

**The new institutions: artist-run participative platforms
and initiatives in South Africa**

By

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DECLARATION

I declare that this study is my own original work. Where use is made of the work of others it is indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references.

It is submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy at the University of the Pretoria, South Africa. It has not been submitted before for any other degree or examination to any other university.

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August 2016

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ABSTRACT

In a contemporary South African context of artistic production and exhibition, there are few spaces or arenas dedicated to the development and presentation of experimental and/or non-commercial practices – a void that has become increasingly evident amidst the growing interest in participatory art and social aesthetics. However, and as the central thesis of this study suggests, in response to the lack of infrastructure for open-ended, idea-rich and socially focused praxis, artists have adopted a do-it-yourself approach to ‘filling the void’. That is, artists have taken it upon themselves to address the absence of experimental and/or laboratory ‘space’ by creating autonomous, self-directed initiatives, through a variety of non-traditional and context-specific methodologies.

Using a meta-analytical approach, this research project tracks the rise of the artist-run initiative (ARI) in South Africa. It is suggested that ARIs that utilise participative methodologies such as open-source sharing, collaborative economies (trade, bartering, collectivism, etc.) and/or user-generated organisational approaches offer generative alternatives for the development and presentation of experimental and/or non-commercial projects within a South African context – arguably a *new* New-Institutionalism.

Critically, I explore a number of potential paradoxes inherent within this approach, including issues around the artist operating as a ‘double agent’, as well as various problematics associated with employing a collaborative economy within a wider capitalistic system. I conclude, however, that despite these concerns, artist-run participative initiatives suggest radical new possibilities, not only in terms of alternative forms of institution-building, but also regarding a critical re-imagining of authorship, ‘collectivity’, economic democracy, and inclusivity within artistic production.

As the first sustained and discursive engagement on artist-run initiatives in South Africa, or more particularly artist-run participative initiatives, the research is intended to fill a significant gap in the literature, and provide a resource for further research and practice.

KEYWORDS

Artist-run initiative; alternative economies; institution-building; social aesthetics; social interstice; participation; participative; Parking Gallery; Sober & Lonely Institute for Contemporary Art; Keleketla!.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

o	INTRODUCTION	9
o.1	Research approach	13
o.2	Literature pertinent to the study	14
o.1.	Theoretical approach	17
o.3	Outline of chapters	19
1	CHAPTER ONE: A BRIEF HISTORY OF PARTICIPATION	23
1.1	Participation and performance art (or how to make your audience angry)	24
1.2	The other end of participation (towards the ‘social turn’)	31
1.3	Anti-Modernism and the politics of participatory art	36
2	CHAPTER TWO: THE NINETIES, SOCIAL AESTHETICS, AND THE COMMUNITY EFFECT	39
2.1	Relational aesthetics and the logic of precariousness	41
2.2	Criticism and relational aesthetics	46
2.3	In defence of relational aesthetics	51
2.4	A relational participative methodology	56
3	CHAPTER THREE: (NEW) INSTITUTIONALISM	58
3.1	The curatorial turn and the promise of New-Institutionalism	59
3.2	(New) Institutionalism in South Africa	61
3.3	The independent artist-run initiative	67
3.4	The new New-Institutionalism	72
4	CHAPTER FOUR: THE PARKING GALLERY	74
4.1	The Parking Gallery v1.0	76
4.2	The Parking Gallery v2.0	80
4.3	A ‘socialistic’ space	83
4.4	Paradoxes of inclusivity and co-operation	89
5	CHAPTER FIVE: THE SOBER & LONELY INSTITUTE FOR CONTEMPORARY ART	92
5.1	Unpacking Sober & Lonely	97
5.2	The shape-shifting Institute	106
5.3	The artist-curator-as-artist, and the exhibition as form	112
6	CHAPTER SIX: KELEKETLA!	115
6.1	Establishing Keleketla!	117

6.2	Funding, ‘crowdfunding’, and institutional autonomy	120
7	CHAPTER SEVEN: CONCLUSION	128
7.1	Towards a radical new discourse	136
8	LIST OF SOURCES CONSULTED	138
9	APPENDICES	164
9.1	A conversation with Simon Gush, Ruth Sacks, Euridice Kala and Joseph Gaylard of the Parking Gallery	164
9.2	A conversation with Cara Snyman of the Goethe-Institut	174
9.3	A conversation with Jonathan Garnham of Blank Projects	179
9.4	A conversation with Patrick Mudekereza of Picha Centre de Art	193
9.5	A conversation with Rangoato Hlasane of Keleketla!	199
9.7	A conversation with Lauren von Gogh of Sober & Lonely	209
9.8	A conversation with Juliana Irene Smith of Alma Martha	237
9.9	A conversation with Molly Steven of Alma Martha	241
9.10	A conversation with Rangoato Hlasane and Malose Malahlela of Keleketla!	249

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ANC	African National Congress
ARI	Artist-run Initiative
AVA	Association For Visual Arts
BYOB	Bring Your Own Bottle
CHR	Center for Historical Re-enactments
CODESA	Convention for a Democratic South Africa
CoJ	City of Johannesburg
COSATU	Congress of South African Trade Unions
DIY	Do-it-yourself
ESP	Extrasensory Perception
FEAST	Funding Emerging Art with Sustainable Tactics
GIF	Graphics Interchange Format
GPS	Goethe-Institut Project Space
HISK	Hoger Instituut Voor Schone Kunsten
ICI	Independent Curators International
JAG	Johannesburg Art Gallery
JPP	Joubert Park Project
NAC	National Arts Council
NPO	Non-profit Organisation
NRF	National Research Foundation
PAN!C	Pan-African Network of Independent Contemporaneity
SACP	South African Communist Party
SI	Situationist International
SLICA	Sober & Lonely Institute for Contemporary Art
SLLSFFM	Sober & Lonely Library for Science Fiction Feminism & Misc.
SLRC	Sober & Lonely Running Club
TPS	Taller Popular de Serigrafia
VANSA	Visual Arts Network of South Africa
Wits	University of the Witwatersrand
WSoA	Wits School of Arts

o INTRODUCTION

In September 2009, artists Ed Young and Matthew Blackman launched a new exhibition space in Cape Town's city centre. Young (2009:[sp]) offered the following observation about the intention and purpose of the initiative:¹

[YOUNGBLACKMAN] work[s] on the project space model ... we don't really want to be limited to what galleries are doing at the moment. Very money-orientated stuff. We want to give the artists freedom to make something while not having to worry about sales ... I haven't been excited by shows recently, so hopefully we can make some exciting stuff. And just be happy.

The space was, however, in operation only a year. Blackman (2010:[sp]) commented on its closing:

I feel the failure of [YOUNGBLACKMAN] shows a real lack of interest in the appreciation of contemporary art in South Africa. Furthermore, I think it also confirms that very few South Africans believe that art has any moral, revelatory, humorous or pedagogical value ... The interest in art in this country is all too often driven by ... a search for profit and a certain desire for social self-aggrandizement.

As these remarks suggest, within a recent South African context, there have been few spaces or arenas dedicated purely to experimentation and open-ended inquiry within artistic practice. The arts sector has been dominated (traditionally) by a coterie of commercial gallery spaces – a structure that has, in turn, effected a wider hegemonic influence over arts production, presentation, reception and critical discourse. This observation is supported by the 2010 Department of Arts and Culture report 'An Assessment of the Visual Arts in South Africa' which notes the “near complete absence

¹ Ed Young was born in Welkom in 1978 (SMAC 2015:[sp]). He completed both his MFA and BFA at the Michaelis School of Fine Art. He is currently represented by the SMAC Gallery, and lives and works in Cape Town (SMAC 2015:[sp]). Matthew Blackman was born in Pietermaritzburg in 1975 (Spier Contemporary 2015:[sp]). Blackman is the current editor of the South African online art publication *Artthrob* (*Art Review* 2015:[sp]).

of independent and artist-run initiatives for the cultivation, presentation and promotion of innovation within the visual arts” (VANSA 2010:1). Within this context, the processes of art making have remained largely confined to a conventional studio/gallery archetype, with the focus being on the creation of a saleable ‘end-product’ for display within a gallery space.

This binary has, however, become increasingly problematic amidst the growing interest in social aesthetics within contemporary artistic production. Broadly characterised by a critical and applied emphasis on the social aspects of art (social-interaction/social-experience/social-encounter), the expanded fields of the practice include (but are not limited to) relational art, littoral art and dialogical art. Within these paradigms audience participation and the creation of conditions for social interstice occupy primacy over that of making, wherein the art produced takes on the form of a dialogue, an event, a workshop, a meeting, a game, and so on; often appearing to be work-in-progress rather than a completed object (Bishop 2004:53). In turn, the artistic requirements of exhibition space shift radically where, counter to standardised showroom formats, the practice demands environments that are flexible, heterogeneous, and better suited to the promotion of dialogue than the display of objects.

In response, a number of artists have taken it upon themselves to address the absence of experimental and/or laboratory space by creating alternative platforms, not only for themselves, but also for a wider community of peers and practitioners. These artist-run initiatives (ARIs) are typically organised in non-traditional environments: disused shop fronts, warehouse space, studios, or even the artists’ own homes. Some might approximate a white-cube, while others offer residencies, venues for screenings, discussions, and so on. What is common to these self-organised initiatives is the capacity to circumvent the mediating pressures of wider institutional structures (and the traditional curator/gallery binary), thus retaining autonomy over their programming. In turn, they are able to produce and/or showcase work “rarely encountered within either the publicly funded or commercial spheres of art” (Lind 2009:75).

While the phenomenon of the ARI is nothing new – the practice tracking back to (inter alia) Dada’s Cabaret Voltaire of the early 1900s, to the vast number of collective organisations that flourished during the 1960s and 1970s, to the so-called ‘Glasgow Miracle’ of the 1990s – the last decade has seen an unprecedented rise of the artist-run space globally (Detterer and Nannuci 2012). This accession has been particularly significant within a recent Pan-African context where artists have adopted a do-it-yourself approach to ‘filling the void’.² The recently launched (2014) PAN!C platform (the Pan-African Network of Independent Contemporaneity), for example, evidences this trajectory – with a directory of over 30 independent and/or ARIs around Africa, the vast majority of which have emerged in the last five to ten years (including Raw Material Company [Senegal], Beirut [Egypt], CCA [Lagos] and Picha Centre de Art [Lubumbashi]) (PAN!C 2014:[sp]). Within a South African context, recently launched ARIs include Jonathan Garnham’s Blank Projects (2005–2012); Carl Ascroft and Shane De Lange’s Outlet (2007–2012); Malose Malahlela and Rangoato Hlasane’s Keleketla! (2008–); Matthew Blackman and Ed Young’s YOUNGBLACKMAN (2009–2010); Kathryn Smith’s serialworks (2009–); Phillip Raiford Johnson and Anthea Buys’ Cloak & Dagger (2010); James King and Rosie Mudge’s Jnr Gallery (2014–); Anthea Pokroy and Louise Ross’ Assemblage (2010–); Murray Turpin’s Kalashnikovv (2013–); Maaïke Bakker, Jayne Crawshay-Hall and Dalene Victor Meyer’s No End Contemporary Art Space (2015); and my own collaborative project with Lauren von Gogh, Sober & Lonely (2011–).³

However, with the closure of a number of these ARIs the feasibility of an alternative, non-commercial approach to institutionalism appears tenuous. Matthew Blackman (2010:[sp]) remarks on shutting the doors at YOUNGBLACKMAN (with particular reference to the South African economy): “I ought to have realised that a project sustained only through funding, and not through commerce, had a predisposition towards failure”. The question then arises: If an open-ended and experimental approach to arts practice and institutionalism is to ‘succeed’ within a South African

² The term ‘filling the void’ comes from Koyo Kouoh’s influential paper of the same name, which she presented at the Symposium on Building Art Institutions in Africa in Senegal in 2012. The term has become a leitmotif of sorts to describe the response of artists to numerous artistic and critical voids within a Pan-African arts landscape (Kouoh 2013:17).

³ Artist Abrie Fourie first initiated Outlet as a project space at the Tshwane University of Technology (then Pretoria Technikon) in 2002. He then “passed the space over” to Ascroft and De Lange who opened a second, entirely independent, iteration of Outlet, in Johannesburg in 2007 (Outlet 2015:[sp]).

context, what are the specific strategies, particularities, and methodologies that will inform it?

Through the use of a meta-analytical approach in this research project, I track the rise of participative art and social aesthetics, and the impact thereof on institutional practice. I explore the short-lived promise, and ultimate ‘failure’, of funding-dependent approaches to the institutionalisation of said praxes, including those of New-Institutionalism, and the funding-reliant ARI. I contend that, as a potential solution to this problematic, ARIs that utilise participative methodologies such as open-source sharing, collaborative economies (trade, bartering, collectivism, etc.), and a user-generated organisational approach offer generative alternatives for the development and presentation of experimental, non-commercial, and/or socially focused praxis within a South African context.

Within this framework, I document the various artist-run, participative initiatives currently operating in South Africa, with a specific focus on their *raison d’être*, participative strategies, economy, programming, and overall feasibility.

The study leads to, *inter alia*, an investigation of the various artist-run ‘new institutions’ currently operating in South Africa (as of January 2015) and seeks to provide a handbook for critical methodological practice pertaining to the development, day-to-day operations, and sustainability of said projects.⁴ The investigation comprises:

- 1) The Parking Gallery
- 2) Keleketla!
- 3) The Sober & Lonely Institute for Contemporary Art

While case studies referenced in this research project have been discussed briefly elsewhere, including Portia Malatjie’s ‘Alternative/Experimental Art Spaces in Johannesburg’ (2013), there has not to date been a comprehensive research study on

⁴ The delineation of a categorical timeframe for this research is essential as artist-run initiatives are, by their very nature, unstable – with new initiatives opening, and existing projects closing/re-formatting themselves constantly. Thus without a clear ‘end-point’, this research would be boundless.

ARIs or, more particularly, artist-run participative initiatives in South Africa.⁵ As such, it is hoped the research will provide a valuable resource for researchers and practitioners, and go some way towards filling a significant gap within the literature.

It is also important to note that while this thesis is primarily a research study, the impetus behind the topic has been propelled via my own artistic practice. The Sober & Lonely Institute for Contemporary Art (SLICA) was launched as an extension of an existing collaboration between artist Lauren von Gogh and myself in 2011, in direct response to the lack of experimental and/or laboratory space available to practitioners in South Africa. Since then, it has been extant in various formats (including a mobile caravan project space, a suburban residency, and a running club), and has employed a variety of participative methodologies, economies, and models. Accordingly, this project has been driven by a bi-directional, reciprocal system of practice-led research and research-led practice.

0.1 Research approach

Although there has been no substantive study of artist-run platforms in South Africa, a body of theoretical literature, as well as writings from other geopolitical contexts, raises issues and concerns that are pertinent to the examples I explore in this thesis. As such I undertake a conceptual analysis of the various meta-theoretical aspects informing this research project via an integrative literature review. This includes unpacking critical terms such as ‘participatory practice’, ‘participative practice’, ‘relational aesthetics’, ‘relational participative’, ‘social interstice’, ‘New-Institutionalism’, and ‘artist-run’. This aspect of the research design defines the limits of the research project – namely, what is meant by an artist-run, participative initiative or platform.

Additionally, as the emergence of ARIs in South Africa tracks that of a larger global phenomenon, a comparative cross-national study will explore the emergence of experimental institutionalism in other contexts as a point of departure for comparison

⁵ Deduced via an exploration of both Sabinet (2016) and the National Research Foundation (NRF) (2016).

with local examples. This aspect of the study includes personal interviews with directors from various initiatives, including Dana Whabira of Njelele Art Station (Harare) and Patrick Mudekereza of Picha Centre de Art (Lubumbashi).

The bulk of the research pertaining to artist-run participative initiatives in South Africa is compiled via ethnographic research, participant observation and case studies. This includes case study analyses of relational participative practice such as Naadira Patel and Donna Kukama's *Café Exchange* (2012); personal interviews with the directors of various artist-run platforms, including Murray Turpin (Kalashnikov Gallery), Jonathan Garnham (Blank Projects), Rangoato Hlasane and Malose Malahlela (Keleketla!), Ruth Sacks and Simon Gush (the Parking Gallery), Juliana Irene Smith and Molly Steven (Alma Martha), and Dineo Bopape (Nothing Gets Organised), as well as a self-reflective, auto-ethnographic analysis of my own initiative, Sober & Lonely.

o.2 Literature pertinent to the study

On participation

Claire Bishop's seminal texts *Participation* (2006) and *Artificial Hells* (2012) inform much of the contextual and art historical framework for the paradigm of participation. *Participation*, an edited collection, presents a variety of theoretical frameworks, and critical and curatorial positions on participation, while *Artificial Hells* charts a thematic path from the early participatory experiments of the progressive avant-garde, to the Situationist International, to the community art of the 1970s, to contemporary uses of participation as a pedagogical project. While these two texts present an (arguably) comprehensive survey of the historicisation of participation, my analyses centre only on the historiography of participatory practice in relation to the position and agency of the viewer/audience/spectator.⁶ This is contextualised and defended with supporting evidence from Thomas McEvelley's 'Modernism, Post-Modernism, and the End of Art' (2006), Peter Bürger's revised *Theory of the Avant-Garde* (2010), Roselee

⁶ Wong (2012:[sp]), amongst other critics, argues that Bishop's history glosses over key areas in the genealogy of participation, including key works by Alan Kaprow and Jean-Jacques Lebel. However, within the scope of this essay, Bishop's texts are analysed according to thematics and concepts rather than as a teleological *fait accompli*.

Goldberg's *Performance Art: From Futurism to The Present* (2001) and *Performance: Live-Art Since the 1960s* (2004), and Sadie Plant's *The Most Radical Gesture* (2002), et al. Central to the discussion of the historiographic trajectory of participation is an analysis of the shifting perceptions of the audience. Gustave Le Bon's highly influential texts *The Crowd: A Study of the Popular-Mind* (2001a, first issued in 1895) and *The Psychology of Revolution* (2001b, first published in 1912) are examined in terms of their influence on the early avant-garde understanding of 'the crowd', while Christine Poggi's *Folla/Follia: Futurism and the Crowd* (2001) and Jon Erickson's 'The Spectacle of the Anti-Spectacle' (1992) track the heritable influence of these acuties on the neo-avant-garde. Original documentary evidence from artists Filippo Marinetti ('The Futurist Manifesto' [1909]), Graciela Carnevale ('Project for the Experimental Art Series' [1968]), and Alan Kaprow ('Notes on the Elimination of the Audience' [1966], 'Self-Service: A Happening' [1968]) inform various case studies around early participatory practice.

From a contemporary perspective, the main theoretical thrusts of the research study are driven by French theorist and curator Nicolas Bourriaud's postulations on relational aesthetics and Alter-Modernity in his texts, *Relational Aesthetics* (2002a), *Postproduction* (2002b), and *The Radicant* (2009). These texts, along with case studies of his curatorial work, draw out the critical shift from participatory art to participative art, within a current socio-political and cultural context of globalisation (Bourriaud 2009c:[sp]). Importantly, I utilise artist Xavier Roux's (2007:[sp]) classification to mark this critical distinction; Roux differentiates between participatory art, which is primarily concerned with viewer/audience/spectator (or non-artist) involvement, and participative art, which is *conceptually driven* by audience participation and the creation of conditions for meetings or events in which the artist is often a participant himself/herself. Various art-critical texts provide an objective counterpoint to a purely one-sided reading of Bourriaud, including Bishop's 'Antagonism and Relational Aesthetics' (2004), Stewart Martin's 'Critique of Relational Aesthetics' (2007) and Grant Kester's *The One and the Many* (2012).

On artist-run spaces

Gabriele Detterer and Maurizio Nannuci's edited collection, *Artist-Run Spaces* (2013), provides an historical perspective on the emergence of artist-run spaces. As one of the first collected texts on the subject, the volume attempts to track various non-profit collective organisations that emerged globally during the 1960s and 1970s, including Art Metropole (Toronto), Artpool (Budapest) and Franklin Furnace (New York).

From a contemporary perspective, a number of shorter texts and case studies inform the research on independent and artist-run platforms. These include curator Maria Lind's *Writings* (2010), which provides an important source of essays around the emergence of the ARI in a contemporary European context, and a volume edited by Koyo Kouoh's *Symposium on Building Art Institutions in Africa* (2013), which explores the emergence of artist-run and independent initiatives from a Pan-African perspective. In line with 'the embeddedness' of contemporary relational art (Von Bismarck 2010:13), both Lind and Kouoh's theorisation is practice-led, emerging out of their own independent artist-run and/or curatorial initiatives. These texts (amongst others) allow for a cross-national comparison and model-building analyses of artist-run initiatives for comparison with specific examples from a South African context. Data gathering centres on funding structures, context specificity, and questions of artistic and/or institutional autonomy.

On project spaces and New-Institutionalism

Tying the frameworks of participative art and experimental institutionalism together is the conceptual paradigm of 'New-Institutionalism'. Claire Doherty's 'Contemporary Art and New Institutionalism' (2004) and Alex Farquharson's 'Bureaux de Change' (2006) plot this connection from the rise of the project space in Europe during the 1990s to the subsequent appropriation of many of the strategies developed therein into mainstream institutional practice. Nina Möntmann's 'The Rise and Fall of New Institutionalism: Perspectives on a Possible Future' (2007), Felix Vogel's 'Notes on Exhibition History in Curatorial Discourse' (2013), and Lucie Kolb and Gabriel Flückiger's 'New Institutionalism Revisited' (2013) draw out the ultimate 'failure' of many of these funding-dependent strategies. The cross-national comparison sheds

light on the difficulties inherent within New-Institutional and project space models within a South African context.

On case study methodologies

As the thesis is primarily an investigation of artist-run initiatives, various data collection methodologies have been used in documenting each platform. Case studies in particular form a large part of the research. Robert Stake's *The Art of Case Study Research* (1995) and Gary Shank's *Qualitative Research: A Personal Skills Approach* (2006) chart specific methodologies for interviewing and retrieving data, as well as coding, sorting and reporting. Within the case studies, vignettes are used as a narrative tool to sketch out various events or behaviours. In particular, I employ Clifford Geertz's (1973:6) 'thick description' vignette methodology as described in his formative text *The Interpretation of Cultures*. This approach uses highly descriptive, personal and dense reflections as a means to draw out a qualitative sense of complex happenings and events.

1.1. Theoretical approach

Within a wider art historical framework, the historicisation of participatory practice tracks a parallel course to that of performance art. Both praxes stem (arguably) from three distinct junctures within the historic avant-garde, namely: Italian Futurism, Russian Proletkult theatre, and Dada cabaret (Bishop 2012:41, Goldberg 2001:[sp]). As such, the initial theoretical framework for this thesis considers the development of performance art, and thus participation, via the paradigms of inclusive and exclusive Modernism, and the ensuing reaction against high Modernism via the avant-garde focus on anti-Modernism (Taylor 2005:10).

Moving away from the hegemonic legacy of Modernist/anti-Modernist/Post-Modernist art discourse and criticism, the main theoretical approach for this research centres on Bourriaud's theorisation of relational aesthetics in conjunction with his later thesis on

Alter-Modernism. While relational aesthetics describes a sensibility and form of praxis,⁷ Alter-Modernism plots a new meta-theoretical framework liberated from the teleological dogma of preceding generations (Bourriaud 2009c:[sp]). Via these two hypotheses, a number of the problematics associated with participatory practice, discourse and criticism are resolved, including:

The art-object as a point of antagonism

Bourriaud suggests that contemporary art is defined by inter-human relations which are represented or prompted by an ‘artistic proposition’ (Bourriaud 2002a:112). Within this framework, objects that happen to be produced (be they photographs, silk-screened posters, written texts, or dinner party detritus) are understood as an inevitable consequence (a “happy ending”) of specific social moments (Bourriaud 2002a:54). As such, counter to Modernisms’ “aesthetic militancy”, or anti-Modernism’s “refusal to create objects”, there is no supremacy of materiality or immateriality – objects are viewed simply as vehicles of social interstice (Bourriaud 2002a:47).

The ‘capitalist’ gallery establishment versus the ‘democratic’ institution

Bourriaud (2002a:16) contends that the function of contemporary art space is to “create free areas and time spans, whose rhythm contrasts with those structuring everyday life” and which encourage “inter-human commerce that differs from the ‘communication zones’ that are imposed upon us”. Thus, counter to the inherent ‘Capitalisms’ of the Modernist gallery space, and to the virtual moratorium placed on the gallery establishment by the avant-garde of the 1970s (Goldberg 2004:16; McEvilly 2006:138), relational aesthetics advances the importance of ‘the institution’ in the creation of democratic relationships – an approach to institutional practice which has been realised through New-Institutionalism. Within this framework, the hegemony of

⁷ Within this research, the term ‘praxis’ is understood as containing both action (or practice), reflection and theorisation, as per educationalist Paulo Freire’s definition in *The Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (Freire 2005:51; first published 1970).

‘an exhibition’ gives way to multifunctional sites, where screenings, discussions, workshops, conferences, and so on, are given equal emphasis (Farquharson 2006:1).⁸

The audience as witness, viewer or collaborator

Relational aesthetics argues for a new way of understanding the role of the audience within praxis. Rejecting the enforced confrontations of the early avant-garde witness, and, similarly, the one-to-one relationship between ‘the artwork’ and the Modernist viewer, relational aesthetics calls for the creation of sites of interactivity (Bishop 2004:53; Bauman 2005:27). That is, the paradigm centres on the facilitation of encounters or arenas for sociability that are characterised by discursiveness, spontaneity and open-endedness, wherein the audience are able to “determine their own social and political reality” (Bishop 2006:12).

0.3 Outline of chapters

Through a non-empirical conceptual analysis, Chapter One briefly tracks the development of performance art and participation from the earliest Futurist *serate*, through to the transgressive ‘Happenings’ of the 1960s. Utilising various examples, including Graciela Carnevale's *Acción del Encierro* (1968) and Allan Kaprow's *Self-Service* (1967), I explore divergent participatory strategies within this historicisation – one antagonistic and inflammatory, the other ameliorative and inclusive (Bishop 2006:11). I argue that while both approaches actively sought the democratisation and/or dehierarchisation of the processes of art making (a ‘bridging of art and life’), the actual participation of the audience remained largely nugatory – a tactic of the artists’ specific socio-political agenda rather than an applied imperative in and of itself (Plant 2002:25). Furthermore, I contend that underpinning this ambiguity is an unresolved syllogistic meta-narrative in which participatory art, within an avant-garde tradition, defined itself via Modernisms’ antitheses – ironically entrenching the

⁸According to Farquharson (2006), within ‘traditional’ art practice, exhibitions are seen as being the primary function and focus while catalogues, tours, talks, and so on, are seen simply as support structures.

practice within the same dogmatic theorisation it sought to reject (McEvelley 2006:138; Kozloff in Sandler 1980:346).

Working towards a resolution of these problematics, Chapter Two explores the development of a new family of engaged participatory practice, namely, participative art. Within this paradigm “participation IS the project”, wherein the ‘artwork’ produced is conceptually driven by audience participation and the creation of conditions for social interstice and sociability (Roux 2007:2). The popularisation of this trend tracks back to the publishing of Nicolas Bourriaud’s seminal work *Relational Aesthetics* (first published in 1998 and translated in 2002) which proved to be a defining text for an emerging generation of artists during the late 1990s and early 2000s (Bishop 2006:160). Relational aesthetics interprets participation as “a state of encounter” in which discursive, open-ended, and dynamic inter-human relations are formed (Bourriaud 2002:112). However, the paradigm has been heavily criticised, both for its aestheticisation of human relations, and for the confinement of these relations to gallery space (Stewart 2007:13; Bishop 2004:2). In turn, a series of alternative participative strategies have emerged within a more recent contemporary context, including that of dialogic aesthetics and littoral art (Bishop 1996:2). Via an integrative literature review and conceptual analysis, I explore the development of relational aesthetics as well as key arguments levelled against the paradigm. Utilising Donna Kukama and Naadira Patel’s *Café Exchange* (2012) as a case study, I argue that much of the criticism of Bourriaud’s project is based on a misreading of relational aesthetics as a methodology rather than a form and, furthermore, that this misconception stems from the failure to situate participation outside of the avant-garde/neo-avant-garde (read anti-Modernist) performance art tradition discussed in Chapter One. I conclude that, in its modest approach to human relations (via the Micro-utopia and the Micro-community), and in its clear locus as an aesthetic form, relational aesthetics remains a relevant, generative, and productive approach to participation. The relational participative strategy outlined in this chapter delineates the scope of the remainder of this research paper’s inquiry into participative platforms in South Africa.

Chapter Three explores the influence of relational aesthetics on the institutionalisation and presentation of art. While institutional change has often been driven from the mythical ‘outside’, relational aesthetics encourages a reimagining of the purpose and

function of gallery space from the ‘the inside’ (Farquharson 2006:[sp]). That is, rather than ‘taking to the streets’, as suggested by the avant-garde, the hegemonic form of institutional space is reconstructed (often literally) as a site for democratic participation and social interaction. Via a cross-national comparison, I explore the emergence of this New-Institutionalism and the associated curatorial turn. I argue, however, that while these paradigms ostensibly offer ideologically fitting solutions to the institutionalisation of experimental and/or participative art, in practice they prove largely untenable. This position is drawn out within a South African context through interviews with Katrin Lewinsky and Cara Snyman of Goodman Projects and GoetheOnMain respectively. In response then to the continuing ‘failure’ of traditional institutional frameworks to meet the demands of experimental or idea-rich practice, I consider the independent ARI as a means to ‘fill the void’. A detailed case study of Jonathan Garnham’s Blank Projects (Cape Town 2005–2012) provides insights into the potentially generative nature of these ‘laboratory’ spaces within a South African context. I argue, however, that while these models provide a valuable resource for the development and/or promotion of contemporary art in South Africa, they ultimately remain constrained by commercial concerns. I posit that, as a potential solution to this problematic, ARIs that utilise participative methodologies such as open-source sharing, collaborative economies (trade, bartering, and collectivism), and a user-generated organisational approach offer generative alternatives for the development and presentation of experimental, non-commercial and/or socially focused praxis within a South African context.

Based on the artist-run participative framework developed in the previous chapters, Chapters Four, Five and Six comprise a descriptive and evaluative investigation of the various artist-run participative initiatives currently operating in South African. These are the Parking Gallery, Keleketla!, and my own collaborative project the Sober & Lonely Institute for Contemporary Art. Each of the platforms is empirically evaluated via primary and secondary research methodologies, with a specific focus on each project’s *raison d’être*, working methodology, participative strategy, economy, programming, and feasibility. Significant and idiosyncratic areas of each initiative are then identified and drawn out in detail. These include the Parking Gallery’s connection to autonomous-Marxism, and how this has developed into a distinctive ‘socialistic’ approach to the institutionalisation of art, SLICA’s complex relationship to authorship,

and the increasing heterogeneity associated with artist-run practice, and finally, Keleketla's use of 'crowdfunding' as a radical and potentially democratising alternative to traditional cultural funding.

Following a summary and comparative analysis of my findings from the previous chapters, this research project closes with a separately indexed appendix of the various interview transcripts compiled during my investigations. It is hoped this documentation will provide a valuable resource for researchers and practitioners working within the field of artist-run and/or independent project spaces or platforms, particularly within a South African and Pan-African context where literature on the subject is still limited.

1 CHAPTER ONE: A BRIEF HISTORY OF PARTICIPATION

Participation as a practice or postulate (almost) always plays a role in the art of the 20th century where it is a matter of the self-critique of art, of calling the author into question, of the distance between art and ‘life’ and society (Kravagna 2008:2).

Whilst the term *participation* has become popularised over the last decade through the work of theoreticians such as Nicholas Bourriaud and Grant Kester,⁹ as historian Christian Kravagna’s statement indicates, participation as a methodology within arts practice is nothing new. From the earliest avant-garde provocations, to the ‘heyday’ of performance art activities during the 1960s, to the more recent focus on interactivity, the postulates of audience inclusion, agency and authorship (central to the subject of participation) have persisted as significant foci within arts practice throughout the twentieth century (Goldberg 2001:7; Bishop 2006:12). What has shifted, however, is the participative *role* of the audience – from the crowd, to the community, to the co-producer, and so on (Erickson 1992:54; Bishop 2009:277). Claire Bishop’s seminal text *Artificial Hells* attributes this trajectory to two distinct impulses within the historicisation of arts practice; firstly, an “authored tradition that seeks to provoke participants”, and secondly, a “de-authored lineage that aims to embrace collective creativity” (Bishop 2006:11). In this chapter, I use a non-empirical conceptual analysis to explore the development of participatory practices through these central, yet conflicting, lenses. I argue, however, that while both approaches ostensibly ‘produce’ audience participation (as Bishop suggests), the so-called ‘participation’ is in fact highly engineered – a simulacrum of autonomy, rather than authentic participative action in which the audience can claim real agency or jurisdiction. It is a resolution of this paradox that in turn leads to the participative strategies of subsequent generations. As such, my aim for this chapter is twofold. It is, firstly, to situate participatory art within an art historical framework. Secondly, it is to draw out the

⁹ Bourriaud and Kester’s seminal texts on participation, collaboration and relational art practices (*Relational Aesthetics* [1998] and *The One and the Many* [2011] respectively) will be examined via a conceptual and a theory-building analysis in Chapter Two.

actuating nodes that have influenced the development of contemporary participation, towards a clear delineation of relational participative practice in the following chapter.

It is important to note that this chapter is in no way meant to explicate a comprehensive historiography, nor imply a single teleology, for the postulate of participation. Rather, the development of participatory practices are assessed in terms of their defining, and stymieing, influences on the position and agency of the viewer/audience/spectator.

It is also critical to acknowledge that the art historical narrative for this chapter is driven primarily through examples from Europe and the Americas. While there were individual artists working with experimental and avant-garde approaches in South Africa during the 60s, 70s and 80s (for example, Walter Battiss, Rina Sherman and John Nankin), there was no single avant-garde trajectory to speak of (Smith 2014:[sp]).¹⁰ As such, the examples discussed are confined to those that provide a wider survey of the development of participatory art.

1.1 Participation and performance art (or how to make your audience angry)

The origins and development of participation within contemporary arts practice tracks closely against that of performance art. That is, both the postulate and the mode have their geneses within the historic avant-garde of the early twentieth century (Bishop 2012:41). Seeking to rescript “the traditional barriers between performers and spectators”, avant-garde artists identified the ‘live spectacle’ as a means to challenge “conventional modes of spectatorship” (Poggi 2002:711). It is this ‘live-ness’, the presence of an artist in real-time, and the associated breakdown of conventional artist/audience roles, that is central to the ‘traditional’ understanding of performance

¹⁰ Kathryn Smith (2014:124) states that much of the experimental art produced in South Africa prior to the 1990s was confined to the artists’ studios, and thus largely undocumented and unpublished. Consequently, little data remains to interpolate an accurate historiography or trajectory of avant-garde practices in South Africa.

art (Goldberg 2004:18).¹¹ In turn, it is the overt focus on repositioning the audience as active discursive agents within a particular project that leads to participatory practice.

However, within the context of the Europe's early twentieth century avant-garde, the use of live performance became inextricably linked to the subject of political commitment (Bishop 2012:74). Politicking, provocation, the incitement of violence, and even arrests, became synonymous with the practice – a model which has seen itself repeated by subsequent generations of performance artists, and has come to concretise the 'traditional' or 'usual' understanding of performance art as a device suited to, and capable of, provoking civil resistance (Goldberg 2001:75; McEvilley 2006:138). This inherited view of performance art as the 'antagonist' within an art historical metanarrative has, however, led to a problematic paradox in terms of the evolution of participation within arts practice. That is, despite the overt attempt at the democratisation of art via the inclusion and collusion of the viewer/audience/spectator, the relationship between audience and artist remains explicitly that of producer to recipient, and where, however active the audience may become, it is in response to a preceding provocation (Bishop 2006:51).

Graciela Carnevale's¹² *Acción del Encierro*, first presented at the 'Ciclo de Arte Experimental' in Rosario, Argentina, in 1968, is but one example of this enduring associative legacy between performance art, participation and provocation.¹³ For the performance, Carnevale invited an audience to attend an exhibition opening at a storefront gallery space comprising an empty room, a full-length glass display window, and a single entrance (EMPAC 2010:[sp]). Once the audience was gathered inside, Carnevale locked the door from the outside, sealing the unwitting audience within the space (EMPAC 2010:[sp]). Posters advertising the event covered the display window further "isolating and confining the visitors" (Kester 2011:[sp]) (Figure 1).

¹¹ Within an art historical framework the definition of *performance art* is a contested concept, particularly in terms of its relationship to 'live-ness', repeatability and documentation (Phelan 2005:66). As the various meta-theoretical debates around the defining limits of performance art are beyond the scope of this research topic, I will utilise the term 'traditional' performance art as defined by theorist Peter Richards as: "a type of art practice that features a live exchange between the artist and the viewer" (Richards 2005:65).

¹² Graciela Carnevale was born in 1942 in the Argentine province of Cordoba (Katzenstein 2004:329). She graduated from the Rosario School of Fine Arts in 1964 and became an active member of the avant-garde collective the Grupo de Arte de Vanguardia de Rosario. Carnevale is currently teaching and practicing at the School of Arts and Humanities at the University of Rosario (Katzenstein 2004:329).

¹³ English translation: 'Confinement Action' and 'Experimental Art Cycle' respectively.

Carnevale (1968:117) describes the action:

In this room the participating audience, which has come together by chance for the opening, has been locked in. The door has been hermetically closed without the audience being aware of it. I have taken prisoners. The point is to allow people to enter and to prevent them from leaving. Here the work comes into being and these people are the actors. There is no possibility of escape, in fact the spectators have no choice; they are obliged, violently, to participate. Their positive or negative reaction is always a form of participation.

Carnevale left the scene immediately after securing the door. According to the artist (2012:[sa]), to have remained as a witness to the unfolding events would have rendered the action a “joke or a game”, whereas, by leaving the audience to fend for themselves, the situation demanded some kind of decisive action and commitment on their part. Carnevale (1968:117) states in this regard:

The end of the work, as unpredictable for the viewer as it is for me, is nevertheless intentioned: will the spectator tolerate the situation passively? Will an unexpected event – help from the outside – rescue him from being locked in? Or will he proceed violently and break the glass?

Kester (2011:[sp]) indicates that the ‘participants’ were in fact trapped for over an hour, first attempting (unsuccessfully) to dismantle the door, until finally a passer-by shattered the glass, freeing them (Figure 2).

The action was undertaken with particular reference to the ongoing violence perpetrated by Argentina’s de facto government. Less than two years earlier, in 1966, elected leader Arturo Illia was overthrown during a coup d’état, which saw General Juan Carlos Onganía established as president (Del Carril 2014:[sp]). What followed was a period of ruthless suppression and censorship, directed at voices critical of his regime (Kester 2011:[sp]). The hostilities culminated in the infamous *La Noche de los Bastones Largos* (the Night of the Long Batons), where protesting students and academics were forcibly removed from the University of Buenos Aires by Federal

Police (Del Carril 2014:[sp]).¹⁴

Within this context, Carnevale’s intervention sought to simultaneously “provoke the viewer into [an] awareness of the power with which violence is enacted in everyday life”, and to emphasise the possibility of “self-liberation” (Carnevale 1968:117; Kester 2011:[sp]). At their core, these sentiments exemplify a number of the characteristics associated with the enduring view of performance art as apposite to socio-political critique, activism and change. These include:

- the belief in the generative aptitude of the antagonistic gesture to provoke an audience to action or consideration,
- the (unwitting) co-option of an audience as agents for socio-political critique (and potential revolt),
- the view of the audience or crowd as possessing latent ‘revolutionary powers’,
- the belief in the emancipatory possibilities of art.

The origin of these conceptions can be traced back to the genesis of performance art with the historic avant-garde. Amidst Europe’s pre and post World War “rhythm of radicalism and reaction”, divergent fundamentalist tendencies materialised within the arts, actively seeking political, social and cultural regeneration (Maier 1975:7). Amongst these nascent praxes, Italian Futurism and Dadaism emerged, propounding equally radical but mostly antithetical agendas.¹⁵ Futurism called for a doctrine of separatism,¹⁶ whose essence was anti-liberalist, anti-democratic and anti-socialist (Antliff

¹⁴ Santiago Del Carril (2014:[sp]) reports that “the police violently removed the university students, firing tear gas, hitting several of them, holding a mock execution, forcing them to march in double line out of the building and putting them all under arrest”. According to Del Carril (2014:[sp]), the incident resulted in the detention of over 400 people, and the destruction of much of the University infrastructure.

¹⁵ The history and development of Futurism and Dadaism have been exhaustively rehearsed elsewhere, and as such, will not be explored in depth in this research thesis beyond the scope of their critical effect on the development of the *antagonistic gesture* in relation to performance art. However, it is important to note that Chapter One is based on the following historiographies: Roselee Goldberg’s *Performance Art: From Futurism to The Present* (2001), and *Performance: Live-Art Since the 1960s* (2004), Christine Poggi’s *Inventing Futurism* (2008), Peter Bürger’s seminal work *Theory of the Avant-Garde* (1974), Laurence Rainey’s *Futurism an Anthology* (2009) and Claire Bishop’s *Artificial Hells: Participatory Art and the Politics of Spectatorship* (2012).

¹⁶ Separatism can be defined as “as the struggle of an ethnic group for an independent state”, in this case referring to Futurism’s drive for a return to Italian nationalism and colonial power in response to a wider European push for democracy and liberalism (Cornell 2002:1; Maier 1975:7).

2000:720).¹⁷ Conversely, Dadaism advocated an ultimately nihilistic programme, attempting to draw attention to the ‘idiocy’ of the War and the society that had produced it (Walther 2005:119). Despite these adversative agendas, both paradigms shared a set of critical commonalities regarding their methodological approach in attempting to effect political regeneration within Europe. Bourgeois society was seen as the “ultimate stake of political and economic conflict” and, as such, the locus of both Futurism and Dadaism’s political and cultural aspirations (Maier 1975:7).

Gustave Le Bon’s formative text *The Psychology of Revolution* (1912) was highly influential in this regard, identifying ‘the masses’ (the public/the crowd/the audience) as a violent and malleable force, possessing latent revolutionary powers:

[M]an in the crowd descends to a very low degree in the scale of civilisation. He becomes a savage, with all a savage’s faults and qualities, with all his momentary violence, enthusiasm, and heroism ... A crowd will commit a crime as readily as an act of abnegation (Le Bon 2001b:58).

The multitude is ... the agent of a revolution; but not its point of departure. The crowd represents an amorphous being which can do nothing, and will nothing, without a head to lead it. It will quickly exceed the impulse once received, but it never creates it (Le Bon 2001b:12).

Viewed then as highly manipulable and capable of extreme violence, ‘the crowd’ was seen as the ultimate tool for social revolution. As a means to engage (lead) ‘the masses’, both paradigms identified populist modes of communication (Poggi 2002:709). The hybrid model of variety theatre in particular (incorporating film, song, dance, poetry, acrobatics, and clowning) was seen as an ideal means to connect with large audiences in the sense that it enabled performers to quickly and incisively explain the “most abstruse problems and complicated political events” to the “working

¹⁷ Futurism was closely aligned with the genesis and evolution of Fascism in Italy. In 1919 Filippo Marinetti merged his political party the *Partito Politico Futurista* (the Futurist Political Party) into Benito Mussolini’s *Fasci Italiani di Combattimento* (the National Fascist Party) (Jensen 1995:[sp]). According to historian Richard Jensen (1995:[sp]) much of Mussolini’s success in seizing power can, in fact, be attributed to his adoption of the Futurist “histrionics and choreography of the streets, which served as a fundamental organizing and mobilizing instrument in the Fascist armarium”.

and lower-middle classes” (Marinetti 1913:[sp]; Poggi 2002:711).¹⁸ While variety theatre had typically provided an opportunity for reciprocal “heckling and improvisation” between the performers and the audience, within the Futurist/Dadaist manifestation of the mode, participation became calculatedly antagonistic (Bishop 2012:45).¹⁹ Once again drawing on Le Bon’s (2001a:72) theorisation, the avant-garde believed in the idea of ‘contagion’ – in this case, the contagion of violence and rebellion:

Ideas, sentiments, emotions, and beliefs possess in crowds a contagious power as intense as that of microbes. This phenomenon is very natural, since it is observed even in animals when they are together in numbers. Should a horse in a stable take to biting his manger the other horses in the stable will imitate him. A panic that has seized on a few sheep will soon extend to the whole flock. In the case of men collected in a crowd all emotions are very rapidly contagious ...

For the avant-garde then, the more incensed the audience became, the greater the potential for contagion, often “gauging [their] appeal by the cries made against [them]”.²⁰ In his 1913 ‘Variety Theatre Manifesto’ Filippo Marinetti (1913:[sp]) in fact suggests a number of ways to escalate audience antipathy:

... spread a strong glue on some of the seats, so that the male or female spectator will remain stuck to the seat ... [s]ell the same ticket to ten people: resulting in traffic jams, bickering, and wrangling ... [g]ive free

¹⁸ Again drawing on Le Bon’s theorisation; the Futurists identified *visual imagery* (above that of rhetoric or discourse) as the principal method for communicating to ‘the crowd’: “[a] crowd thinks in images ... [o]ur reason shows us the incoherence there is in these images, but a crowd is almost blind to this truth, and confuses with the real event what the deforming action of its imagination has superimposed thereon. A crowd scarcely distinguishes ... It accepts as real the images evoked in its mind, though they most often have only a very distant relation with the observed fact” (Le Bon 2001b:23). According to Bishop, this attitude was reflected in the “Futurist adoption of visual performance as the primary vehicle to connect with large audiences” (Bishop 2012:44).

¹⁹ The first of the Futurist *serata* (evenings) was held at the Politeama Rossetti in Trieste on 12 January 1910 (Golberg 2001:13). Seeking to awaken irredentist sentiment Marinetti called on Austria to surrender all Italian-language territories, including Trieste and Trent, back to Italian rule (Poggi 2008:1). According to Marinetti (1914:[sp]), the provocation was a success where “all the young [Italian] men rose to their feet, shouting and shaking their fists [while] the Austrians sank back into their sepulchral seats”. The performance was of such a provocative nature, that following the first *serata*, the Austrian consulate made an official complaint to the Italian government, with the result that the future actions of the ‘troublemakers’ of the art world were carefully scrutinised by state and security officials (Goldberg, 2001:13).

²⁰ This tendency is similarly articulated by Marinetti in his 1911 ([sp]) manifesto ‘The Pleasure of Being Boomed’ in which Marinetti expresses the importance of the antagonistic gesture: “[n]ot everything boomed is beautiful or new, [b]ut everything immediately applauded is certainly no better than the average intelligence and therefore is something mediocre, dull, regurgitated, or too well digested”.

tickets to men and women who are notoriously unbalanced, irritable, or eccentric and likely to provoke an uproar with obscene gestures or other freakishness ...

According to Bishop (2012:46) this kind of incitement to action represents a type of ‘spectatorphilia’ within the historicisation of participation, in which ‘the crowd’ is stirred-up and made “visible to itself” – refusing the usual complacency and “docile respect” of an audience, and demanding an aggressive, and often assaultive, response in its place.

Returning now to *Acción del Encierro*, the enduring legacy of the historic avant-garde’s influence on participation becomes axiomatic – that is, the entrenchment of *live-art* as an overtly political project, and the belief in the rhetorical power of the antagonistic gesture to incite and persuade an audience toward revolutionary action (Walther 2005:119; Poggi 2009:330). In an epistolary report on the project, Carnevale (1968:118) concludes that her intention was to generate a “consideration” of the violence sanctioned in everyday life and the “natural impulses that get repressed by a social system designed to create passive beings”. Furthermore, she indicates that to achieve this end she was *obliged* to be “aggressive ... [to] exercise a degree of violence ... to do violence herself” Carnevale (1968:118). While the project is arguably more intimate and optimistic than the propagandistic spectacles of the Futurists and Dadaists (both in its ‘smallness’, and in the potentiality of a ‘solution’), the didactic intention of the artist to provoke the audience into a self-reflexive examination of their norms and mores, via the antagonistic gesture, remains deeply entrenched within the practice (Carnevale 1968:118; Bishop 2012:48, 73).

Within this methodology, however, lies a paradoxical division between artist and audience. Despite the apparent focus on ‘participation’, the crowd becomes mythologised, an ideological *Other* which exists and is shaped only in relation to the ‘leader’ – in this case, the artist provocateur (Poggi 2002:748). Rather than challenging existing social conditions, class divisions are in fact reinforced, where the artist attempts to reclaim “sovereignty and persuasive power over the viewer’s consciousness”, to “prepare them for the nuanced and sensitive perceptions of the artist” – essentially to “*master the viewer*” (Kester 2005:[sp]). So while the historic

avant-garde (and by induction the heritable elements of ‘traditional’ performance art) attempted to negate the determinations of “individual production, and individual reception” in favour of the integration of art into the praxis of everyday life, the result was, in fact, a “false sublation” of autonomous art (Bürger 2010:53). Within this framework, participation is less about genuine emancipation or contribution and more the carefully measured incorporation of players within a directed artifice of autonomy.²¹ Thus, while the live spectacle “propagates the image of participation” it simultaneously ensures that “this totality is illusory and unattainable: a strong, appealing, but empty image” (Plant 2002:25).

Despite these problematics, however, it would be disingenuous to assert that all performance art has such a single-minded antagonistic focus. Amidst the unprecedented rise in performance activities during the late 1960s and 1970s (Goldberg, 2006:7) a number of artists began exploring participation as a theoretical and conceptual imperative in and of itself, and moreover, attempting to create opportunities for genuine reciprocity, contribution and/or agency between the artist, the audience and the project.²²

The following section will explore the shift towards ‘collective creativity’ within the historicisation of participative practice.

1.2 *The other end of participation (towards the ‘social turn’)*²³

In his essay ‘Notes on the Elimination of an Audience’, artist Allan Kaprow (1966:102) states that “to assemble people unprepared for an event and say that they are ‘participating’ if apples are thrown at them or they are herded about is to ask very little

²¹ Graciela Carnevale’s text ‘Project for the Experimental Art Series’ (1968:117) on the *Acción del Encierro* affirms this statement: “I made every effort to foresee the reactions, risks and dangers that might attend this work, and I consciously assumed responsibility for the consequences and implications”.

²² Bishop points out, however, that this particular focus was largely the exception rather than the rule (Bishop 2012:309).

²³ The ‘social turn’ is derived from Clare Bishop’s ‘The Social Turn: Collaboration and Its Discontents’ (2006:2) and refers to the increasing attempts within contemporary participative practice (most notably during the 1990s) to reimagine participation as models for social exchange (Larsen 2012:[sp]). This idea is explored in detail in the following chapter.

of the whole notion of participation”.²⁴ Kaprow’s view of the antagonistic gesture as a form of “latent sadism” underscores a strategic shift amongst certain artists and collectives, during the late 1960s and early 1970s, towards a more “egalitarian and democratic” form of participatory practice (Kaprow 1966:102; Bishop 2006:12). This manifested most notably in the shape of ‘Happenings’, a term coined by Kaprow for a performative event, action or situation in which the audience is encouraged to become an active agent in the production of the work (Kester 2013:22).²⁵ By empowering the audience, they would (hopefully) be able to “determine their own social and political reality” through the *experience* of participation (Bishop 2006:12).

The advent of Happenings reflected a similar preoccupation by the Situationist International’s (SI) constructed ‘Situations’ in Europe. In the first issue of the *Internationale Situationniste* (1958:[sp]) the SI define Situations as “moment[s] of life, concretely and deliberately constructed by the collective organisation of a unitary ambiance and a game of events”. The aim was that through the experience of these Situations, the “ideological over-determinations of the commodified spectacle” (Erickson 1992:37), and within that, the truth of an individual’s social existence within contemporary society, would be revealed to the ‘liver’²⁶ (Debord 1958:[sp]; Bishop 2012:85). While Happenings and Situations differed in constitution and practice (perhaps most obviously in the practicable application of the former and the metaphysical bent of the latter), the two paradigms shared a number of critical

²⁴ Allan Kaprow was born in Atlantic City in 1927 (Reed 2006:[sp]). Between 1956 and 1958 he studied under John Cage at the New School for Social Research, a period which proved highly formative (Reed 2006:[sp]). In the late 1960s Kaprow moved to California where he continued to practice and later joined UC San Diego as a full-time lecturer. He died in 2006 (Reed 2006:[sp]).

²⁵ It is important to recognise Kaprow’s participatory practice occurred as part of a trajectory of revisionism and increased interest in performance activities that emerged in the United States during the late 1930s with the influx of war exiles from Europe (Goldberg 2001:121). By the mid-1940s, performance art was recognised as an “activity in its right”, surpassing the multidisciplinary provocations of the early avant-garde (Goldberg 2001:121). Kaprow’s practice emerged amidst an increasing interest in experimental and interdisciplinary projects, including John Cage’s first “happening-like-event” at Black Mountain College in 1952, which involved dance, music, poetry, and film (Kelley 2004:19).

²⁶ Debord defined two roles within the creation of a constructed Situation, that of the ‘director’ and the ‘liver’. The ‘director’ denoted the person(s) responsible for preparing, planning and coordinating the interventions, while the ‘liver(s)’ referred to the person(s) *experiencing* the Situation (Debord 1958:[sp]).

psychographic connexions in terms of their intended locus and effect.²⁷ Counter to ‘traditional’ performance arts’ attempts at effecting a political influence over *the masses*, both Happenings and Situations pursued an “authenticity of [the] self-produced experience” (Erickson 1992:54), that is, the ceding of authorial control to the viewer/audience/spectator in order to establish the primacy of subjectivity.

The ontogenic development of this increasing focus on the creation of an ‘authentic’ collaborative experience for the audience is clearly evidenced in two of Kaprow’s seminal works, namely *18 Happenings in 6 Parts* (1959) and *Self-Service* (1967).

18 Happenings in 6 Parts was an organised series of events, which took place at the Reuben Gallery (New York) in the Autumn of 1959 (Goldberg 2001:128). Prior to the opening, Kaprow (1959:[sp]) issued invitations and an explanatory note to the audience:

There are three rooms for this work, each different in size and feeling. The rooms are nearly transparent. No matter where a person is, he is aware of something happening in another room. One room has red and white lights in rows along its top, like a used car lot at night. The other has blue and white lights. The third has a blue globe hanging in its centre ... Chairs – perhaps seventy-five to one hundred – are arranged throughout where guests are to be seated. The guests will change seats according to numbered cards ... Some guests will also act. Slides will be shown. Tape recorded sounds, produced electronically, will come from four loudspeakers. Words will be spoken. Human actions will occur of different but simple kinds ... The actions will mean nothing clearly formulable so far as the artist is concerned. It is intended ... that the whole work is to be intimate, austere, and of a somewhat brief duration. These eighteen Happenings will take place on October 4,6,7,8,9, and 10 at 8:30pm.

²⁷ A key differentiator between the two practices lay in Happenings’ preoccupation with *doing* over that of the dialogue that so characterised Situations. While Happenings dispensed “with language for the most part, reducing it to sounds and ejaculations or decontextualized texts”, the SI encouraged “discourse and argument” (Erickson 1992:50). The SI were in fact highly critical of what they perceived as a lack of metaphysical depth in the practice of Happenings describing them in *Internationale Situationniste #8* (1963:[sp]) as “a sort of spectacle pushed to the extreme state of dissolution ... a hash produced by throwing together all the old artistic leftovers; or as a too aesthetically encumbered attempt to renovate the ordinary surprise party or the classic orgy” (Erickson 1992:50).

On arrival at the gallery, the audience received a programme and instructions:

The performance is divided into six parts ... Each part contains three Happenings that will occur at once ... the beginning and end of each will be signalled by a bell ... (Figure 3) (Kaprow 1959:[sp]).

The detailed explanation and directives set down by Kaprow evidence a critical revision of participatory practice. That is, counter to the surprise tactics associated with 'traditional' performance art (in which the performance often relies on shocking or coercing the audience into participating via negativa), the audience is able to make an informed decision – a choice – whether to participate or not. For Kaprow, it was a “mark of mutual respect that all persons involved in a Happening be willing and committed participants who have a clear idea what they are to do” (Kaprow 1966:103). As a further attempt at the democratisation of the process of participation, Kaprow included the audience (“the visitors – who sit in various chairs”) on the event programme alongside the rest of the cast, ostensibly countering hierarchies implicit in 'traditional' artist/audience roles (Kaprow 1959:[sp]). The action itself, and its careful choreography, likewise evidences a significant reimagining of performance practice. Following the instructions on the numbered cards each of the audience members were assigned different rooms for different intervals. Friends and couples were arbitrarily broken into various groups, and some were left standing (Kaprow had left a deliberate shortage of chairs in some rooms). Each of the rooms presented a series of sounds, odours, lights and actions – a “collage of direct and indirect sensory experiences” (Kelley 2004:39). As such, *18 Happenings in 6 Parts* could only ever be experienced *in part*, with each 'player' (or at least group of 'players') experiencing a unique aspect of the work.

While *18 Happenings in 6 Parts* marks a significant shift in blurring the lines between audience/producer/performer, Kaprow recognised that the audience experience was still not fully emancipated from the artist's directive (Erickson 1992:38). In response to this perceived problematic Kaprow developed *Self-Service* (1967), a work which “eliminated the audience altogether”, wherein the role of audience/viewer/spectator becomes one and the same as the producer (Erickson 1992:38; Kaprow 1968:160).

Self-Service was performed during the American summer of 1967 in Boston, New York and Los Angeles (Kaprow 1968:160). Kaprow drew up a programme of thirty-one actions, each of which was designed for its “casualness”, its “in-and-out-of-your-daily-lifeness” (Kaprow 1968:160). These included: shouting in the subway just before disembarking (New York and Los Angeles), whistling in the aisles of a supermarket and then, after a few minutes, returning to shopping (Boston and Los Angeles), creating a pathway out of jam and bread in a forest over a long-distance (Los Angeles), tying tar-paper around cars in supermarket parking lots (Boston and Los Angeles), and hammering nails into all of the surfaces of an empty house, locking the house and leaving (New York and Los Angeles) (Kaprow 1968:[sp]). The only criteria for participation was that the participants (or ‘sub-contractors’) had to perform at least one action offered for their city (Kaprow 1968:[sp]). The choice of time, the site, the duration, and the number of times the action was performed, was left open-ended and up to each participant.

Self-Service evidences a clear move toward *participative praxis*. This was manifest, firstly, in the ‘everydayness’ of the project’s actions – in the inclusion of social forms or behaviour such as kissing, doing laundry, grocery shopping, whistling, driving, etc. (Kaprow 1968:[sp]; Bishop 2006:10). Secondly, in its suggestion of *alternatives* – alternative ways to perform, alternative ways of viewing the ‘everyday’, and alternative ways of seeing relationships and communities. The desired effect being “to stimulate people into producing their own lives and meanings in opposition to the consumption of ready-made meanings and enjoyments” (Erickson 1992:44). And finally, in reimaging traditional viewer/audience/spectator roles, whereby the audience becomes an active *co-producer* of the work (Kester 2013:22).

However, despite the democratic intentions of Happenings the relationship between the audience and the artist remained largely ‘closed’ – a contractual understanding allowing for only a few pre-determined outcomes or possibilities (Bishop 2012:48).²⁸

²⁸ Bishop (2012:48) argues, in fact, that while it might be an uncomfortable position to support, “the creative options available to audiences seem less determined in Futurist performances than in the scored participation of the Happenings and other experiments of the 1960s”, thus suggesting that “destructive modes of participation might be more inclusive than those that purport to be democratically open”.

That is, while the audience may be persuaded of their agency and contribution within a specific programme, the parameters are in fact tightly controlled (Erickson 1992:53). Artist Jon Erickson (1992:54) likens this to the processes of mass-mediated democracy in which citizens are convinced of the influence of their vote when in fact the candidates are already bought and sold, thus reducing “all democratic action to answering yes or no to questions citizens themselves play little part in formulating”. As such, the delegation of “potentially expressive” action to the audience remains “constrained and mechanical” – a closed relationship rather than one based on genuine collaboration (Kester 2013:27).

1.3 *Anti-Modernism and the politics of participatory art*²⁹

Alongside the overt problematics introduced above, an acute paradox lies at the core of the relationship between performance art (both antagonistic and inclusive) and participation. While Futurism and Dadaism made no separation between sculpture, painting and performance, seeking rather to “launch assaults ... on the artistic battle” no matter what the mode of representation, performance art of the Carnevale/Kaprow generation saw audience participation, and the ‘live-ness’ of the act, as a means to destabilise the hegemony of High Modernism (Goldberg 2004:16).³⁰ Characterised primarily by painting and sculpture, and defined by (inter-alia) abstraction, formalism, and self-referentialism, Modernism positioned ‘the artist’ within the artist-audience relationship, in the role of demiurgic genius/messiah – a trope propagated by critics such as Heinrich Wölfflin, Roger Fry, Clive Bell and Clement Greenberg (Yau 2013:[sp]; Vekony-Harper 2010:3).³¹ Within this conception, the art-objects created (most typically painting and sculpture) were imbued with a “quasi-religious value”, whose “aesthetic experience” was believed to be universally transcendental (Vekony-Harper

²⁹ It is important to acknowledge that the paradoxical relationship observed in this chapter was first identified and explored in my Master’s dissertation (2011:28), entitled ‘The rise of the sidekick: renegotiating the relationship between performance art and performance documentation’.

³⁰ The history and theorisation of High Modernism have been exhaustively rehearsed elsewhere and as such it will only be examined in terms of its relationship to the audience/viewer.

³¹ The artist-genius trope (always white, mostly male) is in fact nothing new (Jones 1998:16). It has been in use since the High Renaissance and reiterated by subsequent generations, including eighteenth century theorists Denis Diderot, and Immanuel Kant et al. (Vekony-Harper 2010:3). During the twentieth century abstract-expressionist artists such as Jackson Pollock were again positioned in said role; Greenberg (1993:107, 108) for example refers to Pollock as a “demiurgic genius” who “led art out of the ‘circle of culture’ into a new realm of spontaneity” and describes him as variously as a “consecrated master” and a “cultural hero” whose work is “original”, “revelatory” and “a triumph”.

2010:59; Richter 2009:49). This, in turn, demanded specific ‘gestures of viewing’ on the part of the audience, such as: “mov[ing] about in expressive surroundings, observing intently, holding back, passive vis-à-vis what is shown”, and so on (Richter 2009:49). In direct opposition to this (literal) hands-off approach, the physical involvement of the audience was seen as an integral component of performance art. Artist Carolee Schneeman (1979:248) describes this focus in her text *More Meat than Joy*:

The force of a performance is necessarily more aggressive and immediate in its effect – *it is projective ... the audience becomes more active physically than when viewing a painting ... [they] have to act, to do things, to assist some activity, to get out of the way, to dodge or catch falling objects.*

The experience of being there, of being physically affected and effected, is thus intrinsically linked, not only to performance art’s overt political ends, but also as a means to negate the stronghold of Modernism (Bauman in Auslander 2005:27). This agenda was simultaneously manifest in a number of other ways, most notably through a rejection of Modernism’s inherent ‘Capitalisms’. To performance artists of the generation a commoditised approach to art making was seen as “complicit with unhealthy political tendencies”, and largely responsible for the “divorce between art and life – between the museum and the everyday world outside on the streets” (McEvelley 2006:138). In opposition to this, performance art was viewed as an (ostensibly) temporal and transient medium, and thus inherently ‘valueless’ in the hands of patrons and collectors (Goldberg 2004:16).³² Moreover, performance art was able to circumvent Modernism’s interdependence on ‘the institution’ by relocating art beyond the confines of galleries and museums into so-called *democratic zones*: streets, parking lots, campuses, suburbs, and so on (Joseph 1997:59).³³

³² The relationship between performance art and the documentation thereof (through photography, video, text, etc.) is a highly contested area. Performance traditionalists such as Linda Frye Burnham (1986:15) argue that “documentation of the events is antithetical to the ideal ... almost a violation” of performance art’s ends, as ultimately these can be exhibited and sold. Other critics argue, however, that without documentation, live performances are “destined to oblivion” (Mangolte 2005:36). The full scope of this argument is drawn out in detail in my Master’s thesis (2011:38), entitled ‘The rise of the sidekick: renegotiating the relationship between performance art and performance documentation’.

³³ Again, this is a contested area within the ‘historicisation’ of performance art. As Barbara Clausen (2005:9) points out, many performances are fringe in nature, witnessed more often than not by a few friends and other performance artists on a single night. In contrast, institutions and galleries are more accessible to a general public, and are therefore arguably more democratic.

However, in countering Modernism by its antitheses, performance art emerged as “a kind of dark alter ego of Modernism” with many of the same characteristics but with a “reversed hierarchy” (McEvelley 2006:138). As such, rather than creating an “instead of” or “in exchange for”, performance art defined itself by negation, and specifically the negation of Modernism viz. anti-institutional, anti-mainstream, anti-commodification, and so on (McEvelley 2006:138). By proxy, participation within a performance art tradition has become theoretically and critically linked by definition to an anti-art/anti-Modernist agenda – ironically entrenching the practice within the same dogmatic Modernist discourse it sought to reject.

Nonetheless, the strategies developed by early participatory practice laid the groundwork for a new discourse to emerge during the 1990s (Farquharson 2006:[sp]). Coined by Nicolas Bourriaud as ‘relational aesthetics’, participative art developed its own set of criteria removed from the teleological and anti-establishment imperatives determined by performance artists of earlier generations.

The following chapter will explore contemporary theories on the expanded fields of participatory practice, with a particular focus on relational aesthetics, towards a comprehensive positioning of *participative art*.

2 CHAPTER TWO: THE NINETIES, SOCIAL AESTHETICS, AND THE COMMUNITY EFFECT

In 1992, Suzi Gablik wrote the essay ‘Connective Aesthetics’ – a text that would prove highly prognosticative in terms of the trajectory of art theorisation and practice during the mid-to-late 1990s and beyond. In it she writes:

Today, the war on the canon reflects the crises of Western individualism and the modern tradition of self that derives from conquest and erasure of the other ... the new connective aesthetics recognizes that we live in a time in which our need for community has become critical ... [m]any artists now fashion their individuality out of this interconnection and weave it directly into their work ... [o]ver the next few decades, I think we will see more art that is essentially social, that rejects the myths of neutrality and autonomy, as the notion of atomic individuals discreetly divided from each other gives way, within an ecological paradigm, to a different notion of the self (Gablik 1992:6).

Alongside the massive ideological shift within arts practice so clearly described by Gablik, the ‘social turn’ was further intensified by a number of more practicable changes that occurred during the early 1990s. These included the growing influence of the Biennale and the emergence of the independent or ‘entrepreneurial’ curator.³⁴ Within this context, artists began to, and were realistically able to, focus less on gallery-appropriate (commercially viable) production, and more on the relationships and experiences produced by the art object (Larsen 2012:[sp]). As such, art became increasingly convivial and accessible, where a ‘work’ could take the form of a café, a running club, a jumble sale, a telepathy workshop, a disco, and so on. In other words, art began to offer a zone for social interaction, prioritising the ideas of togetherness

³⁴ The term ‘entrepreneurial curator’ refers to a curator who has developed an influential practice independently, and outside of institutional frameworks. Examples include Okwui Enwezor, Maria Lind, Hans Ulrich Obrist and Jérôme Sans, to name but a few (Farquharson 2006:[sp]).

and community over that of the remoteness and austerity so often associated with the institutionalisation of art (Larsen 2012:[sp]; Bourriaud 2002a:14).³⁵

This ‘social turn’ was first popularly theorised as a movement by Bourriaud during the mid-1990s. Coined as ‘relational aesthetics’, the term marks a distinct shift within the historicisation of participation towards that of *participative art*. Within this paradigm, participation not only becomes the governing principle of a given project, but the artist also creates only the framework for participation “with no preconceived ideas of the outcome” (Roux 2007:[sp]). From a meta-theoretical perspective, relational aesthetics is underpinned by a critical reimagining of the teleological Modernist/Post-Modernist binary; namely, that of an ‘Alter-Modernity’ – a state that is both self-reflexive and in constant flux (Bourriaud 2009a:39). However, since its inception in the nineties, relational aesthetics (and within that, the meta-paradigm of Alter-Modernity) has been the subject of much critical debate. Claire Bishop, Grant Kester and Bruce Barber, to name but a few, have situated their critique around the *type* and *quality* of the relationships produced by the paradigm. In turn, a series of alternative participative models (relational antagonism, littoral art, dialogical aesthetics) have emerged, each attempting to reposition the ‘social’ approach to participation, within participative practice.

Operating via a conceptual analysis and integrative literature review, my intention in this chapter is to contextualise, define, and defend a relational participative strategy within the scope of this inquiry on artist-run participative platforms. While a defence of relational aesthetics is perhaps an unfashionable position (the paradigm being past its ‘heyday’), I argue that its modest approach to inter-human relations, and its clear locus as an *aesthetic form*, is what distinguishes the practice from its Modernist predecessors. And furthermore, I suggest that this quality avoids the didactic messianism, and ill-prepared social science bent underpinning the subsequent iterations of social aesthetics suggested by Bishop, Kester and Wright (et al.).

³⁵ It is vital to note that this shift occurred hand-in-hand with a critical reflection and repositioning of the ‘art institution’. This dynamic will be explored in detail in the following chapter.

2.1 *Relational aesthetics and the logic of precariousness*

The term ‘relational aesthetics’ was first used by Bourriaud in connection with his curated exhibition *Traffic* at the CAPC Musée d'Art Contemporain (France) which took place in 1996. For Bourriaud (1996:[sp]), the term, and the exhibition it described, set out to articulate the emergence of a new sensibility – namely, work that “highlights social methods of exchange [and] interactivity with the onlooker”. Visitors to the show were encouraged to sit, drink, converse, touch, and engage in ‘everyday activities’, with the art object acting as a “catalyst for ... stimulating relationships” (Reckitt 2013:133; Arning 2005:12). Rirkrit Tiravanija, for example, created “user-friendly arrangements of tables and chairs” out of packaging cardboard for gallery to visitors to relax in – each with its own complimentary mini-bar (Freedman 1996:[sp]). Jes Brinch and Henrik Jakobsen installed a “synthetic landscape” of cave-like dwellings, “complete with wooden beds, a kitchen area and communal seating”; the intention being for the artists to live in the CAPC for the duration of the show, and engage visitors in discussions on “alternative models of society” (Freedman 1996:[sp]; Jakobsen 2010:[sp]). Christine Hill set up a flea market of sorts, encouraging visitors to rummage through second-hand books and records that she had collected in East-Berlin (Reckitt 2013:133). The visual language of the show was one that would come to typify relational aesthetics. Constituted as an “anti-form” style wherein the gallery space appears closer to that of an open-air market or fête, it incorporated “a temporary and nomadic gathering of precarious materials and products of various provenances” (Bourriaud 2002b:28).

At the time *Traffic* received a mostly unenthusiastic reception from critics. In his review for *Frieze Magazine*, Carl Freedman (1996:[sp]) refers to Bourriaud’s curatorial framework “as awkwardly formulated”, with the concept of ‘relational aesthetics’ being “too unspecific to be capable of defining a new art”. Similarly, critic Emily Tsingou describes Bourriaud’s notion of ‘interactivity’ as incoherent and implausible, with a number of the works in the show being “forced to fit” into a so-called relational framework (Tsingou 1996:[sp]). However, Bourriaud continued to champion relational aesthetics over the next few years; in theory, through the publishing of *Relational*

Aesthetics (1998) and *Postproduction* (2002),³⁶ and in practice through his directorship at the Palais de Tokyo (Paris) (Reckitt 2013:133). However, it was only after the translation of *Relational Aesthetics* in 2002 that Bourriaud's theories became widely popularised, proving to be a defining text for artists, theorists and critics, and acquiring (arguably) the status of a new 'ism' within art history (Doherty 2004:4; Martin 2008:369).

Bourriaud's (2002a:14) formulation of relational aesthetics takes human interaction and its social context as its "theoretical horizon". Within this framework, the audience becomes an interlocutor within the artwork, and the arena for this interlocution (a meeting, an event, a game) becomes the artistic form (Bourriaud 2002a:28). While these activities clearly have their roots in early performance and conceptual art, relational art simply uses their attendant 'matter' as a kind of vocabulary (Bourriaud 2002a:46). As Bourriaud (2002a:46) puts it: while "Peter Land, Gillian Wearing and Henry Bond ... have a preference for video recording, they are still not video artists". Rather, the "medium merely turns out to be the one best suited to the formalisation of certain activities and projects" (Bourriaud 2002a:46). The artistic focus is consequently less about 'production' (and associated ideological encumbrances), and more about picking the most suitable method for creating arenas for dialogue and exchange. Relational art thus centres on facilitating the grouping of participants into small communities or 'Micro-communities'; a function that is central to relational aesthetics' political project (Bourriaud 2002a:14). Citing philosopher Felix Guattari, Bourriaud (2002a:14, 31) argues that (counter to Modernism's wholesale transformative aims) it is, in fact, the "microscopic attempts" of the "community and neighbourhood committee type" that will be able to effect change, even if it is only on a small scale.³⁷ The function of art, within a relational paradigm, is thus no longer to drive an ambitious utopian agenda (as Modernism would have it), but rather to create solutions for the here and

³⁶ According to Bourriaud (2002b:8) *Relational Aesthetics* and *Postproduction* show the "same scene from a different angle". *Relational Aesthetics* "deals with a collective sensibility", while *Postproduction* "analyses a set of modes of production, seeking to establish a typology of contemporary practices and to find commonalities" (Bourriaud 2002b:8). The analysis of relational aesthetics within this chapter will be based on a side-by-side reading of the texts.

³⁷ It is important to note that Bourriaud's theories are indebted to philosopher Felix Guattari's writings – in particular, *Chaosmosis* (1992) and *Molecular Revolution* (1984). Bourriaud acknowledges this in *Relational Aesthetics*, stating that while Guattari's work was cut short by his untimely death, we are left with a 'toolbox' to use when interrogating contemporary art (2002:87). These 'tools' drawn on by Bourriaud include the key ideas of micro-politics and the Micro-utopia, and the value of 'neighbourhood-type communities' as a realistic form of political resistance.

now; modest and realisable ‘Micro-utopias’ created by and for ‘Micro-communities’ (Bourriaud 2002a:31).

Underpinning this position is the meta-theoretical paradigm of ‘Alter-Modernism’ – a concept drawn out subsequently in Bourriaud’s 2009 exhibition at the Tate Triennial entitled *Altermodern*,³⁸ and in his text *The Radicant* (2010). For Bourriaud (2010:173), the prefix ‘alter’ suggests the idea of alternatives and multiplicity in relation to art and its temporality, a kind of heterochronic approach to the historicisation of art. Within this framework, the teleological dogma of the Modernist/post(anti)-Modernist binary is “divested of [its] hierarchy” in favour of ephemerality and precariousness (Bourriaud 2010:15). The botanical metaphor of ‘the radicant’ designates this new ‘modernity’ as a kind of heterogeneous ‘organism’: moving, propagating, transplanting – refusing the postmodern multiculturalist notion that assumes a work of art is “inevitably explained by the ‘condition’ ... or ‘origin’ of its author” (Bourriaud 2010:34; 2009a:[sp]).³⁹ Central to this idea of mutability is an assertion of the massive impact of the Internet, where accessibility, multiplicity and immediacy have fundamentally changed the ways in which we communicate, and the ease with which we are able to share and access information (Bourriaud 2010:43). For Bourriaud, we are now living in an era where travel is increasingly attainable (through economical airfares, but also via satellite imaging and Google Earth), divesting the idea of a ‘centre’ in favour of a global/local model which embraces the concepts of nomadism and the cultural polyglot (Bourriaud 2009e:13). Importantly, and in keeping with the idea of the Micro-community, this shift “will be undertaken not in the wake of, but in resistance against ... globalisation” and the ongoing standardisation associated with capitalism, where artists are able to embrace and draw on their unique singularity but within a global context (Bourriaud 2010:17).

³⁸ *Altermodern* attempted to interrogate and make visible, the characteristics of ‘Alter-Modernism’ (Bourriaud 2009e:[sp]). In keeping with the project of relational aesthetics, the exhibition was largely interlocutory; with discussions, screenings, interventions, and talks with theorists Okwui Enwezor, TJ Demos and Jordi Vidal, and artists Zoran Naskovski, Navin Rawanchaikul and Carsten Höller et al. (Bourriaud 2009e:[sp]). The ‘artwork’ itself was split up into a series of themes, including travel, viatorisation, exile, and heterochronia, as a starting point for engaging in conversations around a ‘modernity for the now’ (Bourriaud 2009e:[sp]).

³⁹ Bourriaud (2010:34) argues that Post-Modernism’s centre/periphery paradigm, and associated multiculturalist bent, has only entrenched concepts it claims to refute. Concepts of “emancipation, resistance, alienation” are dealt with by “asking the artist ‘where do you speak from?’”, thus locating, and ‘nailing’, every individual to their cultural or geographic roots. For Bourriaud (2010:34) these problematics are largely as a result of art market demands for “simple categories and recognizable images ... so as to facilitate its distribution of products”, resulting in “essentialist theme parks” rather than a heterogeneous global voice.

In order to draw out these concepts and explore how they might work in practice, it is helpful to look at them in relation to a specific example. One project which might be used to consider ideas within relational aesthetics, such as the sub-themes of the Micro-community and the Micro-utopia, is Donna Kukama and Naadira Patel's *Café Exchange* (Figures 4–6).⁴⁰ The work was first produced at the University of the Witwatersrand (Wits) Substation in May 2012, and then reformatted for the Parking Gallery the following month.⁴¹ Run over five days at the Wits Substation, the project offered visitors a cup of coffee in exchange for a 'something', with suggestions including a hat, a mix-tape, a story, an ornament, a photograph, and so on. The 'value' of the 'something' (based on Kukama and Patel's appraisal) would then determine the strength or weakness of the coffee served.

On attending day three of *Café Exchange* at the Substation, I was struck by the homey conversion of the normally sterile white-cube gallery space. A serving counter had been set up opposite the entrance, complete with commercial espresso machine, waffle maker and flashing 'OPEN' sign. Couches, cushions, tables and menu boards filled the central floor space, with the display of 'somethings' accumulating in one corner. Kukama and Patel, along with a number of friends and Wits art students, performed the appraisals, and prepared and served the coffee. I had been invited to the Café by artists Vaughn Sadie and Lester Adams to participate in a scheduled discussion as part of series of presentations, dialogues and screenings held throughout the week. As there were only five of us involved, the discussion took place casually around one of the tables – our conversation being traded as the 'something' in exchange for coffee.

The second iteration of the project was an evening event held at the Parking Gallery (then situated at the VANSA offices in Fox Street). Once again Kukama and Patel set up the Café; the espresso machine was borrowed from the Little Addis Cafe across the road, VANSA's trestle tables and futon were laid out, and the 'somethings' collected

⁴⁰ Donna Kukama is a South African artist, currently based in Johannesburg. She is a faculty member at the Wits School of Arts (WSoA), and a co-founder of the Center for Historical Reenactments (CHR). She is represented by Blank Gallery in Cape Town (Blank 2014:[sp]). Naadira Patel is a Johannesburg-based artist and curator who completed her undergraduate BA Fine Arts Degree at the WSoA in 2010 (lowave 2014:[sp]).

⁴¹ The Wits Substation is a project space on the East Campus of the University, and is programmed by the WSoA. The Parking Gallery is an independent artist-run space that will be looked at in detail in Chapter Four.

from the Substation were displayed in a corner of the space. The evening iteration of the Café was less of a ‘coffee shop’ and more of a party, with Kukama and Patel serving whiskey-spiked coffee, and a DJ (artist Zen Marie) on the decks.

The project in many ways exemplifies Bourriaud’s conception of relational aesthetics. This is true, firstly in terms of its form. By setting itself up as a general café, the work clearly appropriates (or remixes) an “existing cultural form” (Bishop 2004:55). Similarly, by learning new skills associated with the service sector – in this case that of a barista or bartender – the artists are seizing the codes of existing forms and ‘reprogramming’ them in order to create new meaning (Bourriaud 2002c:[sp]; Bourriaud 2002b:17). This reprogramming is central to the project of relational aesthetics, where artists are no longer asking, “What can we have that is new?” but rather, “How can we make do with what we have?” (Bourriaud 2002b:17).

Secondly, in terms of its aesthetic, the café is typically ‘anti-slick’; the shelves are made from repurposed crates, the menu is handwritten in chalk on the wall, the instruction sign is made up of packaging cardboard, and so on. Again, a type of reprogramming takes place, in this case through the arrangement and recomposition of recycled objects (Bourriaud 2002a:28).

Thirdly, by accepting ‘somethings’ in exchange for a cup of coffee, the *Café Exchange* hits at the core of relational aesthetics’ project, namely the creation of ‘social interstice’. Bourriaud (2002a:16) borrows the term ‘social interstice’ from Karl Marx’s description of the way in which trading communities are able to elude capitalist economies by removing the law of profit in favour of reciprocal exchange economies such as bartering. Within a contemporary exhibition space, social interstice refers to a kind of economy which “goes beyond the dry and reductive simplification in which modernity rigs it”, taking the form of a negotiation (conversation, compromise, discussion) between two people (Bourriaud 2002b:30). According to Bourriaud (2002b:30), by creating space for these negotiations, artists are trying to rematerialise the *social experience* which has become increasingly abstract and invisible to us through our current economic system. So within the context of *Café Exchange*, art commerce is removed from existing capitalist mediums of exchange (cash) in favour of

an exchange of ideas, information and/or services, thus suggesting (albeit tentatively) an alternative to the current status-quo.

And finally, *Café Exchange* fits within the paradigm of relational aesthetics in terms of its relational approach to participation. Kukama and Patel have created space for interlocution (the open discussions, the participation of art students as servers, the negotiations with the proprietor of the Little Addis Café, and so on). In other words, each relationship leads to “a bundle of relations”, which in turn “gives rise to other relations ... ad infinitum” creating a temporary Micro-community of users (Bourriaud 2002a:22).

Café Exchange is but one example of the continuing influence of relational aesthetics on global contemporary arts production and on the current pedagogic focus of art-schools such as the Wits School of Arts (WSoA).⁴² However, along with its increasing popularity, the paradigm has been the subject of criticism from a number of fronts. Furthermore, it has become a catchphrase, a “sort of caricatured vulgate” for “any artwork with an interactive and/or socially related dimension” – or as Bourriaud scathingly describes it – for “artists-who-serve-soup-at-the-opening” (Lind 2007:192; Bourriaud 2002b:7). The following section will draw out the various arguments levelled against relational aesthetics, and explore several iterations of the paradigm that have emerged as ‘solutions’ to these perceived problematics.

2.2 *Criticism and relational aesthetics*

Central to much of the criticism directed at relational aesthetics is a critique of the *kinds or quality* of the relationships produced by the paradigm. This question is drawn out most notably in Claire Bishop’s essay ‘Antagonism and Relational Aesthetics’ in which she asks: “If relational art produces human relations ... what types of relations are being produced, for whom, and why?” (Bishop 2004:65). Bishop argues that relational aesthetics presupposes dialogue to be inherently democratic when in fact the paradigm’s overt focus on conviviality disallows the possibility of any authentic

⁴² Email correspondence with Nontobeko Ntombela on 11/20/2014.

conversation or contestation (Bishop 2004:65). That is, by glossing over the tensions inherent in human relations, relational aesthetics simply ‘aestheticises’ democracy, using the so-called interaction between participants as props or material for artistic execution (Bishop 2004:56; Lind 2007:192). Drawing on Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe’s *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy: Towards a Radical Democratic Politics* (1985), Bishop (2004:70 and 79) argues for relational art to claim democratic authenticity it would need to *actively generate* antagonism, thus encouraging the tensions inherent within debate.⁴³ Bishop (2004:70) cites Santiago Sierra’s controversial actions in which he pays workers to perform seemingly meaningless and often debasing acts as examples of this kind of ‘relational antagonism’ (Margolles 2004:63). *160 cm Line Tattooed on Four People* (Figure 7) for example, saw Sierra hire four heroin-addicted sex workers for the price of a shot of heroin, to have a portion of a line tattooed across their backs at the El Gallo Arte Contemporáneo Gallery in Spain (Sierra 2000:[sp]).⁴⁴ In setting up these deeply uncomfortable situations, Sierra “aims to unmask the power relations that keep workers invisible under capitalism”, thus drawing attention to “the exploitation of human labour taking place in systems of economic exchange” (Sierra 2000:[sp]; Margolles 2004:63). Bishop contends that the overt antagonism within these actions problematises relationships in a way that authentically exposes the nature of human relations that are profoundly “riven with social and legal exclusions”, and in which (counter to the ‘gift’ economy associated with relational aesthetics) “there’s no such thing as a free meal: everything and everyone has a price” (Bishop 2004:70).

Stephen Wright’s *The Delicate Essence of Artistic Collaboration* (2006) pursues a critique of relational aesthetics via an antithetical strategy to that of the relational antagonism suggested by Bishop. While both Wright and Bishop agree that the relationships produced by relational aesthetics are largely superficial, Wright argues (counter to Bishop) that there is in fact *too much* conflict within the practice, and that

⁴³ Laclau and Mouffe (1985:xvii) argue, from a post-Marxist perspective, that in order for ‘real change’ to take place, the hegemony of neo-liberal politics must be actively challenged by the Left, rather than simply ‘managed in a more humane way’. In other words “there cannot be a radical politics without the definition of an adversary” and the “acceptance of the ineradicability of antagonism”. Drawing on this, Bishop (2004:66) contends that an authentically democratic society is one in which “relations of conflict are sustained, not erased” and where a lack of antagonism would point only to an “imposed consensus of authoritarian order” and a “total suppression of debate and discussion, which is inimical to democracy”.

⁴⁴ According to Sierra “normally [the sex workers] charge 2,000 or 3,000 pesetas, between 15 and 17 dollars, for fellatio, while the price of a shot of heroin is around 12,000 pesetas, about 67 dollars” (Sierra 2004:[sp]).

the relationships produced are intrinsically exploitative and hostile (Lind 2007:192; Wright 2006:534). For Wright (2006:535), to offer “contrived services” to an unwitting audience, and then “expropriate ... whatever minimal labour they have managed to extract” from the ‘participants’ as material for the work, makes a mockery of the term ‘collaboration’. He argues that by creating these administered situations, artists are entrenching capitalist “class-based relations of expropriation” wherein the artists “hold the symbolic capital” while the participant’s labour is “used to foster the accumulation of more capital” (Wright 2006:535). While Wright (largely) dismisses relational aesthetics as an “intellectually and aesthetically impoverished practice”, he argues that truly collaborative art is possible if it is driven by ‘competencies’ rather than ‘performance’ (Wright 2006:536). Wright defines ‘competencies’ as skill sets that cover a range of technical, procedural and perceptual proficiencies.⁴⁵ For Wright (2006:537, 545), when artists put these competencies at the disposal of citizen-participants who in turn contribute with their specific competencies, genuine ‘extra-disciplinary’ collaboration can take place. He cites the artist-run group the Taller Popular de Serigrafía (TPS) as a successful example of this kind of collaborative exchange (Wright 2006:538). Formed in Buenos Aires in 2001 during the midst of Argentina’s economic collapse, the TPS sought to actively and productively engage in the ongoing protest action in the city (Wright 2006:538). For the TPS, the most practicable way to assist was to offer up their competencies to various civil action groups in the form of silk-screening workshops. In doing so, the artists provided the tools and the skills needed to produce posters, pamphlets, signs, t-shirts, and other much-needed material for various public groups and assemblies. According to Wright, by providing the equipment and expertise for use by the public, and by assisting with production without necessarily controlling it, the TPS was able to foster an authentic participatory democracy, and to facilitate a genuinely collaborative venture (Wright 2006:538).

Stewart Martin’s *Critique of Relational Aesthetics* (2007) challenges yet another aspect of the relationships generated by relational aesthetics – namely Bourriaud’s ‘romantic’ conception of social interstice as an ‘anti-capitalist’ strategy. For Martin (2008:378), by

⁴⁵ The term ‘competencies’ is derived from Noam Chomsky’s linguistic theory presented in *Aspects of the Theory of Syntax* (1965). For Chomsky (1965:4), ‘competence’ is an individual’s innate or subconscious mastery of a language, which allows the speaker to “construct, recognise, interpret, and detect sentences as being correct, incorrect, meaningful, meaningless, and so on” (Wright 2006:536).

equating the eradication of the commodifiable art-object with the eradication of capitalist exchange, relational aesthetics perpetuates the misnomer that the current post-industrialised ‘service economy’ has led to real change in terms of value-form. That is, rather than preventing capitalist exchange, the relationships produced by relational aesthetics in fact fetishize social procedures, creating commodity value out of human experience, echoing the waged ‘friendships’ of customer service (Martin 2008:379).

In direct response to these questions around the “democratic efficacy” of relational aesthetics, a number of theorists (including Wright) have reworked theories around the practice of social aesthetics (Downey 2007:274). The following section will expand on two paradigms that have gained traction over the last decade – namely, dialogical aesthetics and littoral art.

Alternative social practice: dialogical aesthetics and littoral art

In his text *Conversation Pieces: Community and Communication in Modern Art* (2004), Grant Kester positions ‘dialogical aesthetics’ as a socially collaborative practice that “explicitly address[es] the ethical relationship between the artist and his or her collaborators” (Kester 2007:112). Counter to relational aesthetics, which Kester views as “essentially choreographed or staged”, dialogical aesthetics is more open-ended – a “kind of conversation” that allows for “a locus of differing meanings, interpretations and points of view” (Kester 2004:4). The term ‘dialogical’ is derived from literary theorist Mikhail Bakhtin’s concept of the ‘dialogic relationship’ (Kester 2004:4). Bakhtin argues that the “aesthetic whole” cannot be “experienced or even co-experienced by the spectator”, but that it rather needs to be “actively produced” by both the author and contemplator – a relationship structure he terms ‘dialogic’ (Bakhtin in Haladyn 2008:4). Similarly, dialogical art is produced through the reciprocal process of shared conversations and insights between artist and participant (Kester 2004:4). Importantly, dialogical exchange is seen as a durational process where, “rather than a single, instantaneous shock of insight, precipitated by an image or object”, the aesthetic experience is cumulative and ongoing (Kester 2004:3).

Kester cites Suzanne Lacy's 'The Oakland Projects' as a prime example of the collaborative, empathetic and reciprocal possibilities inherent within a dialogical approach to social aesthetics. The series consists of a number of large-scale, participative public projects undertaken by Lacy, and a number of collaborators, in Oakland, California between 1991 and 2001 (Lacy 1997:[sp]). *The Roof is on Fire* (1993-1994: Figure 8), for example, saw 220 public high school students invited to a rooftop garage to engage in unscripted and off-the-cuff conversations around various themes, including drugs, sexuality, education, and the future (Lacy 1997:[sp]). Over 1000 Oakland residents were then invited to listen to the teenagers conversations. According to Lacy (1997:[sp]), the work was created in response to two incidents of violence involving Oakland students that had made national news in a single week. By creating a platform for open conversation, *The Roof is on Fire* sought to give "control of the message" back to the teenagers of Oakland (Lacy 1997:[sp]). The project, in turn, generated a number of spin-offs, including the development of a media literacy curriculum and a series of workshops for students (Lacy 1997:[sp]). For Kester (2004:2) Lacy's work evidences the "emancipatory" possibilities of dialogical aesthetics, in which art making becomes consultative, and the outcomes generative and enduring.

Bruce Barber's formulation of 'littoral art' is yet another iteration of social aesthetics that has found traction within recent contemporary art.⁴⁶ The term 'littoral' is a geographical term for the liminal zone that occurs between the ocean and the shore, and is, depending on the tides, alternately dry or covered with water (Barber 2004:[sp]). Barber uses the trope to describe the back and forth nature of the practice in which the artist and artwork move between the community and the gallery system (Barber 2004:[sp]). As such, the artist's role is that of an intermediary or arbitrator between various political paradigms (institutional, geopolitical, social) (Barber 2004[sp]). Barber's participative strategy is unambiguously democratic in the sense that all decisions within the process should take the form of a dialogue and "no one individual should assume absolute control" (Barber 1998:[sp]). Barber refers to this strategy as "communicative action", a model borrowed from sociologist Jurgen Habermas' *The Theory of Communicative Action* (1984). Within this conception,

⁴⁶ It is important to note that while Barber began his postulations in 'littoral art' as far back as 1997, it is only within the last decade that the paradigm has received critical attention (Littoral 2014:[sp]).

decisions are arrived at through the “co-operative achievements of understanding among participants” rather than the “egocentric calculations of success of every individual” (Barber 2004:[sp]). While littoral art aligns itself closely with that of dialogical aesthetics in terms of its dialogic approach to participation, it asserts itself through a marked emphasis on effecting *real change* (Barber 2004:[sp]). That is, the ultimate end of a littoral project is to “engender (or engineer) ‘conscientization’, and possibly, social change” (Barber 2004:[sp]). The recent increase in the popularity of littoral art is evident with the emergence of groups such as Littoral (2011) – an arts research and development trust that aims to promote “new creative strategies, artistic interventions and cultural partnerships in response to issues about social, cultural and environmental change” (Littoral 2014:[sp]). The trust positions itself directly as an alternative to relational aesthetics with its focus on providing “grassroots solutions” to “real-life problems” (Littoral 2014:[sp]). This includes the promotion of equality for marginalised groups, lobbying for policy change for British craftsmen, implementing research projects on the relationship between conflict and culture, and so on (Littoral 2014:[sp]).

Tying Bishop’s and Wright’s critiques of relational aesthetics and the alternatives suggested by dialogical aesthetics and littoral art together, a set of critical commonalities are revealed. Firstly, it becomes evident that the relationships produced by relational aesthetics are not necessarily democratic, but that genuine democratic, participative engagement is possible (potentially through antagonism / the sharing of competencies / a dialogical or littoral approach to social aesthetics). And secondly, it is revealed that within genuine democratic participative engagement lies the possibility of catalysing ‘real social change’. However, interred within these conclusory points are a number of ethical and paradoxical problematics. The following section will draw out my insights into these issues, and argue in defence of Bourriaud’s relational aesthetics.

2.3 *In defence of relational aesthetics*

In its simplest form, Bishop’s argument against relational aesthetics can be understood as a compound syllogism, and broken down as follows:

Argument A

- 1) The types of relationships produced by participatory art should be democratic.
- 2) Democratic relationships are necessarily dependent on the sustained presence of antagonism.

∴ The relationships produced by participatory art should be antagonistic.

Argument B

- 3) The relationships produced by participatory art should be antagonistic.
- 4) The relationships produced by relational aesthetics are convivial.

∴ The relationships produced by relational aesthetics are undemocratic.

Analysing *Argument A* via a meta-synthesis of the literature, the claim appears largely specious. The premise that democratic engagement is *necessarily* dependent on antagonism has been repudiated by a number of artists and critics including Liam Gillick in ‘Letters and Responses’ (2006) and Maria Lind ‘The Collaborative Turn’ (2007).⁴⁷ Furthermore, it might be worth noting that Bishop’s position is a consequence of (perhaps inadvertent) confirmation bias. Bishop’s argument for antagonism is based on Laclau and Mouffe’s exposition in *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy: Towards a Radical Democratic Politics* (1985). However, Mouffe in fact fundamentally revised this position in her later work, *The Democratic Paradox* (2000). Counter to her earlier argument that social antagonism is central to democratic politics, Mouffe (2000:14) argues for ‘agonistic pluralism’. Within this paradigm, the simplistic dualism inherent within antagonistic relations is replaced with a productive and generative approach to dealing with conflict (Mouffe 2000:14). For Mouffe, then, democratic politics and the “real meaning of liberal-democratic tolerance” stems from

⁴⁷ This position is explicitly addressed in both essays (Gillick 2006:99 and Lind 2007:23) and as such will not be drawn out further here.

moving beyond the destructive conflict of antagonism, towards *agonism* (Mouffe 2000:14).

However, if we grant Bishop that democratic relationships are necessarily dependent on antagonism, it is the second part of Bishop's argument that is (to my mind) most problematic. My defence of relational aesthetics will thus centre on a critique of *Argument B* which, in turn, will set up a framework for a further interrogation of Wright's criticism and the alternative approaches to social aesthetics suggested by Kester and Barber.

Form vs. production in relational art

Argument B sits at the core of Bishop's (2004:66) question: "if relational art produces human relations, then the next logical question to ask is what types of relations are being produced ...?" Bishop's conclusion is that relational art produces convivial (non-antagonistic) relationships, which are inimical to real democratic participation. However, this notion is problematic on two levels. Firstly, the idea that relational aesthetics 'produces' a specific type of relationship is, I believe, based on a misinterpretation of Bourriaud's project. And, secondly, the argument that social aesthetics, of any kind, should attempt to 'produce' a particular 'type' of relationship seems counter-intuitive to the concept of democratic participation.

Looking at the first problematic, I would argue that relational aesthetics refers to a *form*, not a methodology, for participation or collaboration. Bourriaud is not attempting to design relationships, nor is he positing a methodology for achieving a specific 'type' of relationship; rather he is making *space* for relationships to develop. The purpose of relational aesthetics is thus only to create an "arena of exchange" – space and time for social interstice (Bourriaud 2002a:18, 83). So while a convivial form might be the starting point for a given project, the relationships 'produced' are open-ended. Returning to *Café Exchange* for example, it would seem unreasonable to claim that the project prohibits divisive conversation: consider the debating, deliberating, gossiping, arguing, and contesting that could potentially take place within a coffee shop, and even more so within the critical panel discussions hosted by the Café.

Looking at the second problematic, it seems evident a priori that the open-ended interlocution of relational aesthetics is more democratic than a propagandistic attempt to *produce* and direct a specific *type* of relationship. For example, Bishop's characterisation of Sierra's work as being able to "disrupt the art audience's sense of identity", of "amplify[ing] of the status quo", of "highlight[ing] the divisions enforced by these contexts", and of "exposing how all our interactions are ... riven with social and legal exclusions", evidences a didactic approach to 'participation', and a pervasive Modernist attitude that positions art as being somehow responsible for the edification of the audience.

Underpinning these issues is, I believe, a refusal to come to grips with a reading of participation outside of a Modernist teleology. That is, Bishop, Wright, Kester and Barber's critiques and methodologies share many of the characteristics entrenched within an avant-garde/neo-avant-garde (read anti-Modernist) performance art participatory strategy discussed in Chapter One. These include the co-option of the audience as agents for socio-political critique, the attempt to redirect art's influence and effect on society, and the belief in the emancipatory possibilities of art. So while relational art might be 'feel good'⁴⁸ in comparison to the projects suggested by Bishop (et al.), the idea that art is somehow there to "right the world and to turn humankind from its fearful path" seems a relic of fundamentalist Modernist dogma – the kind of dogma that has proved itself messianic, authoritarian and 'utopianistic' (Bishop 2004:79; Burnham 1986:43).⁴⁹ As Bourriaud (2002a:45) puts it:

[It is] clear that the age of the New Man, future-oriented manifestos, and calls for a better world all ready to be walked into and lived in is well and truly over ... it seems more pressing to invent possible relations with our neighbours in the present than to bet on happier tomorrows ... a much-awaited alternative to the depressive, authoritarian and reactionary.

⁴⁸ Bishop (2004:79) uses this term pejoratively; however, this too seems a relic of Modernism's view of art as something necessarily "remote, academic and monumental" (Larsen 2012:[sp]).

⁴⁹ This phrase is borrowed from Linda Frye Burnham's description of a trend in performance art in California during the late 1970s and early 1980s in her essay 'High Performance, Performance Art, and Me' (1986:43).

Within relational aesthetics and Alter-Modernism then, the expectations of art and participation are much more modest, suggesting only possible “solutions for the here-and-now” through “models of action within the existing real, whatever the scale chosen by the artist” (Bourriaud 2002a:13). In other words, the suggestion is for Micro-utopias for Micro-communities – small-scale, immediate changes within the everyday, which could include simple acts of good-neighbourliness or performing modest gestures of generosity or conviviality.⁵⁰

A further problematic associated with the emancipatory bent of relational antagonism, littoral art and dialogical aesthetics is that artists, critics and theorists are required to “employ techniques ... more typically associated with the social sciences” (Kester 2011:10). Counter to this position, Bourriaud makes it clear that relational aesthetics should be judged purely on the “basis of aesthetic criteria” (Bourriaud 1996:18). That is, the discourses of visual art should be used to interpolate and analyse “the coherence of [a project’s] form, and then the symbolic value of the ‘world’ it suggests to us, and of the image of human relations reflected by it” (Bourriaud 1996:18). This is not to say that relational art should not be inter-disciplinary, but rather that the form acknowledges its value as an aesthetic (rather than an ethico-political) project. This modest focus, I believe, circumvents a number of ethical and paradoxical problematics evident in the ‘social-work’ focus of Wright, Kester and Barber. One such example (as Wright himself points out) occurred when the TPS were invited to the Venice Biennale in 2003 as an activist group, and a year later to the World Social Forum as artists (Wright 2004:538). Post Wright’s observation, the group, in fact, returned to the Biennale circuit at the 2006 Sao Paulo Biennale as artists with a curated gallery show consisting of an installation of banners and framed prints of the silk-screened pamphlets produced in 2002 (NEME:[sp]). While the lack of clarity around their role and the terminology used to describe the TPS might seem a matter of semantics, the ethical gain of artistic capital created off of the backs of protest action, particularly given the anti-capitalist nature of those protests, and the increasing transnational corporate funding associated with Biennales, seems deeply problematic (Madra

⁵⁰ The notion of the ‘Micro-utopia’ has a wider theoretical trajectory, which is, in part, indebted to Michel Foucault’s concept of micropolitics (Larsen 2012:[sp]). Foucault differentiates between macropolitics in which “clashing forces struggle for control over a centralized source of power rooted in the economy and state” and micropolitics where “local groups contest [and] diffuse ... forms of power spreading throughout society” (Kellner 2009:[sp]).

2006:528). Kester (2011:9) acknowledges these kinds of paradoxes, pointing out that social aesthetics “suggests a model of reception, and a set of research methodologies, that are potentially quite different from those employed to analyse object-based art practices” which would necessitate certain “transformations in the nature of contemporary art practice [and] have broader implications for art historiography and theory”. However, without these transformations having taken place, the approach seems ethically imprudent and potentially damaging. Briefly looking at a South African social-science context for example, the South African Council for Social Service Professions (SACSSP) and the Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC) have clear codes of conduct in order to protect both the “the integrity of the social service professions” and the “interests of the public at large” (SACSSP:[sa]; HSRC:[sa]). These include clear directives around issues of transparency, accountability, confidentiality, professionalism, ethics, non-maleficence, and so forth. Social aesthetics has no such framework, and with its relativist ethical and emancipatory aims (based on the subjective cultural-specific values and norms of the artist involved), is clearly open to abuses of power and exploitation, and ultimately offers no protection to the ‘participants’.

2.4 *A relational participative methodology*

The continuing debate and interest around relational aesthetics over a decade after its introduction, and the burgeoning arena of social aesthetics it has helped shape, demonstrates the paradigms’ significant impact on arts practice and discourse. As the recently launched *Field Journal: A Journal of Socially-Engaged Art Criticism* (2014:[sp]) attests: “we are living through a singular cultural moment in which the conventional relationship between art and the social world, and between artist and viewer, is being questioned and renegotiated”.⁵¹ Amidst this boisterous vogue of social aesthetics, relational aesthetics remains, I believe, a relevant, generative and productive practice.

⁵¹ Consisting of an editorial board of theorists, artists, curators, and sociologists the *Field Journal* seeks to engage with a number of the problematics outlined above, including the notion of artistic production crossing into the field of social sciences, and the questions this raises about “the ‘proper’ field of art itself, as it engages with other disciplines” (2014:[sp]).

The following chapter explores the ways in which relational aesthetics has influenced institutional practice, and in turn led to the widespread emergence of the artist-run initiative.

3 CHAPTER THREE: (NEW) INSTITUTIONALISM

According to curator Maria Lind (2002:137), the exhibition policy of most galleries and art institutions is to “maximise interface” – a kind of standardised conveyor-belt system where “efficiency is paramount” and “time for research and reflection [is] pared to a minimum”. Within such a context, socially focused praxes such as relational aesthetics – with their emphasis on interlocution, variability, and open-endedness – are largely at odds with conventional institutional logic. This tension is highlighted in Emily Tsingou’s (1996:[sp]) review of Bourriaud’s *Traffic*:

The large hall of the CAPC Musée ... proved a difficult setting, leaving the works to appear unintentionally muddled together, resulting in a disruptive whole ... that is, turning the building into a ‘shock-and-shield’ vessel – shock because the works evidently were not catered for in this context, and shield because they were accepted in an environment of academia.

However, it is precisely this ‘shock-and-shield’ response that has stimulated a critical and widespread re-imagining of institutional practice.

Via a cross-national comparison, I briefly explore the curatorial turn and rise of New-Institutionalism as inextricable concomitants of the increased interest in participative practice. I argue, however, that while New-Institutionalism ostensibly offers an ideologically fitting solution to the institutionalisation of experimental and/or participative art, with ongoing budget cuts in the arts and the associated demands of a neoliberal economy, the model has proved ultimately unsustainable. Through examples, I examine various alternative strategies for the support and development of experimental and/or non-commercial projects with a particular focus on South Africa’s unique geopolitical context. These include the project space as an offshoot of a larger commercial gallery through Goodman Projects, the funded project space via GoetheOnMain, and the independent artist-run initiative through Jonathan Garnham’s Blank Projects. I conclude, however, that while these approaches undoubtedly provide a valuable resource for the development and/or promotion of contemporary art, ultimately they remain constrained by commercial concerns, and as such, can only

ever partially fulfil the need for autonomous space for the support of radical, open-ended, idea-rich and socially focused praxis.

3.1 *The curatorial turn and the promise of New-Institutionalism*

Curator Jens Hoffman (2007:[sp]) points out that just a few decades ago, the role of the curator was purely administrative and custodial – to anonymously collect and organise exhibitions within prescribed institutional conventions. More recently, however, the office of the curator has become increasingly differentiated and complex, with the act of curating establishing itself as a “potential nexus for discussion, critique, and debate” (O’Neill 2007:241). This trend is largely predicated on the burgeoning arena of social aesthetics, and the associated prominence of the group show and the transnational biennale (Reckitt 2013:137; Altshuller 1994:236). Counter to the homogeneity demanded by traditional institutional frameworks, these formats require a “discursive, conversational, and geopolitical” approach to the exhibition (O’Neill 2007:241). In turn, curators are able to develop their own idiosyncratic oeuvres – akin to those of directors, writers or artists – and have an increasingly active and creative role in the production and making of art (Hoffman 2007:[sp]). This rise of ‘the curator as creator’, and the group exhibition as the primary means through which their work is “mediated, experienced, and historicized”, has been coined ‘the curatorial turn’ (O’Neill 2007:243).⁵²

Within a European context, this trend has led to the appointment of a number of prominent, previously independent curators into larger institutional structures (Hoffman 2007:[sp]). These include Nicolas Bourriaud and Jérôme Sans at the Palais de Tokyo (Paris), Nicolaus Schafhausen at the Kunstverein (Frankfurt), Maria Hlavajova

⁵² Within a South African context, the ‘curatorial turn’ can be seen manifest in a number of areas. Firstly, it underpins the widespread introduction of curatorial courses at established art schools. In 2011, for example, WSoA introduced the first curating exhibitions course at an Honour’s and Master’s level via their Heritage Studies programme (Ntombela 11/20/2014). In 2013, the Michaelis School of Fine Art’s Centre for Curating the Archive (CCA), in collaboration with Iziko Museums, introduced their first Honour’s programme in curatorship (CCA 2014:[sp]; VANSAs 2013:[sp]). According to the prospectus, the programme offers courses in the theory and practice of curatorship, aimed at introducing practitioners to “the central skills of a curator”, which include working with collections, articulating these into exhibitions, and collaborating with artists and mediating their production (CCA 2015:4). Awards such as the MTN New Contemporaries have similarly begun placing an increased emphasis on ‘the curatorial’ aspect of their annual programme – where an up-and-coming guest curator is tasked with selecting the artists and, in keeping with the ‘curatorial turn’ paradigm, “identifying emerging visual languages ... and *formulating a conceptual framework* for an exhibition of ... works” (MTN 2014:[sp], emphasis added).

at the BAK (Utrecht), and Charles Esche and Maria Lind at the Witte de With (Rotterdam) (Farquharson 2006:[sp]). This internalisation of the curatorial turn – and thus social aesthetics – has been widely referred to as ‘New-Institutionalism’ where, for the first time, it was envisaged that curators would be able to effect a critical reimagining of the purpose and function of the institution from the ‘the inside’ (Farquharson 2006:[sp]; Kolb and Flückiger 2013:12).⁵³ Farquharson (2006:[sp]) points out that, for many, the idea of institutional critique taking place from *the inside* seems oxymoronic: “institutional critique, by definition, was something conducted from the outside ... often literally so: artists closed galleries, wrapped them, [and] plastered paper over their façades ...”. Counter to this anti-institutional (anti-Modernist) approach, New-Institutional practice seeks to divest the white-cube of its austere monumentality – repositioning the institution as an arena for democratic engagement. Within this framework, the hegemony of the exhibition gives way to sites of engagement, where residencies run alongside seminars, workshops alongside production, and so on – an “active space rather than one of passive observation” (Esche 2004:[sp]).

The Palais de Tokyo, under the directorship of Nicolas Bourriaud and Jérôme Sans, is perhaps the most vivid example of this New-Institutional vision. Under their administration, the institution has been reframed structurally and ideologically as part community centre, part laboratory and part academy.⁵⁴ Specifically, the Palais de Tokyo has been designed to optimise participation – an inclusive ‘lifestyle’ approach to institutionalism. This includes the addition of a bookshop, free Wi-Fi, restaurants, a garden (the Jardin aux Habitants), an auditorium capable of housing concerts and conferences, and a cinema (Palais de Tokyo 2014:[sp]). The opening hours of the Palais de Tokyo have been changed from the usual nine-to-five work day (Sans points out that “only tourists, people of private means or artists can afford to visit a museum during the day”) to a noon to midnight schedule in keeping with the leisure hours of cinemas and theatres (in Barahlé 2002:[sp]). Unlike traditional museums, the interior has been designed to allow free movement, encouraging visitors to explore, to

⁵³ The term ‘New-Institutionalism’ was coined by Josef Eckenburg (2013:21), who ‘borrowed’ the phrase from the field of social sciences in reference to the “renewed belief in the effectiveness of institutions after the Second World War”.

⁵⁴ This phrase is borrowed from curator Charles Esche’s formative essay ‘What’s the Point of Art Centres Anyway? - Possibility, Art and Democratic Deviance’ (2004).

investigate, and to remain (Winstanley 2002:[sp]). Within this larger institutional body, the actual exhibition space is entirely malleable, able to contain any one of a number of programmes, workshops, solo or group projects, residencies, etc. And with no permanent collection, the Palais de Tokyo can focus solely on open-ended, experimental and socially focused praxis.

However, while New-Institutionalism ostensibly offers a potentially generative solution to the institutionalisation of participative and/or experimental art as a long-term strategy, it has proved largely unsustainable. Amidst widespread budget cuts and austerity measures associated with the global economic crisis, institutions are increasingly expected to pay for themselves, either by generating income or by attracting corporate sponsorship (Möntmann 2005:10). These strategies – both of which favour mass audiences and populist programming – are ultimately antithetical to New-Institutionalism’s focus on the social experience. As a result, despite its initial promise, the vast majority of New-Institutional spaces in Europe have closed down or, at the very least, dramatically reoriented their curatorial strategy towards that of the saleable and/or the marketable over the last few years (Kolb and Flückiger 2013:5).

3.2 (New) Institutionalism in South Africa

Within a South African context, the resource-intensive demands of New-Institutionalism are clearly unviable within a climate beset by funding shortages, governmental underinvestment, and waning support from international agencies (VANSA 2010:6,7).⁵⁵ However, projects such as the Goodman Gallery’s Goodman Projects and the Goethe-Institut’s GoetheOnMain have tentatively introduced alternative ‘New-Institutional’ space for the development of non-commercial praxis in South Africa. The following case studies will track the emergence of these project spaces, and draw out various problematics and/or advantages inherent to each.

⁵⁵ To put the costs of large scale New-Institutional practice into perspective, in 2010 the Palais de Tokyo needed over €6 million (approximately R85 million) to run its programme alone. In comparison, during the same period, the South African government invested only R20 million between four of its largest national art museums for their entire annual administration (VANSA 2010:8).

Goodman Projects – the commercial project space

Goodman Projects launched in 2009 at Arts on Main as part of the Maboneng Precinct’s gentrification project in City and Suburban, Johannesburg.⁵⁶ Backed by the Goodman Gallery – one of South Africa’s largest commercial contemporary galleries – the space was positioned as an “experimental space for younger and emerging artists, and for experimental or non-commercial projects and installations” (South Africa 2010:[sp]).⁵⁷ Katrin Lewinsky, then co-curator of both Goodman Projects and the Goodman Gallery proper, reiterates this focus, stating that the space was intended as “a laboratory ... for experimental work ... for established artists of the gallery as well as ... for younger and emerging artists not represented by the gallery”.⁵⁸ The designation of Goodman Projects as a project space, as well as the rhetoric surrounding its characterisation (experimental, laboratory, non-commercial, emerging, etc.) clearly points to its New-Institutional ambitions. However, despite being ‘sold’ as such, the project space failed to embody any of the open-endedness or malleability associated with a project space proper, essentially functioning as an urban branch of the Goodman Gallery.

The launch, for example, saw a collaborative exhibition of large-scale mohair tapestries by William Kentridge (artist) and Marguerite Stephens (master weaver) entitled *Five Tapestries* (Goodman Gallery 2009:[sp]). Critic Mary Corrigan (2009:[sp]) noted at the time the incongruity of “setting out to establish a space for cutting edge new talent and then opting to show bankable names like Kentridge”. And in fact, looking at the listings over the next two years, the project space seemed to cater almost entirely for established artists: David Goldblatt, Kendell Geers, Robin Rhode, Candice Breitz, Michelangelo Pistoletto, Willem Boshoff et al. (Artthrob [sa]).

⁵⁶ The Maboneng Precinct is a private development by the urban regeneration company Propertuity. The precinct is situated to the East of the Johannesburg CDB and includes (inter alia) residential accommodation, artist’s studios, retail areas, restaurants and a hotel (Maboneng Precinct 2014:[sp]).

⁵⁷ The Goodman Gallery was launched in 1966 in Johannesburg by Linda Goodman (now Givon). The Gallery now has space in both Cape Town and Johannesburg and has a number of South Africa’s “visual art luminaries” on their books, including William Kentridge and David Goldblatt (Goodman Gallery 2014:[sp]).

⁵⁸ Email correspondence with Katrin Lewinsky on 02/04/2014.

One of the only ‘emerging artist’ projects shown at the space was Cape Town-based Gugulective’s debut ‘Ityala Aliboli/Debt Don’t Rot’ (2010: *Figures* 9–10).⁵⁹ However, while the press release promised an installation by an emerging network of practitioners (“artists, musicians, writers, DJs, rappers and poets”) who work “on the periphery of the mainstream art world”, the show was in fact highly orthodox – consisting of saleable digital prints and collages, accompanied by a single video installation (Goodman 2009:[sp]). In a review of the show, Corrigall (2009:[sp]) notes this incongruity:

[W]hen I saw that Gugulective would be enjoying their own solo exhibition at the Goodman’s Project Space at Arts on Main ... [I was] buoyed by the idea that the Project Space was shaping up to meet its original mandate ... I arrived at Arts on Main feeling optimistic and with my little notebook in hand was committed to writing an in-depth review of the exhibition for the newspaper ... But my notebook remained empty. There was nothing that I wanted to say about the work – other than that it was one-dimensional and dull.

Ideologically, ‘Ityala Aliboli/Debt Don’t Rot’ contradicted itself in the most glaring way. While attempting a “confrontation of the economic crisis in South Africa”, and an exploration of “the legacies of colonialism and apartheid as well as the disappointment of democracy” (Goodman Gallery 2014:sp), Gugulective engaged with none of the problematics associated with the commodification of art, nor the institution as a seat for the capitalist commoditisation of creative content, nor the elitist or alienating tendencies of the white-cube gallery model. The work was glassed, framed and ready for sale – pandering to the very market the show sought to critique. Moreover, its traditionalist austerity ultimately disallowed any democratic engagement or interlocution on the part of the audience. In other words, the exhibition permitted only the conventional gestures of viewing associated with Modernism (where the audience is expected to “curb their movements, and keep their distance”) ensuring ‘the

⁵⁹ Gugulective was formed in 2006 in Cape Town’s eastern township Gugulethu (CAACart 2014:[sp]). Participants included Lonwabo Kilani, Khanyi Mbongwa, Dathini Mzaziya, Unathi Sigenu, Nosipho Singiswa, Themba Tsotsi, Kemang Wa le Hulere and Loyiso Qanya (CAACart 2014:[sp]).

art' remained, both literally and figuratively, out of reach of the viewer's grasp (Richter 2011:49).

Despite its claims to be a 'project space' then, and easy use of the attendant buzzwords, the Goodman Projects was essentially a conventional commercial gallery. Lewinsky, in fact, confirms (despite press to the contrary) that the space "always remained commercial ... all shows had price lists [and] only a few works per show were not for sale because they were ephemera or private property of the artist".⁶⁰ This paradox of the commercial gallery attempting to promote non-commercial work was similarly operative at the Nirox Foundation's Nirox Projects (2012–2015).⁶¹ As with Goodman Projects, the space opportunistically appropriated the terminology of experimental institutionalism while promoting only traditional institutionalised forms of production (painting, sculpture, photography, printmaking, etc.).

While South Africa's commercial arts market is in fact highly "robust" – with an annual turnover of approximately R2 billion – there is clearly an overwhelming lack of will on the part of the commercial sector for the support and development of experimental and/or non-commercial projects (VANSA 2010:6).

After a "long and hard process" Goodman Projects closed in 2013 – ironically due to "its minimal commercial success".⁶²

GoetheOnMain – the funded project space

GoetheOnMain was launched in May 2009 at Arts on Main as a "multidisciplinary project space" for established and emerging artists "to independently develop experimental art projects" (Maboneng [sa]). According to Cara Snyman, Cultural Programme Assistant for the Goethe-Institut Johannesburg, the platform emerged out of two specific needs. Firstly, the Goethe-Institut wanted to assist in developing local structures while avoiding the neo-colonial insensitivities of 'bringing content' to an

⁶⁰ Email correspondence with Katrin Lewinsky on 02/04/2014.

⁶¹ Nirox Projects opened in Maboneng, Johannesburg in 2012 as an offshoot of the Nirox Foundation Trust (Nirox 2016:[sp]).

⁶² Email correspondence with Katrin Lewinsky on 02/04/2014.

African context.⁶³ And secondly, the Institut wanted to address the significant gap in experimental or laboratory spaces in Johannesburg. As Snyman points out “there is fantastic artistic content, there just isn’t enough space to show it ... certainly nothing ... inter-disciplinary”.⁶⁴ This *need for space* is clearly illustrated by the ever-increasing number of applications to the GoetheOnMain programme, a trend that has far surpassed the Institut’s initial projections:

We imagined that we would open the space and it would only be for people who are showing work for the first time, theatre productions, choreographers, whoever, but that are just starting out ... over time we realised there is such a massive gap for spaces that show experimental non-commercial work, that we were getting really established artists sending in proposals ... [Y]ou kind of look at proposals and think, wait, what? Why are they approaching us, surely this is for the Market Theatre or the Dance Umbrella?⁶⁵ I mean what is happening? Why is there such a dearth of space?⁶⁶

Based on these critical problematics, the Institut established GoetheOnMain as an ongoing initiative, to be coordinated by South African professionals and run by South African artists. Based on an open call for proposals, an independent jury then selects between ten and twelve projects, which are then funded, assisted (press, installation, etc.) and given free rein of the bare industrial space as part of the GoetheOnMain annual programme.

Selected projects typically cover a broad range of multi-disciplinary activities, and ‘exhibitions’ tend to incorporate (inter alia) workshops, screenings, and panel discussions. In 2014, for example, Alphabet Zoo’s⁶⁷ project ‘Johannesburg Street

⁶³ Interview with Cara Snyman in Johannesburg on 06/03/2014. See Appendix 9.2.

⁶⁴ Interview with Cara Snyman in Johannesburg on 06/03/2014. See Appendix 9.2.

⁶⁵ The Market Theatre was established in 1976 in central Johannesburg and is well known for its anti-apartheid activism during the struggle. The complex consists of four large theatres and two galleries and has showcased many of South Africa’s preeminent playwrights and actors including Zakes Mda, Athol Fugard, Mbonegni Ngema (Gauteng 2014:[sp]). The Dance Umbrella is a platform for contemporary dance and choreographic performance, which has been held annually in Johannesburg since 1988 (Moncho 2014:[sp]).

⁶⁶ Interview with Cara Snyman in Johannesburg on 06/03/2014. See Appendix 9.2.

⁶⁷ Alphabet Zoo is a collaborative project between artists Isaac Zavale and Minenkulu Ngoyi (Goethe-Institut 2014:[sp]).

(Alphabet Zoo Research Project)' used the space as part library (showcasing Zine collections), part studio (producing new Zines), part workshop (hosting DIY Zine-ing events for the public), and part forum (review evenings/discussions) (Figures 11–15).⁶⁸ The project set out to encourage interest in reading, collecting and creating Zines, and ultimately explore the possibility of “hosting the first Zine Fair or Zine Fest in the city of Johannesburg” (GoetheOnMain 2014:[sp]). A wide range of contributors participated in the project, including first time ‘Ziners’, research theorists, illustrators, and printmakers. The aesthetic of the show was lo-fi; chalkboard writing was used on the walls for signage and captions, desks and bookshelves were constructed out of plywood, sketches were tacked to the uneven painted brick walls, and so on. Counter to the sterility and monumentality associated with gallery space, the project’s participative approach transformed the industrial shell of GoetheOnMain into a mutable, active, and sociable arena – a true relational, participative project.⁶⁹

While GoetheOnMain has proved highly generative, the project is in fact the only initiative of its type operating in the country. And given the ever-increasing number of applications to the annual programme, the dire need for non-commercial project space is clearly evident.

However, in response to continued lack of infrastructure for open-ended, idea-rich and socially focused praxis, artists have adopted a do-it-yourself approach to ‘filling the void’. The following section will explore the emergence of the ARI as a potentially generative solution for the support of experimental and/or non-commercial projects.

⁶⁸ A ‘Zine’ is an alternative, independent, self-published magazine, which is often produced inexpensively or through lo-fi techniques such as photocopying, or mimeographing (Atton 2002:45). Zines are also characterised by a ‘dehierarchising’ of the traditional roles associated with publishing, where the position of artist, editor, writer and distributor are typically “collapsed into one” (Atton 2002:18). There has been a recent upsurge of interest in Zines – what author Ione Gamble (2015:[sp]) refers to as “the Zine renaissance” – with an increasing number Zine fairs and exhibitions, and the inclusion of Zines in academic libraries such as Harvard and the University of California (Sutton 2014:[sp]).

⁶⁹ As of December 2016, GoetheOnMain will close its doors and be succeeded by the Goethe-Institut Project Space (GPS). The GPS is intended to make the project space increasingly malleable, by allowing “actors, artists, performers, curators, choreographers, writers, dancers, composers, directors, musicians and film-makers to select the space and infrastructure they wish to work with” (Artslink 2016:[sp]).

3.3 *The independent artist-run initiative*

While the phenomenon of the artist-run space is nothing new – tracking back to (inter alia) Dada’s Cabaret Voltaire of the early 1900s, to the vast number of collective organisations that flourished during the 1960s and 1970s (such as Franklin Furnace [New York], Zona [Florence] Artpool [Budapest]), to the so-called ‘Glasgow Miracle’ of the 1990s (Detterer and Nannuci 2012), the last decade has seen an unprecedented rise of the artist-run project space (Lind 2009:74).⁷⁰ Context and specificity become key to the premise of each platform, its methodology and feasibility, resulting in radically diverse platforms. This is of particular importance within a Pan-African context, where artists and curators are engaging with the specificities of their local environment without attempting a blanket ‘cure-all’ approach to the institutionalisation of experimental art.⁷¹ As such, some might approximate more traditional exhibition space, while others offer residencies, or venues for screenings and discussion, and so on (Stanhope 2007:2).

Though the emergence of these spaces can be seen as an attempt to address the vacuum created by “unfulfilled promises of cultural and artistic programmes led by governments”, curator Simon Njami (2012:21) argues that to reduce the birth of these spaces to a reaction against the governmental negligence would not suffice to explain their existence (Kouoh 2012:16).⁷² For Njami (2012:21), the central motivation behind the phenomenon is to “democratise culture and make it accessible to all”, to break down the barriers between “those who know and those who do not know”, and to adopt a proactive rather than reactive ideology. This sentiment is echoed continually

⁷⁰ The ‘Glasgow Miracle’ was a (contentious) term coined by curator Hans Ulrich Obrist in reference to Glasgow’s booming art scene during the mid-1990s; a phenomenon predicated on the generative impact of experimental artist-run and independent spaces in the City (Brocklehurst 2012:[sp]).

⁷¹ As VANSAs recently launched (2014) PAN!C platform (the Pan-African Network of Independent Contemporaneity) attests, the last decade has seen the rapid accession of the ARI within a Pan-African context. PAN!C maintains a directory of over 30 independent and/or artist-run spaces from around Africa (including Raw Material [Senegal], Beirut [Egypt], CCA [Lagos], Picha Centre de Art [Lubumbashi]), nine of which are from South Africa (PAN!C 2014:[sp]).

⁷² According to Kouoh (2012:15), the ‘indifference’ of African states to contemporary art can be traced back to the “centralistic model of an omnipotent and omnipresent [colonial] state” which ensured art making was ‘initiated, regulated, controlled, promoted and critiqued’ by government structures, discouraging an entrepreneurial approach to the institutionalisation of the arts (Kouoh 2012:15).

throughout my research. Murray Turpin, the founder of the artist-run independent space Kalashnikov Gallery states, for example:⁷³

One of our core beliefs and or philosophies is the ‘no brow’ movement; destroying the notions of what ‘fine art’ or ‘high art’ is and can be ... [i]n our opinion the categorization of what constitutes high art is fundamentally archaic in the 21st century, for us great art is great art, irrespective of tertiary education or academic conceptual prowess if you will ... [we] support the blurring of boundaries between street art, craft and design as in our opinion, one of the purposes of creativity is to share, to defy categorisation.⁷⁴

Within a South African context, Blank Projects, initiated by artist Jonathan Garnham, is arguably one of the most generative independent, not-for-profit, artist-run project spaces to emerge within recent years. Referred to affectionately as the ‘granddaddy’ of South African project spaces, the platform ran from 2005 to 2012 in Cape Town, testing a variety of approaches to its institutional methodology (programming, location, economy, etc.) along the way (Rossouw 2005:[sp]).⁷⁵ The following case study will explore the evolution of Blank Projects over the course of its six years as a project space, and explore the complexities of sustaining an ARI within a South African context (Rossouw 2005:[sp]).

Blank Projects – the independent artist-run project space

Prior to 2005, Jonathan Garnham had spent ten years in Berlin, completing his studies and practicing as an artist (sculptor), amidst a “vital art scene with artist-run spaces everywhere” (Garnham 2012:50). On his return to Cape Town, Garnham was struck by the notable lack of exploratory or experimental platforms available to artists.⁷⁶ At the

⁷³ Kalashnikov Gallery is situated in Braamfontein, Johannesburg. The Gallery has an interesting methodology in that it is part project space, part commercial gallery. According to Turpin (2014), in order to remain sustainable and free from third-party values, the project space generates profit by the sale of artwork from certain exhibitions to be able to host purely experimental and non-commercial work in others.

⁷⁴ Email correspondence with Murray Turpin on 05/06/2013.

⁷⁵ Interview with Jonathan Garnham via Skype on 26/03/2014. See Appendix 9.3.

⁷⁶ Interview with Jonathan Garnham via Skype on 26/03/2014. See Appendix 9.3.

time, Bell-Roberts and João Ferreira were the only contemporary art galleries in the city, but whose conditions for exhibiting were largely antithetical to experimental or participative practice:

... [i]n those days you had to pay rent to the gallery, you had to pay for the printing and the posting of your invites and so on ... [t]he point is mainly that there were no alternative spaces for people to show art, that because of those conditions people were ... forced to sort of recoup their money – it was commercially orientated.⁷⁷

In response to this void, and hoping to energise the arts scene in Cape Town, Garnham launched Blank Projects in 2005 – the idea being that artists should fill in the ‘blank’ space.⁷⁸

The first project space comprised a small, 18m² street-level, glass-fronted space housed in a warehouse in the Bo-Kaap.⁷⁹ At the time, Garnham was working in education, and trying to juggle his own practice as an artist, meaning he could afford to cover the rent out of his own pocket but had no time to man the space.⁸⁰ As such, Blank Projects was initially only available to an audience in the evenings, by appointment, or to view via the street-level windows.⁸¹ The first exhibition *Excluded & Unsaid*, by a colleague of Garnham’s, Pierre Fouche showcased the artists’ process behind an ongoing large-scale tapestry project. This included original reference images, the tapestry cartoon, and custom-dyed silk thread (Artthrob [sa]). According to Garnham, “[i]t wasn’t ... a finished work for sale, it was about the process and the content of what he was doing”.⁸²

In its initial stages, Garnham and then collaborator Lisa Grobler, had no long-term or even medium-term strategy for Blank Projects; the artists were selected more or less

⁷⁷ Interview with Jonathan Garnham via Skype on 26/03/2014. See Appendix 9.3.

⁷⁸ Interview with Jonathan Garnham via Skype on 26/03/2014. See Appendix 9.3.

⁷⁹ Interview with Jonathan Garnham via Skype on 26/03/2014. See Appendix 9.3.

⁸⁰ Interview with Jonathan Garnham via Skype on 26/03/2014. See Appendix 9.3.

⁸¹ Interview with Jonathan Garnham via Skype on 26/03/2014. See Appendix 9.3.

⁸² Interview with Jonathan Garnham via Skype on 26/03/2014. See Appendix 9.3.

arbitrarily, and were usually friends, or friends of friends.⁸³ However, after a short while appeals were made to use the space by both young emerging, and recognised artists (such as James Webb, Cameron Platter and Jackson Hlungwani).⁸⁴ According to Garnham, the *need* for the space was so great that they often sacrificed quality to quantity – wanting to “give everyone a chance”.⁸⁵ Between 2005 and 2009, Blank Projects proved itself a remarkably versatile and generative space, hosting over 60 projects in just four years (Blank Projects [sa]). Projects included the installation of a Fiat Seicento (complete with a couple ‘making out’ in the back seat) by Bianca Baldi (Figure 16), lessons in carpentry and the dismantling of wooden sculptures by Douglas Gimberg and Christian Nerf (Figure 17), and the installation of a drawing machine by Brendon Bussy (Figure 18), to name but a few. In keeping with the nature of the artist-run project space, the work continued to be experimental, experiential, often participative, and mostly process-oriented.

In 2009, Garnham managed to secure funding from both Pro Helvetia (the Swiss cultural agency) and the Goethe-Institut, which enabled Blank Projects to relocate to a larger 150m² premises in Woodstock (Figure 19).⁸⁶ According to Garnham (2014), with the move, came the shift towards a more conventional gallery set up, with established opening hours, office space, storage, and so on. As a result of these transformations, and possibly because of its proximity to the established Stevenson and Goodman Gallery, the kind of work increasingly gravitated towards that of the commercial. These included solo painting shows such as Trasi Henen’s ‘Never Falling Together’ and Mary Wafer’s ‘High Violet’.⁸⁷ According to Garnham, sales increased such that three or four shows a year would generate enough profit to cover the annual rental costs for the space, which in turn enabled Blank to support more experimental exhibitions for the remainder of the year.⁸⁸

⁸³ Interview with Jonathan Garnham via Skype on 26/03/2014. See Appendix 9.3.

⁸⁴ Interview with Jonathan Garnham via Skype on 26/03/2014. See Appendix 9.3.

⁸⁵ Interview with Jonathan Garnham via Skype on 26/03/2014. See Appendix 9.3.

⁸⁶ Interview with Jonathan Garnham via Skype on 26/03/2014. See Appendix 9.3.

⁸⁷ Trasi Henen was born in Johannesburg in 1981, and studied a BA Fine Art at Wits University (David Krut 2015:[sp]). Mary Wafer was born in Durban in 1975. She first studied at the University of KwaZulu-Natal, but later relocated to Johannesburg, where she completed her Diploma in Fine Art at Wits University (David Krut 2015:[sp]).

⁸⁸ Interview with Jonathan Garnham via Skype on 26/03/2014. See Appendix 9.3.

In 2012, knowing that the three-year funding cycle would soon be at an end, Garnham made the switch to a full commercial gallery model:⁸⁹

[A]t the start of 2013 there was no one funding us anymore ... [w]e had to start selling a R250 000 worth of art just to pay the rent ... it was ... a financial reality and we were quite fortunate that by then had experience and respect from the community ... [B]y now I had invested so much in Blank that it had sort of become my career you know, I didn't just want to let it die.⁹⁰

Alongside the issue of funding, Garnham had also grown exhausted by the rapid and often fleeting nature of the relationships generated by the project space model.⁹¹ By shifting towards a commercial system, Garnham was able to officially represent a number of the artists (most of whom had exhibited as part of the project space) such as James Webb and Jared Ginsburg, and begin developing long-term projects, and creative and career strategies with specific artists.⁹²

While Garnham has received criticism from various corners for 'selling-out', Blank Projects in fact typifies the course of many artist-run project spaces,⁹³ with a trajectory moving from that of an impermanent testing ground, to a profit/non-profit hybrid, and finally to that of a more commercial model (Kennedy 2010:4).⁹⁴ By their very nature, artist-run spaces are (typically) not intended as long-term institutions but instead 'one person armies', reliant on the energy, and (often) financial forfeiture, of a single agent – an ultimately unsustainable praxis.⁹⁵ As Garnham puts it:

People talking ... didn't bother me at all, because I'd done it and by that time I also thought, come on there must be younger people who can do

⁸⁹ Many funders, including Pro Helvetia, use three-year funding cycles, with the expectation that after that period the projects will become self-sustaining (Garnham 2014).

⁹⁰ Interview with Jonathan Garnham via Skype on 26/03/2014. See Appendix 9.3.

⁹¹ Interview with Jonathan Garnham via Skype on 26/03/2014. See Appendix 9.3.

⁹² Interview with Jonathan Garnham via Skype on 26/03/2014. See Appendix 9.3.

⁹³ Other ARIs that have followed, or are following this model, include Kalashnikov Gallery, CO-OP, Rubixcube Gallery, No End Contemporary Art Space, Space Between Gallery.

⁹⁴ Interview with Jonathan Garnham via Skype on 26/03/2014. See Appendix 9.3.

⁹⁵ Interview with Jonathan Garnham via Skype on 26/03/2014. See Appendix 9.3.

this. I mean I'm 48 years old, you know, and for the first time in my life ... I start paying myself a salary from my project space ... Anyone who sticks in this game long enough will have to earn their money in some way.⁹⁶

3.4 *The new New-Institutionalism*

While the various approaches to institutional practice discussed in this chapter undoubtedly provide valuable outlets for the promotion of contemporary art and its relationship to new publics, they remain inescapably constrained by a reliance on funding and/or the need to generate income. In turn, this results in varying degrees of a loss of autonomy. Specifically, ARIs that are dependent or semi-dependent on sales (as with Blank Projects, Kalashnikovv Gallery, No End Contemporary Art Space and Rubixcube Gallery) necessarily gravitate towards traditional institutionalised forms of production, and thus traditional institutionalised forms of display. Similarly, platforms that are reliant (or semi-reliant) on artists paying rental for exhibition space compel that the artwork exhibited be commercially viable for the artists to recoup their costs (Ntombela 2010:9). Moreover, projects that are dependent on funding are becoming increasingly shaped by the fixed agendas of (usually European) funders.⁹⁷ That is, amidst various austerity measures, support is progressively being channelled to 'high necessity' projects, which are seen as of critical importance.⁹⁸

In this sense, the ARI, the project space, and New-Institutional practice itself, can only ever partially fulfil the utopian promise of New-Institutionalism. Thus, the question remains as to whether art centred on 'the social experience' is feasible or sustainable within a South African context (and indeed a broader geopolitical arena) or if it will always remain a radical adjunct to more populist and commercially viable programmes.

However, rather than attempting change from within (as with New Institutionalism) or via negativa (as with the SI), perhaps what is needed are progressive alternative

⁹⁶ Interview with Jonathan Garnham via Skype on 26/03/2014. See Appendix 9.3.

⁹⁷ The various issues associated with European funding of Pan-African initiatives is dealt with more fully in Chapter Six.

⁹⁸ Interview with Patrick Mudekereza in Johannesburg on 06/05/2014. See Appendix 9.4.

institution-forming activities which circumvent the problematics of the institution altogether. As philosopher Sven-Olov Wallenstein (in Möntmann 2007:[sp]) suggests, perhaps our “need for facilities is an illusion, or rather a retroactive rationalization”. And indeed, participative art seems to suggest its own way forward in this regard. Namely, to replace the theoretical and economic frameworks of institutionalism with those of social interstice. Or, to put it another way, to develop *participative institutionalism* for the support of participative art.

The following chapters will explore the emergence of the *artist-run participative initiative* in South Africa, each of whom employ radical relational participative strategies for the support, presentation and development of truly experimental, non-commercial and socially focused praxis within a South African context – arguably a *new* New-Institutionalism.

4 CHAPTER FOUR: THE PARKING GALLERY

6/12/2014, New Doornfontein, Johannesburg:

The King Kong building sits south of Johannesburg, just beyond the limits of the City's gentrified Maboneng precinct, in an area predominantly made up of small-scale industrial and manufacturing businesses (Figure 20). As 5 pm hits, the neighbourhood empties out quickly; opposite King Kong, a no-name mattress factory closes up shop, to the left, metalworkers down their tools – leaving behind a half-finished palisade fence and the smell of TIG welding. Up a narrow flight of stairs, on the first floor of the building, I find the VANSAs premises, and, after-hours on a Wednesday, the venue for the Parking Gallery. The space is vast and reverberant, its original factory life still evident in the goods hoist, wet room, screed floors, and heavy steel doors. A glassed-off fishbowl – the ubiquitous domain of the floor manager – now houses the VANSAs office workspace. In the first of two large rooms, thirty or so people stand around, smokers congregate near the window, two children paddle away at the VANSAs boardroom/ping-pong table. The atmosphere is relaxed and convivial. On the counter of a small kitchenette there is boxed wine, quarts of Black Label, plastic cups, and a donation box with 'R5 – R50' scrawled on it. Tonight is Kurdish artist Ahmet Ögüt's 'We Won't Leave' – a satellite artistic intervention that forms part of the wider collaborative research project 'Giving Contours to Shadows', in association with SAVVY Contemporary and Neuer Berliner Kunstverein (both Berlin). At 7pm, after a brief introduction by the Parking Gallery's assistant Euridice Kala,⁹⁹ Ögüt presents his work to the small crowd, leading the way through a series of videos and projections in the second, darkened, room (Figure 21). The works are presented on VANSAs motley collection of audio-visual equipment – two flat screen TVs, a projector and a sheet of Masonite, a portable DVD player, and an old Cathode Ray Tube monitor. One film, Fahrenheit 451: Reprinted (2013), documents a project in which Finnish firefighters print and deliver copies of Ray Bradbury's classic novel Fahrenheit 451 to the public – a reversal of the dystopian premise of the book, in which firefighters of the future seek out, and burn, any and all literature. Another video, Things We Count (2008), pans slowly across a dusty field of junked fighter-planes in

⁹⁹ Euridice Kala (born 1987) is a Mozambican artist and curator currently based in Johannesburg (ICI 2015:[sp]). She initially began her association with the Parking Gallery in an internship capacity and has since become an integral part of the program (Sacks 05/06/2013). Kala also initiated and runs the PAN!C platform, and is the acting public programmes coordinator at VANSAs (ICI 2015:[sp]).

Arizona's Sonoran Desert, while Kurdish and English voice-overs 'count' the planes in a confusingly haphazard way (Figure 22). Throughout the talk, Öğüt's is self-effacing and approachable, the presentation punctuated by questions from the audience. After the discussion, drinks are refilled, darts are played, and the evening continues sociably (Figure 23). From outside, laughter and conversation carry down the street – the first floor of King Kong a conspicuous beacon of light in the quiet district of New Doornfontein.

'We Won't Leave' is but one of over 80 interventions, discussions or events that have been hosted by (the second iteration of) the Parking Gallery since 2012 (Parking Gallery 2015:[sp]). Other projects have included: *23 Kilograms*, a curated evening by Bettina Malcomess, in collaboration with fellow artists Francis Burger, Siemon Allen, Zen Marie and Donna Kukama; a guest lecture by senior curator at the Palais de Tokyo (Paris), Akiko Miki; an open rehearsal performance by Mohau Modisakeng entitled *1st Rehearsal [Dikubu]*; a screening of Gilles Baro's short documentary on DIY punk spaces in North America, *Invisible Nation*; a round-table talk facilitated by Raimi Gbadamosi on practice-led research; a photographic installation by George Mahashe entitled *Dithugula tša Malefokane*; and an open discussion about the future of the Johannesburg Biennial led by curator Clare Butcher (Parking Gallery 2015:[sp]). While this diversity in programming might at first glance appear haphazard, it is precisely this multiplicity and flexibility that defines the present space.

In this chapter, I explore the *raison d'être* and evolution of the Parking Gallery, from its first brief incarnation as a project space, to its current form as a malleable, relational participative platform. In particular, I examine the influence of artist-founder Simon Gush's practice on the Gallery, and how his overarching interest in the politics of labour has influenced its working methodology and participative approach. I contend that, despite characterising itself as curatorially neutral, the Parking Gallery is in fact tacitly underpinned by a committed, 'socialistic' approach to the presentation and dissemination of art, and is thus a highly politicised project.¹⁰⁰

¹⁰⁰ Interview with Ruth Sacks in Johannesburg on 05/06/2013. See Appendix 9.1.

4.1 *The Parking Gallery v1.0*

The first iteration of the Parking Gallery was formed in 2006 by artist Simon Gush,¹⁰¹ in response to the lack of non-commercial exhibition space in Johannesburg.¹⁰² According to Gush, the only space outside of a “traditional gallery/museum environment” at the time was the artist-run initiative, the Gallery Premises¹⁰³ a platform initiated by collaborative group the Trinity Session (which comprised artists Kathryn Smith, José Ferreira, Stephen Hobbs, and later Marcus Neustetter). As such, Gush set out to create ‘space’, both for young, less established artists, and for artists wanting to exhibit experimental or non-commercial projects.¹⁰⁴ The first site for the Gallery was a disused storeroom in the basement parking lot (hence the name) of the Pritchard Street block of flats where Gush lived.¹⁰⁵ Utilising his experience as a part-time technical assistant at a number of institutions, including the Johannesburg Art Gallery, Gush was able to set up a surprisingly polished and professional white-cube exhibition space, complete with gallery track lighting, on a self-funded, and very limited, budget.¹⁰⁶

One of the first exhibitions, Dorothee Kreutzfeldt’s ‘Adversary’, which ran for one night only on Tuesday, 5 September 2006, is perhaps most emblematic of the kind of work displayed in the space – namely projects that move away from institutionalised forms of production, towards the experimental, the playful, the ephemeral, and the process-oriented. Reflecting on notions of competition, opposition and contestation, ‘Adversary’ presented a series of actions and installations within the space. These included a set of increasingly ‘tricked out’ spoilers, complete with flame decals and custom LED lighting; a roughly taped-up poster declaiming ‘I BELIEVE IN MIRACLES’; and a live performance featuring four marathon runners, from competing athletics clubs, racing up-and-down painted track lines on the floor (Figure 24) (Art South Africa 2006:[sp]).

¹⁰¹ Simon Gush was born in 1981 in Pietermaritzburg, South Africa. He studied Fine Art at Wits University (1999–2003), and completed a postgraduate programme in visual and audiovisual arts at the HISK in Belgium in 2008 (HISK 2015:[sp]). He is currently represented by Stevenson Gallery and lives and works in Johannesburg (Stevenson 2015:[sp]).

¹⁰² Interview with Simon Gush in Johannesburg on 05/06/2013. See Appendix 9.1.

¹⁰³ The Gallery Premises (often referred to as the Premises Gallery) set out to provide a platform for emerging artists, and experimentation in the visual arts – encouraging multi-disciplinary events and projects (Kaganoff 2008[sp]). The space, which was housed in the basement of the Johannesburg Civic Theatre, closed in 2008 (Kaganoff 2008[sp]).

¹⁰⁴ Interview with Simon Gush in Johannesburg on 05/06/2013. See Appendix 9.1.

¹⁰⁵ Interview with Simon Gush in Johannesburg on 05/06/2013. See Appendix 9.1.

¹⁰⁶ Interview with Simon Gush in Johannesburg on 05/06/2013. See Appendix 9.1.

Kreutzfeldt describes the project:¹⁰⁷

[Adversary] came together as a kind of confluence – of a place, its aesthetics, an interest in the economics ... car merchandise (custom wheels, mags, spoilers, dash kits, accessories); mechanics; spares; panel beaters where cars were sprayed and changed appearance quickly; the manual care; the skill of spraying; the unhealthy working condition; cars and car parts piled up in spaces that were too small ... All those details interested me, the labour, the aesthetics of stacking, negotiating, displaying, the money exchange ... And the gendered, clearly male, ‘world’ in which I didn’t belong ... The parking garage in the basement had a similar dimension to these spaces, as regards the physical measurement. So I thought the space could lean towards these other spaces and, call them up; or rather call up some of their parts and dynamics. Not only the car businesses/mechanics etc., but also the hustle of street traders, sex workers, taxis, long distance buses, people passing by ...

The incorporation of long-distance runners was similarly drawn from Kreutzfeldt’s aesthetic and interpersonal experience of the New Doornfontein area:¹⁰⁸

I had met a runner near Ellis Park, he lived in Bertrams and trained all over the city. Very determined, despite not having always guaranteed sponsorship, along with the needed diet/coaching/gear, etc. ... I asked him if he would be interested in running a different kind of length, in a small space, over a given amount of time ... He was interested and brought his running team ... We spoke about how to run – the runners would need to find their rhythm in the small space and on the floor (I painted a track, which continued up the walls; the floor was quite slippery); it wasn’t clear as to who the winner would be, but they would challenge each other ... [They] would always run in tandem, next to each other, do a number of

¹⁰⁷ Email correspondence with Dorothee Kreutzfeldt on 21/08/2015.

¹⁰⁸ Email correspondence with Dorothee Kreutzfeldt on 21/08/2015.

laps, then change, so there was a constant movement backwards and forwards ... Their endurance was impressive, and they ‘made’ the space. I had installed an electric metronome as a kind of echo to their laps, a different kind of timing ... Clothes, shoes – these details were important ... Their presence was key ... The audience was secondary, although they also made the space/event ... as such, ‘nothing much’ really happened; or something fairly ordinary. No sprint, no finale, no applause.

Surveying various listings from the period, it becomes evident how cutting edge ‘Adversary’ was within a South African gallery context at the time. Other openings during the same month consisted almost entirely of traditional institutionalised forms of display – painting (Norman Catherine at the Goodman Gallery, Bronwen Findlay at Artspace), printmaking (Gerard Sekoto at the Standard Bank Gallery, Wilma Cruise at David Krut), and photography (Greg Marinovich at Everard Reed, Pieter Hugo et al. at Warren Siebrits) (Artthrob Listings 2006:[sp]). Furthermore, the rhetoric used in various reviews of the show points to its precocity. Artthrob (2006:[sp]), for example, wrote: “[‘Adversary’] includes painting, an installation and, *believe it or not*, local middle distance runners”, while *Art South Africa* (2006:[sp]) included the following: “the main attraction ... is undoubtedly the four professional long-distance athletes ... they run in pairs, back and forth, literally and figuratively connecting the walls of the gallery ... *my first response was simply to laugh ... it was funny. Quirky. Odd. Massive*” [emphasis added]. These observations are not to say that South African artists weren’t working with live art, or experimental practices at the time, for example, much of the work at the 1995 Johannesburg Biennale, ‘Africus’ (1995), almost ten years earlier, consisted of non-traditional formats (Breitz 2008:94).¹⁰⁹ Rather, the quizzical tone evidences a certain conservatism within the South African art market, and a generalised lack of institutional support for the presentation of alternative media. Within such a “moribund framework” – to quote Joseph Gaylard – the Parking Gallery,

¹⁰⁹ ‘Africus’ was title of the first, and highly controversial, Johannesburg Biennale. The event was heavily criticised for, among other things, “papering over” the socio-political divisions of the South African cultural landscape (Breitz 2008:94). Despite these problematics, the South African work shown indicates that a number of artists were working outside of traditional media at the time. Belinda Blignaut’s 8345223, for example, was made up of a standard telephone and answering machine, the number to which was placed on posters along with an unexplained image of the artist semi-naked and bound, in and around the Johannesburg CBD. The audience was able to listen to the incoming messages live in the gallery space (Blignaut 2014:[sp]). Willem Boshoff’s *Blind Alphabet ABC* was similarly interactive, whereby blind audience members helped sighted audience members “discover certain philosophical aspects of their vision/visionlessness” through touching the various sculptural objects on display (Boshoff 2014:[sp]).

in its support of experimental and non-commercial practices, filled a very specific void within the South African gallery scene during the mid-2000s.¹¹⁰

Yet, despite its curious location in a parking basement and the rhetoric characterising reviews, from a New-Institutional perspective, the Gallery remained comparatively conservative. That is, with its spotlighting, white walls and vinyl lettering, the space largely imitated traditional exhibition semantics and conventions, allowing, in turn, only standard ritualised kinesics from the viewer – such as ‘considering’, ‘observing’, ‘studying’, and ‘reflecting’ (Richter 2009:49).¹¹¹ Thus, it could be argued that, rather than challenging the sovereignty of the white-cube and its concomitant signifiers, the Gallery in fact reinforced its hegemony. From another perspective, however, the clear legibility of the Parking Gallery as ‘a gallery’ allowed its points of disparity to a wider South African art system to be brought sharply into focus. In other words, by utilising traditional display conventions, the experimental and process-driven programming of the gallery, and its non-commercial economy were accentuated. Paradoxically, these differentiators also meant that, as a long-term project, the Gallery was ultimately unsustainable. With no revenue, donations or funding, Gush absorbed all of the exhibition overheads personally. This included drinks for the openings, vinyl lettering, installation hardware, and occasionally even ‘chipping in’ for the artist’s production costs.¹¹² While expenses were kept to a minimum, each project still amounted to between R1000 and R2000 per show, as a result of which Gush accumulated sizeable debt trying to keep the space up and running.¹¹³

What is perhaps most significant about the first iteration of the Parking Gallery, in terms of this research on artist-run participative platforms, is Gush’s own relationship with the space. Gush viewed his role at the Gallery as that of a *service position*, where

¹¹⁰ Gaylard recalls: “I had been in Johannesburg for about four or five years, and the [Parking Gallery] was the first thing that I saw that really struck me of being of any kind of interest, and of really creating a space for people to work and experiment in what seemed a very moribund framework”. Taken from an interview with Joseph Gaylard in Johannesburg on 05/06/2013. See Appendix 9.1.

¹¹¹ In her essay “Exhibitions as Cultural Practices of Showing”, Dorothee Richter (2009:49) refers to the “conventions of perception” used in established exhibition display formats. These include devices such as the use of pedestals, hanging, and spot-lighting, which in turn demand certain ritualised behaviour on the part of the audience – “mov[ing] about in expressive surroundings, observing intently, holding back, passive vis-à-vis what is shown” (Richter 2009:49). Richter argues (2009:49) that within such a context, the objects displayed “obtain a quasi-religious value” where “visitors must control and curb their movements” and in which the role of the audience is subjugated to the supposed sacred value and importance of the art object.

¹¹² Interview with Simon Gush in Johannesburg on 05/06/2013. See Appendix 9.1.

¹¹³ Interview with Simon Gush in Johannesburg on 05/06/2013. See Appendix 9.1.

his time, labour and expertise were offered up for the benefit of other artists.¹¹⁴ This included setting up the initial space, painstakingly installing each exhibition as professionally as possible, managing the openings, repainting the walls after every show, and so on. This notion of the provision of labour, while perhaps more of a practical decision at the time (simply in order to get things done) than a conscious political statement, becomes the linking factor between both iterations of the project, and one that will come to define the participative relational strategy of the second Parking Gallery.

The first version of the Parking Gallery remained open for six months and, despite its short lifespan, held a prodigious twelve exhibitions. It ceased operating when Gush left South Africa to attend a two-year programme at the Hoger Instituut Voor Schone Kunsten (HISK) in Belgium (Gush 2013).

4.2 *The Parking Gallery v2.0*

By 2012, on Gush's return to South Africa, a handful of non-commercial exhibition (project) spaces, including GoetheOnMain and Blank Projects, had opened up.¹¹⁵ In response to these changing conditions, and influenced by alternative models encountered abroad, Gush conceived a new version of the Parking Gallery – this time seeking to address what he perceived as the lack of forums for peer engagement within the South African arts community.¹¹⁶ Fortunately, VANSAs had recently relocated to larger premises in New Doornfontein, and were looking to open the space up to their network of artists and practitioners.¹¹⁷ Gush, in collaboration with artist Ruth Sacks,¹¹⁸ proposed a three-month long residency for a new format Parking Gallery – one that would centre on the creation of space for discussion, debate, sharing and

¹¹⁴ Interview with Simon Gush in Johannesburg on 05/06/2013. See Appendix 9.1.

¹¹⁵ Interview with Simon Gush in Johannesburg on 05/06/2013. See Appendix 9.1.

¹¹⁶ Interview with Simon Gush in Johannesburg on 05/06/2013. See Appendix 9.1.

¹¹⁷ Interview with Joseph Gaylard in Johannesburg on 05/06/2013. See Appendix 9.1.

¹¹⁸ Ruth Sacks was born in Port Elizabeth, South Africa, in 1977. She completed her Master's degree in Fine Art at the University of Cape Town, followed by a postgraduate programme in visual and audiovisual arts at the HISK in Belgium. Sacks is a currently working and living in Johannesburg, and studying towards her doctorate at the Wits Institute for Social and Economic Research (WiSER) (Ruth Sacks 2015:[sp]).

participation.¹¹⁹ While initially conceived of as a short-term project, the programme picked up a small but dedicated following, and has continued operating, resulting in numerous projects, including Ahmet Ögüt's 'We Won't Leave' (2014) which I described at the beginning of the chapter.

The influence of relational aesthetics and New-Institutional theory is clearly evident in the 'un-exhibition' approach of this new format gallery. Counter to the traditional primacy of display, the Parking Gallery focuses on so-called secondary institutional activities, such as panel discussions, artist talks, and round-table events. As such, even if artworks are exhibited (as with 'We Won't Leave'), the Gallery's emphasis remains on the production of discourse around the work, positioning the audience as an active-participant rather than passive-viewer (Vogel 2003:46; Ekeburg 2003:3). Amidst these sorts of engagements, both the artist and the artwork become increasingly transparent. Bourriaud (2002a:41) states in this regard:

[A successful relational work] ... will invariably set its sights beyond its mere presence in space: it will be open to dialogue, discussion, [and] ... inter-human negotiation ..., which is a temporal process, being played out here and now. This negotiation is undertaken in a spirit of 'transparency' which hallmarks it as a product of human labour.

Along with its content, both the physical space occupied by the Parking Gallery and its working methodology, are similarly bound up in this notion of transparency. The lo-fi aesthetic of the Gallery, for example, more akin to that of a house-party than 'an institution', actively denudes the conventions of the white-cube (Kolb and Flückiger 2013:12). That is, with its DIY bar, plastic lawn chairs, and ping-pong table, the Parking Gallery replaces the "formal matrices" of 'the institution' with an everyday heterogeneity; declaiming the space a "place like any other" (Bourriaud 2002b:60). Being situated within the VANSA workplace contributes further to this process of demystification, a scenario which enables the literal 'backstage' of 'the institution' to be revealed to the public and exposing it is as nothing more than a typical office space – complete with cluttered desks, pot plants and personal miscellany. In terms of its

¹¹⁹ Interview with Simon Gush in Johannesburg on 05/06/2013. See Appendix 9.1.

organisational approach, the Parking Gallery is equally pellucid. This is manifest in a number of ways, one of which is an “agnostic curatorial stance” in which, counter to the usual adjudicated open call system used by galleries and residencies, the Parking Gallery endeavours to undertake all projects from the applications it receives, excluding only those which are unfeasible in terms of funding or logistics.¹²⁰ Thus the actual programming of the Parking Gallery is user-generated and driven by self-organising principles rather than a specific (and often undisclosed) curatorial agenda. This translates into diverse programming with thematics ranging from telepathy, to capitalism and schizophrenia, to theme parks, to Afro-futurism, to name but a few (Parking Gallery 2015:[sp]). Furthermore, the actual management of the Parking Gallery is inclusive and transparent, with regular administrative forums being held to allow the Parking Gallery community (the audience and participating artists) decision-making input into the administration and development of the space.¹²¹

Turning now to its economy, this version of the Parking Gallery clearly embodies a relational approach to the notions of value, commodity and worth. That is, rather than producing or transacting in tangible and potentially profit-making goods, the Parking Gallery trades purely on services and exchange. In other words, VANSA shares their infrastructure (the space, chairs, miscellaneous hardware), the Gallery provides production services (press releases, help with installation), the artist provides the artistic situation or premise, and the audience provides participative input. No money changes hands. This dynamic exemplifies Bourriaud’s (2002a:16) notions of social interstice and trading communities, in the sense that the Gallery is able to exist outside of the ‘Capitalisms’ of the art market by removing the law of profit in favour of reciprocal exchange. Thus, unlike the first iteration of the Gallery, the Parking Gallery v2.0 is able to run on a (nearly) zero-budget premise – and is consequently sustainable as long as the community of interest remains invested. This distinction – between non-survivability due to lack of funding, or simply running its course because of shifting curatorial and/or audience interests – is of critical significance. That is, the longevity of the Parking Gallery is not of primary importance. Rather, the project is envisaged as

¹²⁰ Interview with Ruth Sacks in Johannesburg on 05/06/2013. See Appendix 9.1.

¹²¹ Interview with Ruth Sacks in Johannesburg on 05/06/2013. See Appendix 9.1.

reactive and responsive; a site for production and exhibition, which can morph, merge, evolve, shut down, reopen, or pop-up, based on the shifting needs of its community.

4.3 A 'socialistic' space

While the Parking Gallery refers to their artistic and curatorial stance as 'agnostic', the subtext of the project – extant to varying degrees in both the first and second iteration of the Gallery – seems a very particular, and resolute, political statement within a broader South African arts landscape.¹²² That is, despite its overt position of ideological neutrality, the Parking Gallery is, as I see it, underpinned by a deeply 'socialistic' approach to the institutionalisation of art. If looked at in light of Gush's individual artistic practice, and his overarching interest in Marxism and autonomist-Marxism (Variava 2015),¹²³ the latent politics of the Gallery become increasingly legible as an extension thereof. The following example will attempt to draw this claim out further, and explore the manifestation of these 'socialistic' tendencies in practice.

Simon Gush's 'Red'

In 2014, I was able to attend Gush's solo show at the Goethe-Institut in Johannesburg, entitled 'Red'. The exhibition explored a series of unprecedented events that took place at the Port Elizabeth Mercedes-Benz factory in 1990, directly after Nelson Mandela's release from prison on February 11 (Gush 2014:[sp]).¹²⁴ In the feature documentary made for the exhibition, Gush interviews Mercedes-Benz worker Phillip Groom (in Gush and Cairns 2014) who recalls the mood at the time:

¹²² Interview with Ruth Sacks in Johannesburg on 05/06/2013. See Appendix 9.1.

¹²³ Autonomist-Marxism is a political tendency, premised on Marxist theorisation, which places an increased focus on the importance of the "self-activity of the working class" in order to achieve emancipation from capitalism (Marks 2012:937). According to political and economic geographer Brian Marks (2012:937), autonomist-Marxism can be said to encompass three aspects: "the working class' actions take a multiplicity of forms autonomous from and not determined by capital; working class self-activity can be autonomous from organisations or representations of the class; and different fractions of the class are autonomous from each other, constituting a changing overall class composition".

¹²⁴ Mandela's release from prison took place concomitantly with the unbanning of the African National Congress (ANC) and the South African Communist Party (SACP) (Smith 2010:[sp]). These events signaled the end of apartheid and white minority rule in South Africa under the Afrikaner National Party, towards the country's first democratic elections which were held in 1994 (Smith 2010:[sp]).

When [Mandela] was released it was indescribable. People were absolutely joyous. If you were in the township on that Sunday (whistles), people didn't know what to do with themselves, it was crazy ... And then obviously the following day was a Monday. You get up. It's work. And what now you know?

Wanting to mark the significance of the occasion, and after much deliberation, workers collectively elected to build Mandela a Mercedes-Benz 500 SE – a vehicle “fit for a statesman” (Groom in Gush and Cairns, 2014). Groom (in Gush and Cairns 2014), who played a critical role in this process, again describes the events:

There was lots of debate. Some people felt like we should have a day off, an official holiday ... I got to my feet and I said to the guys ... Nelson Mandela offered up 27 years of his life, let us do something for him. My proposal is that we build a car for him, one of these Mercedes-Benz cars – top of the range ... When I said that ... everyone stood up and clapped ... and basically that was the mandate given to management, to say the workers want to build a car for Mandela.

In response to this directive, management gave their go-ahead for the construction of the vehicle. Workers agreed to contribute free overtime, and Mercedes-Benz supplied the raw materials (Gush 2014:[sp]). Critically, rather than the customary black of apartheid state vehicles, the workers chose to spray the car red – a colour associated with trade-unionism and worker emancipation (Groom in Gush and Cairns 2014).¹²⁵ The Mercedes-Benz was handed over to Mandela on 22 July 1990 at the Sisa Dukasha stadium in Mdantsane (O'Toole 2014:[sp]).

However, despite this momentary gesture of worker/management participation, and the seemingly libertarian act of ‘allowing’ workers to repurpose the factory and “produce something for themselves”, the artifice of collaboration collapsed shortly

¹²⁵ According to author Pablo Lafuente (2008:65), the colour red has been used as a symbol of the fight against oppressive rule since the French Revolution of the late eighteenth century. That is, the red flag, which was previously used by the gendarmerie to signal martial law, was appropriated by the revolutionaries as a “bloody symbol of bourgeois repression” (Lafuente 2008:65). Since then, it has become associated with socialist and communist movements, and the “pursuit of a social organisation based on equality” (Lafuente 2008:65).

thereafter (Gush 2014:[sp]). On 16 August 1990, workers embarked on a nine-week sleep-in strike at the plant, largely in response to Mercedes-Benz' announcement that they would go ahead with collective bargaining at a national rather than company level (O'Toole 2014:[sp]). The decision, which put workers at a considerable disadvantage, served as a clear reminder that despite a momentary gesture of egalitarianism, the balance of power was still very much in favour of management (O'Toole 2014:[sp]; Daepf 2013:[sp]).¹²⁶

Along with the documentary, the exhibition centred on two installations, namely *Red (Mandela Car)* and *Red (sleep-in strike)*. The first of these consisted of a semi-built replica of the Mercedes-Benz 500 SE, with its attendant body panels (boot, doors, bonnet) hung on the gallery walls (Figure 25). Each of the panels were sprayed a slightly different shade of red automotive paint – perhaps testing out the most 'red' red before final assembly. In a separate room, *Red (sleep-in strike)* comprised a set of bunk beds constructed from scaffolding uprights, plywood, and upholstery foam – a reference to the sleep-in strike at the factory, where workers resorted to repurposing manufacturing materials for bedding during the gruelling nine-week occupation (Figure 26) (O'Toole 2014:[sp]).

At its core, 'Red' explores a number of critical themes in relation to labour, labour power and labour value.¹²⁷ Firstly, the mandate to build the Mandela Car represents an attempt by the workers to rebalance power relations within the factory. That is, in opposition to standard capitalist pecuniary practice, where employers autocratically decide when, where, and for how long they wish to purchase labour (Harvey 2010:252), workers demand the right to autonomy and self-determination. Moreover, by repurposing the factory for their own use, the workers bring the means of production under their control. Thus, there is flattening of hierarchies and structures, albeit a temporary and unstable one, where workers regain control of their labour power. This

¹²⁶ According to O'Toole (2014:[sp]), Mercedes-Benz workers at the Port Elizabeth plant were already earning R5.62 per hour – 12 cents higher than the proposed new standardised wage of R5.50.

¹²⁷ It is important to note that, within the scope of this research project, Marxism and autonomist-Marxism will only be discussed in relation to two key areas – namely labour power and labour value. In Marx's *Capital*, Vol 1 (2015:117), he defines labour power broadly as the "aggregate of those mental and physical capabilities existing in a human being, which he exercises whenever he produces a use-value of any description". Labour value refers to the monetary value of goods, "objectively measured by the average number of labor hours required to produce that commodity" (Prychitko 1991:[sp]).

instrumentality over production, and the product itself, is key to a Marxist socialist conception of political and industrial democracy, which envisions:

... a form of production and an organization of society in which man can overcome alienation from his product, from his work, from his fellow man, from himself and from nature; in which he can return to himself and grasp the world with his own powers, thus becoming one with the world (Fromm 1961:[sp]).¹²⁸

Secondly, by ‘gifting’ their labour to the project, the workers redefine their labour value outside of traditional economic terms. That is, in contrast to the commodity view of labour, calculable as $revenue \times labour \% \div average\ hourly\ rate\ of\ labour$, the ‘value’ of their labour becomes abstract and symbolic (Corrigal 2014:[sp]; Gush 2014:[sp]; Wilkinson 2013:[sp]). This notion is central to Marxist-ethical theory, which argues that worker freedom “does not commence until the point is passed where labour under the compulsion of necessity and of external utility is required” (Marx 2007:954). And finally, ‘Red’ hints at the potential paradox of soft tactics in terms of effecting real economic change. That is, despite the ostensive inroads made by the workers during the optimistic period of Mandela-car-building, the terms of their ‘rebellion’ were in fact endorsed and co-opted by management, simply because it suited their ends (namely, to appear pro-democracy).

The thematics explored in ‘Red’ are highly significant within South Africa’s current socio-political climate where, 20 years into ‘democracy’, labour value and workers’ rights are still subordinate to the power of Capital interest. The tragic events of the Marikana Massacre are of particular relevance in this regard. On 16 August 2012 (coincidentally the same date as the Mercedes-Benz sleep-in strike) 34 striking miners

¹²⁸ Marx explains his concept of alienation in his *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts* (1844): “What, then, constitutes the alienation of labour? First, the fact that labour is external to the worker, i.e., it does not belong to his essential being; that in his work, therefore, he does not affirm himself but denies himself, does not feel content but unhappy, does not develop freely his physical and mental energy but mortifies his body and ruins his mind. The worker therefore only feels himself outside his work, and in his work feels outside himself. He is at home when he is not working, and when he is working he is not at home. His labour is therefore not voluntary, but coerced; it is forced labour. It is therefore not the satisfaction of a need; it is merely a means to satisfy needs external to it. Its alien character emerges clearly in the fact that as soon as no physical or other compulsion exists, labour is shunned like the plague. External labour, labour in which man alienates himself, is a labour of self-sacrifice, of mortification. Lastly, the external character of labour for the worker appears in the fact that it is not his own, but someone else’s, that it does not belong to him, that in it he belongs, not to himself, but to another” (Marx in Duncan 1973:76).

were tragically shot dead, with many more severely injured, by police at the Lonmin Platinum Mine in Rustenburg, marking the “biggest massacre by police of civilians in post-apartheid South Africa” (Tiwana 2015:[sp]; Gush 2014:[sp]). The issue of workers’ rights in relation to neo-liberal policy was highlighted once again in 2015, with the unprecedented (and ongoing) protest action at universities around the country. Students, workers, and academics joined forces through the #FeesMustFall movement, to demand an end to, amongst other things, ongoing fee hikes (with 10.5% planned for 2016) and the unfair labour practice of outsourcing workers. A report from the National Minimum Wage Symposium (2016) reveals that outsourced cleaners and security personnel earn a non-living wage of between R2637.00 and R3308.55 a month, with no benefits, or family access to the institution (Coleman 2016:17). While many of the demands have been acceded to, it was only in response to mass action and the shutting down of campuses – which saw a number of arrests and student suspensions. Within this context, ‘Red’ serves as a marker for reflection and comparison of workers’ rights, trade unionism and democracy – more than twenty years into South Africa’s ‘liberation’.

Returning now to the Parking Gallery, and viewing ‘Red’ as a reflective site for Gush’s wider artistic practice and research interests, the ideological linkages between the two become clearly legible. Firstly, counter to standard gallery practice where curators and/or gallery directors have the final say over what artworks will be shown, as well as when and how, the Parking Gallery puts decision-making power (back) into the hands of the artist. Thus, they are able to reclaim autonomy over the processes of production and curation, and consequently over the institution itself. Secondly, by utilising an economy of exchange, the burden of commercial necessity, and the concomitant alienating demands of commodity-production are removed from the artist/institution dynamic. As such, artists are able to regain their labour power, and redefine their labour value, outside of the terms dictated by the ‘Capitalisms’ of the South African art market (Rubin 1972:xxiv).¹²⁹

¹²⁹ In his essay ‘The Production Process of Capital Marx’ (1864:160) states that the worker cannot enrich himself or herself through the sale of labour since “in exchange for the available value magnitude of his labour capacity he [or she] surrenders its creative power like Esau his birthright for a mess of pottage” wherein “he has to impoverish himself, because the creative power of his labour becomes established as the power of capital, as an alien power confronting him”.

From a wider sociological perspective, both the Parking Gallery and the events depicted by 'Red', describe a similar form of social resistance. That is, both attempt to “generate new patterns of behaviour, institutions, policies or practices” through “resource and/or relationship-creating activities” (Bartkowski 2009:[sp]). Sociologist Kurt Schock (2007:4466) defines this archetype, within social movement typology, as a “creative non-violent intervention”. According to Schock (2007:4466) this approach is significant because not only does it reject oppressive relations, but it also suggests alternatives to the current status quo. Thus, counter to traditional forms of protest action (strikes, pickets, and so on), which only disrupt and damage existing conditions, creative non-violent interventions “engage in positive action to build alternatives” via the implementation of “constructive programs and parallel structures” (Schock 2007:4468). In other words, rather than staging its critique via insurgency from ‘the outside’ (as with much of the anti-establishment art of the 1960s),¹³⁰ the ‘rebellion’ takes place through co-operation and ‘generativity’ from within. This self-organising method of social resistance is, again, central to Marxist theorisation, in his text ‘Instructions for the Delegates of the Provisional General Council’, Marx (2007b:[sp]) states:

We acknowledge the co-operative movement as one of the transforming forces of the present society based upon class antagonism. Its great merit is to practically show, that the present pauperising, and despotic system of the subordination of labour to capital can be superseded by the republican and beneficent system of the association of free and equal producers.

From a contemporary perspective, collective action is given even greater emphasis as a route to worker emancipation within autonomist-Marxism. Economist Harry Cleaver (2012:[sp]) writes in this regard:

Working class self-activity [can] been seen both in workers’ resistance to the capitalist organization of work and in workers’ ability to transform creatively their work and work environments. [This kind] of continuing

¹³⁰ As discussed in Chapter One, during the late 1960s and 1970s, a number of artists, including Allan Kaprow, placed a virtual moratorium on museum and gallery establishments and their inherent ‘Capitalisms’ – choosing instead to relocate art literally “beyond the confines of the institution” into public space (Taylor 2005:22; Joseph 1997:59).

self-activity [is] not seen primarily as something ‘within’ capital, but rather as autonomous activities constantly checking, rupturing and overthrowing capitalist management.

Thus, with its self-organising, user-generated, and co-operative principles, and the utilisation of social interstice as an economic mode, the Parking Gallery reads both as a real-world extension of Gush’s interest in Marxism and autonomist-Marxism, and a working diorama of socialist participative institutionalism. Moreover, as a platform that simultaneously “challenges the interests of the elite” and “generates power among the oppressed” (Schock 2007:4466), the Gallery embodies the characteristics of organised civil resistance. As such, while the Parking Gallery positions itself as a politically and ideologically neutral space, it is in fact a deeply politicised project. Concomitantly, the critique that relational projects, and their focus on conviviality, are inherently apolitical (see Chapter Two) appears moot.

4.4 *Paradoxes of inclusivity and co-operation*

However, within the Parking Gallery’s ‘socialistic’ approach to institutionalism, lie a number of potential paradoxes. Firstly, while the space attempts inclusivity, its ‘outsider’ position (both geographically and ideologically) means it runs the risk of becoming exclusionary. In her essay ‘Actualisation of Space’, Maria Lind (2004:75) articulates this as an issue common to many artist-run spaces:

Activities are primarily pursued far from the established art institutions, in other social contexts such as housing areas or schools. In this way, a kind of reverse exclusiveness arises: those who are attracted to and captured by the project have more access to this art than the usual art public.

Nevertheless, while the Parking Gallery is perhaps less accessible to a wider public than commercial galleries or museum collections (which often have prominent street frontage, utilise periodical listings, and so on), its remit as a platform for peer engagement, rather than public presentation, is clearly articulated (Parking Gallery 2015:[sp]). In other words, the Parking Gallery’s ‘exclusivity’ is more akin to that of a union or guild than a deliberately

exclusionary cabal for ‘those in the know’. In terms of its accessibility *to artists*, the Gallery’s open call distribution via the VANSAs network (which is distributed bi-monthly to almost 7500 network members), and its user-generated approach to programming, means it is highly inclusive and accessible to practitioners.¹³¹

What is perhaps more difficult to navigate, however, are the unavoidable contradictions that arise in employing a relational, and essentially Marxist-socialist, programme within a wider capitalistic system. Firstly, while the open call approach appears egalitarian and inclusive, ultimately the programme is being taken up and shaped by privilege. That is, only those who can ‘pay for play’ (Perlin 2011:162) are able to access the Parking Gallery. Practically speaking, a project at the Gallery inevitably requires some form of capital outlay – be it incurred in developing the project, transport to and from the space, or simply by taking time off work to attend meetings. As such, artists with access to capital are arguably in a better position to realise a project in the space. This dilemma of ‘working for free’ within a wider capitalistic society, is comparable to the cycle of social inequality perpetuated by the unpaid-internship model, where key positions are more likely to be filled by practitioners from privileged backgrounds, who then go on to control and shape that specific landscape (Perlin 2011:162). Within a South African context still fraught with issues of socio-economic and racial privilege, this issue becomes highly relevant and deeply problematic.

Moreover, galleries which utilise capitalistic systems of revenue are indirectly benefiting from the unremunerated labour power of the artists. In other words, as arenas for experimentation are available elsewhere, commercial galleries are relieved of any obligation to support experimental praxis from their side. And furthermore, they are able to profit off the generative effects of process driven experimentalism without incurring any risk of investment – both ideological or in terms of capital.

¹³¹ From email correspondence with Lauren von Gogh 07/07/2015.

In this sense, the Parking Gallery could perhaps be seen as an ultimately unresolved attempt to undermine the ‘Capitalisms’ bound up within contemporary South African institutionalism. However, if we accept that they are operating as a Bourriaudian Micro-community, with only modest Micro-utopian aims, the argument loses some of its force. To reiterate Bourriaud’s (2002a:45) plea: “the age of the New Man, future-oriented manifestos, and calls for a better world [are] truly over ... it seems more pressing to invent possible relations with our neighbours in the present than to bet on happier tomorrows”.¹³² And undoubtedly it has proved highly generative, and much needed, platform for a community of practitioners working within a South African climate of funding shortfalls and widespread institutional conservatism.

As of 2015, the Parking Gallery has begun operating on an ad hoc rather than weekly basis – a decision made largely in response to increasing external commitments for Sacks and Gush. However, the open call for applications remains in place (Parking Gallery 2015:[sp]).¹³³ Plans are also in the offing to rethink the project from a wider Pan-African perspective at a later date: a Parking Gallery v3.0.¹³⁴

¹³² ‘Micro-utopia’, as a relational concept, is explored in Chapter Two.

¹³³ Interview with Ruth Sacks in Johannesburg on 05/06/2013. See Appendix 9.1.

¹³⁴ Interview with Ruth Sacks in Johannesburg on 05/06/2013. See Appendix 9.1.

5 CHAPTER FIVE: THE SOBER & LONELY INSTITUTE FOR CONTEMPORARY ART

25/08/2011, Hurlingham, Johannesburg:

It's 6pm on a wintery Thursday evening, and a small audience begins arriving at the Sober & Lonely Institute for Contemporary Art's (SLICA's) suburban headquarters at 19 Arbroath Avenue, Hurlingham. The large property, though situated in one of Johannesburg's wealthier neighbourhoods, is in a conspicuous state of disrepair. The exterior walls are low and unalarmed (a peculiarity in the highly guarded area); the kitchen ceiling is missing; the pink and avocado bathrooms timeworn; and the laminate flooring mildewed and lifting. Strewn about are various oddments (a bent basketball hoop, an old-fashioned school desk, miscellaneous cutlery, crockery and linen, a pottery wall plaque in the shape of a spaceship bearing the name 'Miquela', a homemade macramé lamp shade, a collection of Garfield comics taped to a bedroom door, etc.), all of which belong to previous residents, and still homeowners, the Jerman family. Tonight SLICA is presenting a collaborative project with Dutch artist Bas Schevers, entitled 'Failure House' (Figure 27).¹³⁵ The audience gathers in the draughty kitchen, chatting, and pouring their BYOB (bring your own bottle) beer and wine into plastic cups. In the central lounge, a motley collection of chairs is arranged into rows facing a makeshift projector screen. On each seat there is a small gift for tonight's guests – a Lottery ticket, which may or may not contain the winning numbers for this evening's Millionaire Draw. At 6:30pm, a series of video screenings begin. The first, entitled Failure Portfolio, comprises a self-deprecating monologue of Schevers' own artistic failures, including excerpts from various reports by visiting curators and critics: "Dear Bas, just to repeat some of the things we have been talking about. I remember our conversation not being so pleasant. I am quite assured the work you make is too easy ... you don't push yourself ... you always go for the safe, secure option ... your fear shows in your body language as you talk to people

¹³⁵ Bas Schevers was born in the Netherlands in 1977. He received his degree in Fine Arts and Education from Fontys Hogeschool voor de Kunsten (Tilburg) in 2000, as well as a postgraduate qualification from the HISK (Gent) in 2009 (HISK 2015:[sp]).

concerning your work” (Figure 28). A second video looks at artist Hedwig Houben’s workshops with art students on their failed projects; a third introduces Ronald Detige, an artist who recently ‘quit the art world’ to work as a victim support officer for the Turnhout Police Department; and finally a tragicomic short shows a young Schevers failing to perform at a skateboarding competition in Eindhoven in 1997 (Figures 29–30).¹³⁶ After the screenings, South African mountain climber and motivational speaker Deshun Deysel presents an (anti)motivational talk about her recent failed, and much publicised, attempt to scale Everest – a challenging experience punctuated by illness and infighting with the summit crew (Figure 31).¹³⁷ Following a Q-and-A session, the guests help themselves to homemade soup, and are encouraged to peruse the Curriculum Ruinae (listing failed grant applications and gallery rejections) from contributing artists, as well as various ‘failed’ artworks displayed around the house, including Detige’s last art project: an untitled sculpture made from a wooden dowel rod and fork.

12/08/2012, Hurlingham, Johannesburg:

It’s a Sunday afternoon, and a small group of artists, runners and artist-runners gather at the SLICA house for a synchronised transcontinental run. Some of the participants are fully kitted out in technical running gear. Others wear jeans and sneakers. The event, officially titled The Inaugural Sober & Lonely Synchronized Running Club Run, as part of the Sober & Lonely Running Club (SLRC), has been collaboratively organised by SLICA and Los Angeles-based artist-run space, Machine Project.¹³⁸ The runners meet and greet one another via Skype – the time difference evident in the sleepy bearing of the Machine Project runners – and are given race bibs to pin to their shirts. At precisely 6:13am in Echo Park and 3:13pm in Johannesburg, a starting pistol is fired, and the runners take off on a 5.56 kilometre loop – a time and distance strategically designed to synchronise closely with the end of the London Olympic Marathon (Figures 32–33). Posters, distance markers,

¹³⁶ Hedwig Houben was born in the Netherlands in 1983 (Houben 2015:[sp]). She studied at the Düsseldorf and Breda Art Academies, and at the HISK. She currently lives and works in Brussels, Belgium (Houben 2015:[sp]). Ronald Detige was born in Belgium in 1978. He graduated from the HISK in 2008 (HISK 2015:[sp]).

¹³⁷ Deshun Deysel was born Uitenhage, South Africa, in 1970. She is an experienced high-altitude climber, having completed “14 expeditions over 5 continents in 15 years” (Speakers of Note 2015:[sp]). She was a member of the first South African expedition to Mount Everest in 1996 (Speakers of Note 2015:[sp]).

¹³⁸ Machine Project (Machine) is a non-profit artist-run space situated in a storefront in Echo Park, Los Angeles. Machine hosts bi-weekly events and classes with wide-ranging themes, including group naps, science fiction, car theft and pickling (Machine Project 2015:[sp]).

and motivational quotes are strategically placed en route: great job!; 36.64 more km & you'd have run a marathon!; we listen to the rhythm of each others breathing; the thoughts that occur to me while running are the clouds in the sky; and so on (Figures 34–36).¹³⁹ On completion, each runner is presented with a specially designed SLRC medal, a glass of Oros (or its American equivalent), and a CD containing Vangelis' 'Chariots of Fire' theme, with 'listen to me on the way home' written on it in black marker.

01/04/2014, Melville, Johannesburg:

It's 6pm on April Fools Day 2014, and an audience of around 40 people begin arriving at the new SLICA premises at 44 6th Ave, Melville for the launch event, 'FUTURES'. The house set up is utilitarian – bare except for rows of chairs for the evening's presentations, a desk, and a set of bunk beds. In the kitchen, guests help themselves to beer from a DIY 'kegerator' sponsored by home brewer Keith McAdam, while a video of Sober & Lonely's tarot prediction for 2015 plays on a loop in the background.¹⁴⁰ In one of the bedrooms, Sober & Lonely's favourite clairvoyant and psychic medium, D. Ann, is 'on hand' to do palm readings for the audience – an eager queue forming outside (Figures 37–38).¹⁴¹ At 7pm two short lecture presentations begin; the first, by charismatic motivational speaker Barrie Bramley, looks at so-called 'future-hype', while the second, by physicist Dr Richard Jenks, explores post-humanism and the future of bionics (Figures 39–41).¹⁴² Following an open discussion, musician Julian Redpath, accompanied by Clare Vandeleur (cello) and Daniel Kaplan (trumpet), plays a series of unfinished 'future' songs from the bunk beds in the second bedroom – the new sleeping quarters for SLICA's artists-in-residence programme (Figure 42).¹⁴³ Outside in the driveway, future chef (student chef) Megan Pringle serves 'futuristic food' to the hungry,

¹³⁹ The motivational quotes are taken from Haruki Murakami's 2008 memoir *What I Talk About When I Talk About Running*.

¹⁴⁰ Keith McAdam was born in 1982 in Johannesburg, South Africa. He is a partner and practicing attorney at Lee and McAdam, and a craft beer hobbyist in his spare time (McAdam 2016).

¹⁴¹ D. Ann is a practicing clairvoyant, medium and palmist based in Northcliff, Johannesburg (Psychic Angel 2016:[sp]).

¹⁴² Barrie Bramley was born in Johannesburg, South Africa (Bramley 2016:[sp]). He is a keynote speaker with 17 years experience and speaks on issues of change, disruption and innovation (Bramley 2016:[sp]).

¹⁴³ Singer-songwriter Julian Redpath was born in 1985 in Pietermaritzburg, South Africa. Redpath, who is currently based in Johannesburg, released his first full studio album *Maiden Light* in 2015 (Redpath 2016). He frequently collaborates with other musicians, including regular sets with cellist and composer Clare Vandeleur (Redpath 2016).

through the hatch of SLICA's fold-up caravan/mobile Institute (Figure 43).¹⁴⁴ The evening continues late into the night, the guests eagerly chatting and comparing notes on their psychic predictions for 2015 and beyond.

The events described above are but three of the many 'proceedings' organised and hosted by the Sober & Lonely Institute for Contemporary Art (SLICA) – an artist-run initiative co-directed by 'artner' Lauren von Gogh and myself – since its inception in 2011.¹⁴⁵ Other projects have included beetroot Jack 'O Lantern carving in a storefront window, a curated display of belly-button lint in a museum-in-a-cupboard, 'spooky' storytelling in the streets of Rotterdam, butter aerobics in a gallery space, and a residency programme in a garden shed. As such, and unlike the Parking Gallery, there is no single institutional framework or format to speak of, nor is there a coherent thematic or modal approach. Rather, each project, its site, and economy are devised on an ad hoc basis. In turn, SLICA often appears outwardly capricious and inscrutable – characteristics that have perhaps come to best define the initiative. This is clearly evidenced by the various descriptions and/or impressions of the project written on our behalf, by colleagues, friends and peers for the ubiquitous 'About Us' section on our website:¹⁴⁶

As far as my impressions go, SLICA seems to be a moveable feast of new visual arts talent with an international flavour – quirky, interesting, funny projects that capture the imagination. I can't figure out if it's gallery-based, and if so, where it is, but it's intriguing and I want to know more but also like the mystery so don't want to find out, in a way!

Clare Hewitt (Edinburgh Arts Council employee)

S + L is a residency/slash/process space that seems to operate incredibly successfully according to its own laws of nature, and it continues moving

¹⁴⁴ Megan Pringle was born in 1991 in Johannesburg, South Africa (LinkedIn 2016:[sp]). She completed her Grande Diploma in Culinary Arts and Wine at the Prue Leith Chefs Academy in 2014 (LinkedIn 2016:[sp]).

¹⁴⁵ von Gogh and I coined the (playful) portmanteau 'artner' (art+partner) as a descriptor of our collaborative relationship with one another.

¹⁴⁶ These are taken directly from SLICA's 2012 website (Sober & Lonely 2012:[sp]). Contributors were simply asked to provide a short description of their impressions of the initiative.

forward as a result of its internally-generated energy. It's self-powered, and feels like it is its own convincing universe of artists and projects spinning around the periphery. And because it's peripheral it is incredibly valuable. In five years time someone will do a survey show of the S + L scene, and place it in context. That's what it is: a scene.

David Brodie (Natural Southpaw)

I would say that it's 'a something' and it's really different and I've enjoyed looking at it. For a person my age it is a good thing to realise that art isn't a bunch of pretty pictures, it's a lot of interesting stuff. It is movement, it isn't static. I find it all quite exciting.

Daphne Rink (Lauren's granny)

It's the greatest dating service in the world.

Julian Redpath (Singer/songwriter)

The Sober & Lonely Institute for Contemporary Art is an initiative in South Africa that tries to connect young artists from all over the world and show work which is curious, interesting, experimental, makes you smile, beautiful, original, high quality art, surprises you often, makes you look in another way towards art. There is a lot of energy coming from this initiative. It makes you want to participate when you see the photographs on the Internet and read about it.

Annelies Propstra (SLICA Facebook page #1 fan)

The Sober & Lonely Institute for Contemporary Art utilises the concept of artistic transcendence to define the future of art. They push the limits in a surprising ways and raise questions, such as: Is art an expression or a matter of faith?

Pekka Ruuska (Co-Director, Arteles)

I had a physical reaction to it, which is great.

Portia Malatjie (Curator and Art Historian)

For the purposes of this research paper, I set out to make sense of SLICA's variability and its approach to artist-run institutionalism in this chapter. The starting point for this articulation begins with consideration of my collaborative practice with Lauren von Gogh, and the development of Sober & Lonely, a precursor to SLICA itself. I utilise a case study, namely *The Nancy Holt Teleportation Device*, and Bourriaud's conception of Postproduction, in an attempt to unpack our methodological approach. I then explore how this translates into SLICA as a malleable, relational, participative, artist-run platform. I argue that SLICA primarily uses 'the exhibition' as its form, with the 'raw material' comprising the social interstice of colleagues, peers and participants. I then draw out a number of potential problematics inherent within this approach, including the limiting concepts of 'artist', 'curator' and 'artist-curator' amidst an increasingly heterogeneous approach to arts production.

It is important to note that in writing this chapter I have employed a co-constructed narrative methodology. This approach utilises unmediated individual writings, conversations, discussions, and deliberations to co-construct a collective narrative between collaborative partners (Ellis 2008:84). Lauren von Gogh should thus be understood as a key contributor to this chapter whose influence is both explicit (interviews, correspondence, co-authoring of texts), and implicit (collaborative reflections, deliberation, negotiation).

Additionally, I would like to emphasise that the examples cited in this chapter are by no means comprehensive. Moreover, the often spontaneous and haphazard approach of both Sober & Lonely and SLICA disallows a neat teleological account of our/its development. As such, I have selected specific moments and instances that emphasise aspects of our (Sober & Lonely's) artistic practice, its influence on SLICA and its attendant methodologies and thematics.

5.1 Unpacking Sober & Lonely

In order to make sense of Sober & Lonely, it is perhaps best to begin with a recent project that exemplifies a number of the critical areas of interest developed over our

now decade-long collaboration.¹⁴⁷ The following case study, *The Nancy Holt Teleportation Device*, underscores a number of our thematic, modal and formal concerns, and illustrates how, in combination, these contribute to Sober & Lonely's distinctive artistic character and texture.

The Nancy Holt Teleportation Device

In 2013 we (Sober & Lonely) realised *The Nancy Holt Teleportation Device* at GoetheOnMain in Johannesburg.¹⁴⁸ The project was an extension of a month-long research initiative undertaken the previous year in the village of Pinsiö, in the west of Finland. Specifically, we were investigating *Up and Under*, a comparatively undocumented work by American land artist Nancy Holt.¹⁴⁹ *Up and Under* was first commissioned during the 1990s as part of Osmo Rauhala's 'Strata Project' – an initiative that sought to counteract environmental damage caused by open-pit mining in and around the Finnish Lakelands.¹⁵⁰ The work, which sits in a reclaimed sand quarry, takes the form of a series of grassy hillocks inscribed with a curvilinear path that guides visitors up and onto its gentle slopes (*Figures 44–45*). Embedded within are four horizontal tunnels running east to west, and three north to south, which then converge at a vertical centre, precisely aligned with the North Star Polaris (*Figures 46–47*). The site is at once megalithic, enigmatic and playful. And, as with much of Holt's work, forms a kind of “cumbersome camera, an enormous viewing device to record nothing less than the passage of celestial time” (Wagner 2001:267).¹⁵¹

¹⁴⁷ I first met Lauren von Gogh in 2005 during our first year studying Fine Arts at WSoA. We began to assist one another with our practical projects – sharing materials, discussing ideas, and literally keeping an eye out for each other installing projects in the Johannesburg CBD late at night. This collegial alliance led to a merging of our individual artistic practices, and the formation of a lasting collaborative relationship.

¹⁴⁸ The exhibition was one of 13 projects supported by GoetheOnMain in 2013 and was selected by independent jury consisting of Athena Mazarakis, Lester Adams, Donna Kukama and Vanessa Cooke.

¹⁴⁹ Nancy Holt (1938–2014) was born in Massachusetts in the USA. During her lifetime, she created more than 25 site-specific land art works for municipal organisations, museums and universities across the globe, including *Sun Tunnels* in Amarillo Texas (1976), and *Dark Star Park* (1984) in Rosslyn, Virginia (Sooke 2012:[sp]). There is comparatively little research and documentation pertaining to *Up and Under* (deduced via archival research and secondary data analysis). As such, much of our investigation was undertaken through primary research including interviews (journalists who were present at the opening of the site, residents living in the area, and so on) and field recordings.

¹⁵⁰ Osmo Rauhala was born in 1957, in Finland (Strata 2012:[sp]). Along with concerned community members, he helped found the Strata Project in the early 1980s, which has realised installations including Agnes Denes' *Tree Mountain* and Erik van Hoorn's *Bowl & Kuhilas* (both 1998) (Strata 2012:[sp]).

¹⁵¹ Anne Wagner's (2001:267) description refers directly to Holt's *Sun Tunnels* (1976), however the metaphor rings true of *Up and Under*, and a number of Holt's other projects such as *Views Through a Sand Dune* (1972) whereby Holt creates finderscopes within the landscape to frame and capture specific vantages.

From a phenomenological perspective, we understood *Up and Under* as redolent of ancient observatories such as the Almendres Cromlech (Portugal) or the Castlerigg Stone Circles (Britain).¹⁵² That is, a megalithic complex that functions as both a cosmological observatory, and a site for gatherings of communion and ritual (as evidenced by graffiti, innumerable beer cans, a burnt out car, etc.). In other words, a (neo)shamanic space whose¹⁵³

atmosphere fosters entry into altered states of consciousness; where it is easier to ‘step between worlds’ ... [and] where developing spiritual identities are reinforced and grounded in profound experiences of non-ordinary dimensions (Lucas 2007:41).

Based on this intuitive and esoteric reading of Holt’s work, we developed an exhibition proposal that sought to connect GoetheOnMain to Pinsiö, by interpreting *Up and Under* as a device capable of Fortean teleportation.¹⁵⁴ That is, we envisaged the site and its many portals as a paranormal instrument designed to transfer subjects/objects via supernatural rather than mechanical means, with the ‘device’ at GoetheOnMain acting as an interstitial ‘wormhole’ into this system. A press statement, released prior to the opening, framed the exhibition as follows:

This November, Sober & Lonely will build *The Nancy Holt Teleportation Device* at GoetheOnMain, and attempt to teleport objects, animals and people between various portals. Free tours will be available to the Mojave Desert and/or *Up and Under* in the Finnish Lakelands, where you may or

¹⁵² The Almendres Cromlech was built as a ritual site and astronomical observatory in the fifth and third millenniums BCE, and is comprised 92 menhirs (originally 100) aligned according to the equinoxes (Olsen 1994:247). The Castlerigg Stone Circles were constructed around 3000 BCE, and comprise 38 menhirs (originally 42) and are believed to have astronomical significance (alignments with planets and stars), and have been used as a meeting place for Neolithic communities (English Heritage 2015:[sp]). Interestingly, Holt acknowledges the connection often made between earth works and ancient megalithic sites, and an abiding interest in the same however, she states that they were never a “direct inspiration” or “conscious motivation” (Holt 1983:4).

¹⁵³ According to Phillip Lucas (2007:55), megalithic complexes still have relevance today, be they used as sites for community building by neo-pagan, neo-Druidic, or neo-shamanic practitioners, or, as suggested within the context of this chapter, as sites which foster “transformative spiritual experiences by facilitating contact with alternative realities and states of consciousness”.

¹⁵⁴ Writer Charles Fort coined the term ‘teleportation’ in his 1931 non-fiction publication *Lo!* (May 2014:[sp]). While there are numerous theses relating to possible methods of teleportation, Fort viewed teleportation as a “psychic phenomenon analogous to telepathy or telekinesis” whereby “a person is transported from A to B by paranormal rather than mechanical means” (May 2014:[sp]).

may not experience the quietest place on earth, the twilight room, the Kahvila Konditoria (with soapy cake), the official Nancy Holt Teleportation Device Souvenir Shop, and/or the centre of the world.¹⁵⁵

Interested parties were then encouraged to book (via email, Facebook or a handwritten schedule at the entrance to GoetheOnMain) for a guided, personal experiment in teleportation (Figure 48).

The tours officially began on 25 November 2013, where, at an appointed time, the participant (the ‘experimenter’) would arrive at GoetheOnMain and follow a short orientation programme before moving on to the experiment proper. For the first of these, the participant would be seated in an anteroom/waiting room fashioned from an old camping awning. A series of circular peepholes – a framing format reminiscent of Holt’s carefully composed sightlines – would allow an enigmatic preview of the ‘device’ beyond: an old caravan, stepping-stones, reflective windscreen covers, duct tape, auroric iridescent light, mist, and so on (Figures 48–51). The Nancy Holt Teleportation Device Guide, collaborating artist Simon Fidelis, would then introduce himself to the participant, and explain the following terms and conditions (Figure 52):¹⁵⁶

- 1) The tour (experiment) will last anywhere from two to ten minutes.
- 2) You may or may not arrive at the quietest place on earth, the twilight room, the Kahvila Konditoria (with soapy cake), the official Nancy Holt Teleportation Device Souvenir Shop, and/or the centre of the world.
- 3) We cannot guarantee your return.
- 4) Please attempt to clear every thought from your mind on entry into the device.
- 5) Please maintain complete silence inside.
- 6) No phones or cameras are allowed inside.
- 7) *The Nancy Holt Teleportation Device* will accept no responsibility for any loss or damage arising in any way out of the use of the device.

¹⁵⁵ Lauren von Gogh had presciently installed a third portal (a circular metal plate) at High Desert Test Sites in the Mohave Desert, California, that same year for the group exhibition ‘My Voice Will Now Appear in Another Part of the Room’.

¹⁵⁶ Simon Fidelis is a Tanzanian artist and photographer, who is currently living and working in Johannesburg (Behance 2016:[sp]).

- 8) Subjects who are pregnant or suffer from photosensitivity are advised that they enter at their own risk.

The experimenter would then be asked to choose a number from one to five (which would dictate 'Portal site B') and sign the following agreement:

If I agree to enter The Nancy Holt Teleportation Device, and return successfully, I will maintain complete secrecy as to the nature of the device and my experiences inside. If I am asked, I will answer only "I saw nothing – there was nothing".

After completing this induction, the participant would be shown into the device, where the experiment would commence.

In total, over a period of four weeks, 131 people attempted the experiment in teleportation. Each interactive, multi-sensory engagement was wholly unique, and remained/remains undocumented in order to preserve its singularity. At the end of each trial, the experimenter was handed an envelope stamped with their unique subject number, a letter containing the results of their attempt at teleportation, a banana to restore their magnesium levels, and R10 for agreeing to participate (Figure 53).

One experimenter, Bronwyn Lace, wrote of her journey:

I found *The Nancy Holt Teleportation Device* to be a unique and confusing experience. By being forced to enter the space one at a time and by engaging with the 'guide', the project shifted the way in which I would normally view an artwork. Once inside I found I was hyper aware and searching for meaning ... The project's idea is succinct but the outcome, I imagine, as varied as the number of viewers entering the exhibition ... There was no traditional documentation of the work, which is precisely what makes the work memorable. I couldn't read an artist's statement and I felt perplexed and amused after having exited the space – in the back of my mind I kept wondering whether I had missed something. The

experience stays with you for this reason and after some time I realised that I was going to have to make sense of the work for myself – a liberating and unusual position for the viewer.¹⁵⁷

The Nancy Holt Teleportation Device highlights a number of Sober & Lonely's thematic and modal interests. These include participation and interactivity (the filling in of indemnity forms, the guided interaction); re-territorialising the white-cube (in this case, as a 'laboratory' for teleportation experiments); a lo-fi aesthetic approach (cardboard, duct tape, photocopied paper); the pseudo-sciences (teleportation, astrology); humour (the banana as a comedic prop, failure as an artistic strategy); and a rejection of traditional economies (reversing arts commodity value by giving money to the audience). However, in terms of describing Sober & Lonely's wider practice, these modes and thematics are less significant in and of themselves, and more so in the way in which they combine. That is, while specific elements may recur, and/or be idiosyncratic, they are simply seen as material to be decoded, manipulated and reprogrammed.

This approach to making falls within Nicolas Bourriaud's conception of 'Postproduction' as defined in *Postproduction* (2002), his follow-on from *Relational Aesthetics*. For Bourriaud (2002b:13), Postproduction artists (or 'semionauts') are less concerned with notions of originality, and more so in plotting new cartographies through the proliferating mass of data associated with this the 'Information Age'.¹⁵⁸ Bourriaud (2002b:17) argues that:

The artistic question is no longer: 'what can we make that is new?' but 'how can we make do with what we have?' In other words, how can we produce singularity and meaning from [the] chaotic mass of objects, names, and references that constitute our daily life?

In this sense, the function of the Postproduction artist is more akin to that of a DJ or programmer – namely, one who samples, edits and re-configures pre-existing 'data'

¹⁵⁷ Email correspondence with Bronwyn Lace on 08/02/2016.

¹⁵⁸ Bourriaud (2002a:113 and 2002b:17) defines Postproduction artists as 'semionauts' who invent trajectories and produce original pathways through signs.

(including everything from cultural products, to economic and social forms, to everyday objects) in order to create new narratives and alternative storylines (Bourriaud 2002b:13). Often, these processes draw on pre-existing artworks and modes. As Bourriaud (2002b:17) explains:

Artists no longer consider the artistic field (and here one could add television, cinema, or literature) a museum containing works that must be cited or ‘surpassed,’ as the modernist ideology of originality would have it, but so many storehouses filled with tools that should be used, stockpiles of data to manipulate and present.

While this remixing of material from ‘the spectacle’ clearly falls within a wider art historical trajectory – most notably the *détournement* of the Situationist International (SI) – Postproduction’s articulation is, according to Bourriaud (2002b:9), entirely new.¹⁵⁹ That is, Postproduction does not seek to subvert the value of previous forms or works (as with *détournement*/postmodern pastiche/dematerialisation) but rather considers any material, mode or form, ‘fair-game’ (in the most guileless and optimistic sense) to their re-organising processes (Bourriaud 2002b:17).

Importantly, this ‘open-source’ approach to production dovetails neatly with the project of relational aesthetics.¹⁶⁰ That is, both forms are borne from a collectivist culture that prizes networking, mutuality and sharing – the former relating to the exchange of data and material, and the latter to exchange as social interstice (Bourriaud 2002b:14).

Looking at the formal and methodological characteristics of *The Nancy Holt Teleportation Device*, the project can clearly be read as embodying Postproduction’s matrices. This is evident, firstly, in the archetypical flea market aesthetic of the installation. That is, the ‘device’ and related components comprised a precarious arrangement of found, second-hand and repurposed items of various provenance

¹⁵⁹ *Détournement* refers to the plagiaristic processes of appropriation of material from ‘the spectacle’ by the SI, as a means for criticism and reflection (Plant 2002:86). The SI is discussed in detail in Chapter One.

¹⁶⁰ The term ‘open-source’ refers to software (such as Linux) that is created through collaborative and voluntary processes, and then made freely available to the public for use and redistribution – most often with no credit or compensation to the individual authors (Hars and Ou 2002:25).

(Bourriaud 2002b:28). These include a 1968 mobile caravan sourced from online classifieds, miscellaneous second-hand camping equipment, a misting spray from a garden centre, and so on. The ‘re-exhibition’ of a pre-existing work, Holt’s *Up and Under*, and the irreverent inhabitation of historicised forms (broadly including postmodern pastiche, conceptual art, installation art, and Happenings) is again emblematic of Postproduction’s appropriative approach. The result is a blurring of lines between “production and consumption, creation and copy, readymade and original work” (Bourriaud 2002b:13). And finally, the interactive aspects of *The Nancy Holt Teleportation Device* are similarly comprised of repurposed elements – most notably, the social forms of the ‘guided tour’ (the led experience) and the ‘clinical research trial’ (the indemnity forms, confidentiality clause, etc.).

In turn, this chaotic Postproduction mise-en-scène forms a backdrop against which social interstice can take place. That is, the relational narrative is able to unfold, and the ‘experimenter’ can engage with the guide in a way that precludes traditional art audience kinesics (such as studying, reflecting, contemplating, etc.), in favour of dialogic and interlocutory behaviours normally associated with non art world scenarios (Bourriaud 2002b:70). Bourriaud (200b:14) comments expressively on the overlap between Postproduction and relational aesthetics, that

it is striking that the tools most often used by artists today in order to produce these relational models are pre-existing works or formal structures, as if the world of cultural products and artworks constituted an autonomous strata that could provide tools of connection between individuals; as if the establishment of new forms of sociality and a true critique of contemporary forms of life involved a different attitude in relation to artistic patrimony, through the production of new relationships to culture in general and the artwork in particular.

The above analysis of *The Nancy Holt Teleportation Device* provides a useful exemplification of Sober & Lonely’s wider artistic practice. That is, while a given project or experiment may draw on a broad range of cultural references, modes and material, ultimately the principal forms remain consistent. Specifically, whether it be teleportation, land art, and clinical research trials (as with *The Nancy Holt*

Teleportation Device), or astrological haiku, supernatural wigs, and a tribute to primatologist Dr Jane Goodall, each project sets out to establish social interstice within a Postproduction mise-en-scène. This classification of forms, when taken together with a number of recurring and persistent physiognomies – including, and as alluded to, a self-deprecating sense of humour – allows for a clear picture of Sober & Lonely’s idiosyncratic artistic project to emerge. Involving an activating form of Postproduction, initiatives are characterised by a self-effacing levity in the pursuit of alternative dimensions of experience and thought through the creation of social interstice.

Importantly, this approach to production is in sharp contrast to the predominance of ‘identity art’ within a recent South African context.¹⁶¹ That is, while the latter demands aesthetics and meaning be read as a product of an individual’s background (race, class, nationality, gender, etc.), Postproduction acknowledges the impact of Internet culture, and its relationship to global interconnectedness. Within this framework the teleological essentialism of identity art is replaced with the understanding that a ‘double dialogue’ exists for the contemporary artist, where both ‘tradition’ and the ubiquitousness of technology (with its ease of communication and access to information) impact on aesthetics, discourse and debate (Bourriaud 2009:165).¹⁶² Bourriaud (2009:40) refers to this paradigmatic shift as one of ‘*interculturalism*’ – whereby ideological attachments to questions of *origin* are replaced with those of *destination*.

The name ‘Sober & Lonely’ is of particular significance in this regard. That is, the appellation (which is an instance of Postproduction in and of itself) obscures von

¹⁶¹ The 1990s and early 2000s saw an increasing interest in ‘identity art’ within arts practice and discourse – particularly within a post-apartheid South African context (Smith 2011:131). The paradigm follows an essentialist ethos, in which artists are encouraged to ‘reveal themselves’ to the audience in order to provide ‘authentic’ access to their unique social and political systems (Haq and Kreuger 2014:6). While identity art marks an important departure from the hegemony of Western white male bourgeois art history, it also problematically creates highly limiting expectations of the *kind* of art a black/white/male/female/gay artist *should* make. Curators Nav Haq and Anders Kreuger (2014:6) comment in this regard, that identity art often results in a deeply problematic ‘self-othering’ where artists are granted access to the art world on condition that they act, or frame themselves as, “socio-cultural representatives of the place/people they ‘are from’” (Haq and Kreuger 2014:6).

¹⁶² It is important to acknowledge that notions of ‘interconnectivity’ and ‘ubiquity’ in relation to the Internet remain contested areas. Olu Oguibe (1999:239) notes, for example, that many groups remain unable to access the Internet and are thus excluded “from the myriad conversations taking place in [its] enclave of power and privilege”. For Oguibe (1999:239), in order for the promise of global interconnectedness to be realised, it is essential that universal access to the Internet is prioritised alongside other pressing socio-political concerns.

Gogh's and my individual identities behind a non-gendered and non-representational guise.¹⁶³ The result is the emergence of a singular fictive persona – a kind of (to borrow a metaphor from historian Charles Green) third-hand or phantom body freed from the hype of identity art, and its restrictive notions of 'self'.¹⁶⁴

This is not to say, however, that Sober & Lonely's project is apolitical. Rather, our socio-political attitude is evocative rather than reactive and involving explicatory commentary. That is, by suggesting imaginary alternatives (to travel, communication, sport, relationships, etc.), Sober & Lonely's political project functions in much the same way as science fiction and futurism might¹⁶⁵ in the sense that both rely on the 'cognitive estrangement' of the viewer/reader from their usual assumptions about daily life and reality.¹⁶⁶ Within this framework, individuals and communities are encouraged to imagine "conditions and capabilities [that] encourage new ways of thinking about human society, or provide new sources of strength for resisting oppression" (Wallis 2006:2). While this may seem somewhat Utopian, ultimately Sober & Lonely presents no ideal vision of the future. Rather, and in keeping with relational aesthetics, we simply set up an artistic proposition from which the audience derives their experiences and conclusions. In this sense, Sober & Lonely's aims are deliberately precarious and temporary – seeking only to create momentary 'gaps' in the chaos of daily life for alternative narratives.

5.2 *The shape-shifting Institute*

The Sober & Lonely Institute for Contemporary Art (SLICA) emerges directly from the artistic methodology and sensibility outlined above. That is, the seemingly disparate

¹⁶³ The name Sober & Lonely playfully appropriates the form ('X & X') from the canons of named team practice, for example Gilbert & George, and Abramović & Ulay.

¹⁶⁴ In his text 'The third hand: collaboration in art from conceptualism to postmodernism', Green (2001:186) argues that modified artistic identities often take on the form of "a phantom extension of the artists' joint will" almost like a third-hand or phantom limb.

¹⁶⁵ Alongside *The Nancy Holt Teleportation Device*, and its attempts to teleport people, some of these 'fictive alternatives' from the past eleven years include: pet telepathy; experiments in telekinesis; curation via an Ouija board; an experiment to test the destiny of the world; reimagining the Zener card experiment; devising a means to tunnel from one side of the earth to the other, etc.

¹⁶⁶ The term 'cognitive estrangement' was first used by Darko Suvin in his formative text 'On the Poetics of the Science Fiction Genre' (1972). Simply put, the term describes a mechanism for placing "readers in a world different from our own in ways that stimulate thought about the nature of those differences, causing us to view our own world from a fresh perspective" (Booker and Thomas, 2009:4).

projects described at the outset of this Chapter – ‘Failure House’, the SLRC, and ‘FUTURES’ (Figures 27–53) – can be understood as an extension of Sober & Lonely’s approach to production. In the case of SLICA however, the Postproduction ‘material’ consists primarily of institutional forms (for example residency programmes, walkabouts, artist talks, etc.), with the locus for social interstice centering on practitioners, peers and colleagues. As such, there is no single format, site or conceptual framework to speak of – rather, each ‘proceeding’ is undertaken anew. Thus, SLICA – once again echoing Sober & Lonely – exists as a kind of ‘phantom’ institute, one able to change form, and to disappear and reappear, in response to a given moment or proposition.

In his text, *Dark Matter*, Gregory Sholette coins the portmanteau ‘mockstitution’ (mock+institution) to describe these kinds of organisations. A mockstitution can be defined as:

an informally structured art agency that overtly mimics the name and to some degree the function of larger, more established organizational entities including schools, bureaus, offices, laboratories, leagues, centers, departments, societies, clubs, bogus corporations and institutions (Sholette 2015:[sp]).¹⁶⁷

More often than not, and as with SLICA, mockstitutions refuse definitive categorisation and deliberately opt-out of legitimising, but legally and operationally confining, structures such as non-profit organisations directorates (Sholette 2011:161). As such, these informal facsimiles are able to sidestep the cumbersome (and often burdensome) administrative demands associated with ‘officialdom’, and thus remain highly adaptable, versatile and responsive.¹⁶⁸ As Sholette (2011:161) points out, and in keeping with a Postproduction form:

¹⁶⁷ Some notable examples of mockstitutions include The Yes Men, the Center for Tactical Magic and the Institute for Applied Autonomy (Sholette 2011:153).

¹⁶⁸ For example, registered non-profit organisation’s (NPOs) are obligated to adhere to specific policies as outlined by the Department of Social Development. These include the provision of an annual report detailing all income, expenditure, assets and liabilities, within nine months of the end of the financial year, followed by a report from an accounting officer within two months of the original submission (Department of Social Development 2016:[sp]).

Despite the external impression of logic and order ... a mockstitution is essentially a plastic framework in which administrative functions are implemented on an as-needed basis depending on circumstances ... treat[ing] organizational structure as just another artistic challenge, as if it were a material or medium to be manipulated.

An example of this ad hoc approach to institutionalism is evident in SLICA's economy. Specifically, that we have no budget or (regular) premises means we have to rely on a variety of methods in order to get things done. We have had to 'borrow' space; forfeit our beds to visiting artists; trade hardware (projectors, benches, extension cables, etc.); repurpose data; and/or offer up services or 'competencies' in lieu of other services or competencies.¹⁶⁹ These transactions are entirely dependent on relations and negotiations with various stakeholders. In this sense, SLICA's economy emerges directly from a relational participative approach to production, whereby the numerous meetings, appointments, and conversations needed to facilitate a given project are, in and of themselves, instances of social interstice.

The actual 'work' produced under the aegis of SLICA emerges from a similar set of mixed relational participative processes. That is, each 'proceeding' is developed out of conversations and negotiations which can be initiated by open calls, cold-calls, chance encounters, or considered introductions. Key to facilitating these relational channels is the ubiquity of web-based software such as Skype, Google Hangouts and WeTransfer – allowing for inexpensive and efficient ways to communicate, consult and/or share data. In certain instances – for example with UK-based artist Dave Sherry, or LA-based PopSoda (Jimmy Fusil and Mike Wait) – our collaborative rapport and enduring working relationship has been developed exclusively online: we have never met in person.¹⁷⁰

¹⁶⁹ For example, in 2014 we approached a laboratory equipment manufacturer with a disused street-facing storeroom (in Richmond, Johannesburg) and traded graphic design work (illustration and advertising) for temporary use of the space.

¹⁷⁰ Dave Sherry was born in 1974 in Northern Ireland. He graduated from Glasgow School of Art in 2000 (Sherry 2016:[sp]). He has worked with SLICA on a number of projects, including *I am not the Messiah* – a performance as part of the group exhibition 'Oh My Oh My: from the annals of a great telepathic affair' at Convocation House, in Johannesburg, in 2011. PopSoda is an alternative-music duo, and creators of *Butter Aerobics* – which SLICA hosted as part of the group exhibition 'An Experiment to Test the Destiny of the World' at the Ithuba Gallery, in Johannesburg in 2013 (Morais 2013:[sp]).

From a broader perspective, SLICA's relational participative methodology and Postproduction form stands in contrast to the predominance of neo-liberal institutionalism within South Africa. That is, and as now much discussed, the organisational landscape for the exhibition of contemporary art is dominated by a handful of contemporary galleries (Stevenson, Gallery MOMO, What if the World, Circa, etc.), or one of a few corporate art competitions (Sasol New Signatures, Barclays L'Atelier Art Competition, Standard Bank Young Artist Award, PPC Imaginarium Awards, Heineken Next Level Bar, Absolut Vodka Residency, etc.). Ultimately, these structures are underpinned by a focus on the commodity value of art, and thus traditional institutionalised (saleable) products (painting, sculpture, photography, etc.).¹⁷¹ Moreover, these frameworks perpetuate the pervasive, and hyper-individualistic, trope of the 'artist-genius' (via the ubiquitous artist statement, biography, press photo, etc.). In turn, this 'free-enterprise' arts economy results in an environment in which artists are set up to compete against one another, within a narrow and tightly controlled set of parameters. Joseph Gaylard comments in this regard, with specific reference to Johannesburg:

... transactions in the art world ... are often mean-spirited and competitive around something that is actually very small ... [w]here the 'heat' generated is usually in inverse proportion to the actual significance or consequence of what is happening".¹⁷²

In contrast to this self-interested 'gaming' of art, SLICA's relational approach prizes, and is dependent on, a *concerted* approach to production.¹⁷³ 'Failure House', for example, was conceived by (then) Brussels-based artist Bas Schevers. This was then

¹⁷¹ It is important to note that even so-called 'cutting edge' contemporary galleries in South Africa still focus on traditional institutionalised, and saleable, forms of display. In 2010, for example, Stevenson's programme consisted of (in order): Sean Slemon (installation, painting), Daniel Naude (photography), Michael McGarry (photography, drawing, sculpture), Sabelo Mlangeni (photography), Nicholas Hlobo (paintings), Penny Siopis (painting), and Pieter Hugo (photography). The various corporate art competitions in South Africa are often similarly 'acquisitional' in their support of contemporary art. For example, Sasol New Signatures and the PPC Imaginarium Awards clearly stipulate in their terms and conditions that all artwork entered must be for sale, with Sasol/PPC having the first option to purchase (specifically "the works must be for sale and may be purchased on the opening night of the exhibition only after Sasol has exercised its option to purchase" and "the sculpture must be for sale and can only be purchased after PPC has exercised its option to purchase")(Sasol New Signatures 2016:[sp]; PPC Imaginarium 2016:[sp]). As such, the bias clearly remains on the artwork's saleability and/or collectability.

¹⁷² Interview with Joseph Gaylard in Johannesburg on 05/06/2013. See Appendix 9.1.

¹⁷³ Critic Peter Schjeldahl (2011:[sp]) argues that art making has become increasingly about the 'gaming of art', namely a rhetorical "game of pretences and/or of exposing pretences", where it is necessary for artists to "make chess moves with the clichés of some or another academic discourse or prevalent babble" in order to be taken seriously.

shaped and refined collaboratively over a number of months. Hedwig Houben developed her short films with art students from the Willem de Kooning Academy (Rotterdam). Deshun Deysel offered up her services as an (anti)motivational speaker. Curriculum Ruinae were accepted via an open call from our website. Ronald Detige boxed and posted his artwork from Turnhout. Arts writer Bronwyn Shelwell drafted an introduction and description of the project.¹⁷⁴ VANSA lent us a projector and speakers. Friends and family provided chairs. Guests brought their own drinks. And SLICA provided the venue – the lounge in our dilapidated, but spacious, rental home.¹⁷⁵

Alongside these collaborative processes, a specific and idiosyncratic SLICA sensibility has emerged, namely, a kind of Postproduction ‘Post-Internet’ bricolage – a chaotic ‘mash-up’ of signs, drawn from the proliferation of imagery and data (cultural, spectacular and popular) associated with hyper-networked culture (Olson 2011:60).¹⁷⁶ This is particularly notable in our digital platforms (Instagram, website, e-newsletter, etc.), which are heavily influenced by memetic Internet content, and its concomitant techniques (Figures 54–58).¹⁷⁷ The result is an ‘Amateur Ugly’ aesthetic which incorporates ‘bad’ Photoshop, lo-fi hardware, ‘glitching’, South African suburban paraphernalia, clip-art and the use of Graphics Interchange Formats (GIFs), to name but a few (Douglas 2014:314).¹⁷⁸

In turn, this aesthetic can be understood as a kind of cultural dialect which stands in contrast to the slick, symmetry and minimalism of the art world (think WAM, Kalashnikovv Gallery, Stevenson, What if the World, etc.). In other words, the

¹⁷⁴ Bronwyn Shellwell is a South African artist and writer, currently living and working in Hong Kong (Assembly 2016:[sp]).

¹⁷⁵ The rental of 19 Arbroath Avenue was negotiated as part trading of competencies. That is, from 2011 to 2013 von Gogh and I lived and worked from the large suburban house, on a cut-rate deal, whereby we had to oversee the renovation of the dilapidated property. In turn, given that property had five bedrooms, we opened the space up to other artists and practitioners as part of a residency programme.

¹⁷⁶ Post-Internet art can broadly be defined as “any type of art that is in some way influenced by the Internet and digital media” but, unlike ‘New-Media’ art, treats technology and the Internet as a banality rather than a novelty (Olson 2011:60).

¹⁷⁷ The terms ‘memetics’ and ‘meme’ were originally used by Richard Dawkins in his text *The Selfish Gene* (1976), in reference to the transfer of cultural ideas from person to person (Börzsei 2013:3). It has since been appropriated to describe the phenomenon of the rapid and influential ‘viral’ transferal of “piece[s] of culture, typically a joke” through “online transmission” (Börzsei 2013:3). Examples include ‘Grumpy Cat’, ‘Doge’, ‘Ermahgerd’ and ‘Ain’t Nobody Got Time For That’.

¹⁷⁸ In his article ‘It’s Supposed to Look Like Shit: The Internet Ugly Aesthetic’ (2014), Nick Douglas coins the term ‘Internet Ugly’ as a means to describe memetic aesthetics. According to Douglas (2014:315), the overarching aesthetic of meme culture is a “celebration of the sloppy and the amateurish” – using multiple techniques including freehand drawing, poor grammar and spelling, human-made errors, rough photo manipulation in any number of combinations.

‘amateurish’ sensibility communicates propositional content to ‘literate’ readers – a kind of ‘Bat Signal’ for practitioners interested in dialectical, networked and collective practice.¹⁷⁹ Moreover, the aesthetic suggests – and once again echoing Sober & Lonely – an appreciation of self-deprecation, and a dislike of the mainstream and self-serious (Douglas 2014:334). Importantly, this call extends beyond the bounds of the art world, to include communities, groups, and individuals whose interests fall within SLICA’s wide-ranging thematics. Over the years, this has included the development of relationships with cat interest groups, psychic festivals, couch surfers, running clubs, and of course like-minded institutions such as Machine Project.

At the core of these processes is simply the desire to create ‘space’ outside of the politics of commoditised cultural production, where peer support, participation, a sense of community, and the free exchange of ideas can take primacy over the hyper-competitive ‘stakes’ of the Johannesburg art scene. And herein lies a key differentiator between a mockstitution proper and SLICA. Namely, while organisations such as The Yes Men, and closer to home the Center for Historical Reenactments (CHR), attempt to gain surreptitious entry into specific fields in order to enact critique from ‘the inside’, SLICA is purposefully peripheral.¹⁸⁰ Otherwise put, there is no attempt to access the art world through parafictional duplicity.¹⁸¹ Rather, the ‘sad sack’ name (‘Sober & Lonely Institute’), self-effacing institutional descriptors (which stand in direct contrast to the ubiquitous, and often turgid, third-person ‘artist’s statements’), ‘amateurish’ visual aesthetic, and brutally honest press releases and open calls are overt and deliberate endeavours to divest our ‘space’ of competitiveness. There is no deceit – there is nothing at stake. The community, in a true relational participative sense, is a Micro-community, with Micro-utopian aims.

¹⁷⁹ The term ‘Bat Signal’ originally comes from DC’s Comics’ *Batman*, and refers to a coded call to action (Epic Hail 2016:[sp]).

¹⁸⁰ The Yes Men are Andy Bichlbaum and Mike Bonanno, an artist-activist duo who impersonate corporate spokespeople/executives (including BP, Shell, and Exxon) in order to expose and parody the current socio-political order (Britt 2010:[sp]). The Center for Historical Reenactments (CHR) is a Johannesburg-based collaborative platform (including Gabi Ngcobo, Sohrab Mohebbi, Kemang Wa Lehulere and Donna Kukama) that presents itself as an organisation. The CHR is primarily concerned with questions around historical hegemony and construction (CHR 2016:[sp]).

¹⁸¹ In her text ‘Make Believe: Parafiction and Plausibility’ (2009) Carrie Lambert-Beatty uses the term ‘parafictional’ to describe initiatives such as The Yes Men. For Lambert-Beatty (2009:54), these parafictional scenarios “have one foot in the real” and are thus experienced by viewers/readers “as fact”. In other words, parafictions enact a (potentially problematic) deception for tactical progression (Lambert-Beatty 2009:54).

5.3 *The artist-curator-as-artist, and the exhibition as form*¹⁸²

As indicated, underpinning SLICA's practice is the use of 'the exhibition' (event, screening, etc.) as a form, with the 'raw material' comprising interstice with other artists and participants. In this sense, SLICA functions not only as a double agent, but in fact as a triple (or even quadruple) agent – taking on the role of artist, curator, director and collaborating artist all at once.¹⁸³ However, herein lies a potential conflict of interest. That is, artist-run initiatives utilising these kinds of participative methodologies run the risk of appropriating the creative competencies of other artists for their/our own self-promotion and artistic progression. Artist-curator Mariane Bourcheix-Laporte (2013:[sp]) warns in this regard that the ostensibly democratic platform of the artist-run initiative can be co-opted

to foster not the myth of the genius artist, not the myth of the star curator (two myths that artist-run centres as alternative institutions aim to deconstruct), but ... the new myth of the genius artist-curator-as-artist.

However, this sentiment seems dependent on two interrelated issues. Firstly, that the figure of the sovereign 'artist-author' is still relevant in today's hyper-connected environment. And secondly, that there is value in pursuing such a role.

In terms of the first of these issues, theorist and critic Boris Groys (2007:[sp]) argues that the traditional myth of the artist-author has all but disappeared.¹⁸⁴ For Groys (2007:[sp]), there is always multiple authorship at play – whether this is through the process of curatorial selection, the influencing architecture of the space, or decisions on installation and marketing. In other words, an artist's voice within 'an exhibition' is never truly unaccompanied. This, even more so, given the rise of the Biennale, the independent curator, the curated group show, and so on, resulting in "multiple,

¹⁸² The term 'artist-curator-as-artist' is taken from Mariane Bourcheix-Laporte's text 'Interrogating the Artist-Curator-as-Artist in After Finitude' (2013).

¹⁸³ The term 'double agent' refers to an artist who has 'crossed the floor', taking on the role of curator or administrator on one hand, but still practicing as an artist outside of that framework on the other (Cahill and von Zweck 2012:65).

¹⁸⁴ According to Groys (2007:[sp]), it is a 'myth', sustained by the capitalist art market set on creating 'art-stars' in order to profit commercially.

disparate, heterogeneous authorships that combine, overlap, and intersect”, and which are impossible to separate out (Groys 2007:[sp]).

Regarding the second point, the co-option of other artists by the ‘genius artist-curator-as-artist’, implies that there is some kind of critical ‘stake’ at play (perhaps notoriety, financial reward, or being ‘picked up’ by a gallery). However, and once again going back to organisational landscape for the exhibition of contemporary art in South Africa, there is limited funding, and few spaces (arguably only GoetheOnMain – see Chapter Three) that show the kinds of experimental praxis detailed in this chapter. As such, there is in fact very little to gain.

What is evident, however, is that the activities of artists that are increasingly working within these complex, heterogeneous partnerships more closely resemble the collective efforts of open-source software creation than the hyper-competitive realm of the art market. That is, the ‘product’ that emerges is developed entirely through collaborative and voluntary processes, and then made freely available to the public (Hars and Ou 2002:25). Within such a context, art historically loaded terms, no matter how hyphenated they become (‘artist’, ‘curator’, ‘artist-curator’, ‘artist-curator-as-artist’, etc.) seem ill-equipped to deal with the complexities involved in these emerging authorial efforts. Groys suggests that film and theatre might provide a useful model for multiple-authorship in the arts, where the ‘product’ is understood as “divided among writers, composers, directors, actors, camera operators, conductors, and many other participants” (Groys 2007:[sp]). Ultimately, however, it would appear that a new vocabulary around combined authorship and its relationship to ‘the artwork’ is urgently needed. And while this remains outside the scope of this research paper, it presents exciting opportunities for future research and inquiry.

As of 2016, SLICA’s concerted relational participative processes have resulted in more than 40 projects, and 30 residencies with over 100 participating artists, including cell phone jamming the Johannesburg Art Fair with James Webb; an evening of Internet Cats with Lester Adams and a variety of cat interest groups; a group exhibition on precognitive thought with a R100 budget; an informal curatorial seminar with Portia Malatjie; a road trip to the unknown with Jon Bernad; tree climbing with Anthea Moys; and an experiential sound experiment with Malose Malahlele, to name but a few. Our

most recent project, which launched early in 2016, is the Sober & Lonely Library for Science Fiction Feminism & Misc. (SLLSFFM) – a curated collection of feminist, science fiction, and feminist science fiction Zines, books and graphic novels available for public lending from an old industrial vault in the VANSAs offices.

Looking ahead, there no long-term strategies in place. Rather, and in keeping with both SLICA's and Sober & Lonely's shapeshifting physiognomy, the project will simply dematerialise, rematerialise, and transmutate as needed.

6 CHAPTER SIX: KELEKETLA!

19/05/2016, New Doornfontein, Johannesburg:

It's 2pm on a Sunday afternoon and New Doornfontein is teeming with churchgoers. Live gospel reverberates around the semi-industrial neighbourhood, while various hoardings compete for attention: 'Pray Until Something Happens!'; 'Word, Salvation, Healing, Prayer!'; 'Find Deliverance!'. Further up on Verwey Street is the King Kong building – home to VANSA, the Parking Gallery and, most recently, Keleketla!. On the shared rooftop, a small crowd gathers for a collaborative performance by Metropolar (spoken-word artist Modise Sekgothe and visual artist Jotam Schoeman) and The Children of the Wind (Sekgothe again, with musician/poet Itai Hakim) entitled Metropolar meets the Children.¹⁸⁵ The audience chats and relaxes on the wide veranda overlooking City and Suburban – some with BYOB beer, others with hot chocolate purchased from the pop-up café (Figure 59). A small selection of illustrated Metropolar tote bags, Zines, and related merchandise are also for sale, the proceeds of which will go to supporting the act at this year's Grahamstown National Arts Festival (Figure 60).¹⁸⁶ At 2:30pm, the three artist-performers take to the stage: Sekgothe on djembe and vocals, Hakim on acoustic guitar, and Schoeman on guitar and loop pedal (Figure 61). At the back of the venue, Keleketla!'s Malose Malahlela controls the mixing desk. The accompanied spoken-word set progresses through a series of haunting narratives, exploring themes on masculinity, crime, love, and the polarities of life in the double-edged city of Johannesburg. Sekgothe, Hakim, and Schoeman are relaxed and convivial – engaging the audience and each other conversationally throughout. Afterwards the crowd and performers gather on the veranda once more, socialising and discussing the afternoon's performance. Outside, the neighbourhood is quietening down, readying itself for Monday and the working week.

¹⁸⁵ Modise Sekgothe is an award-winning South African writer, hip hop lyricist and spoken-word poet (Mthembu 2016:[sp]). Jotam Schoeman received his BA Design and Visual Communications in 2013, and his Honour's in Film Arts in 2016 from The Open Window School. He founded Bedoelende Kommunikatiewe Produksies in 2009, an independent South African film and production studio based in Pretoria (LinkedIn 2016:[sp]). Itai Hakim studied Psychology, Sociology, English and Philosophy at WITS University. He describes himself as a "folk-soul singer, guitarist and songwriter ... [and] South African story teller" (Hakim 2016:sp). He regularly collaborates with The Brother Moves On – a performance art ensemble founded in Johannesburg in 2008 (Mpemnyama 2016:[sp]).

¹⁸⁶ The Grahamstown National Arts Festival runs over 11 days in the small university town of Grahamstown in the Eastern Cape. The Festival supports "drama, dance, physical theatre, comedy, opera, music, jazz, visual art exhibitions, film, student theatre, street theatre, and lectures" (National Arts Festival 2016:[sp]).

Metropolar meets the Children is but one of the many initiatives and projects that have emerged out of Keleketla! since its inception in 2008. While initially framed as a library, the artist-run participative initiative has simultaneously developed a varied set of core programmes, including an after-school initiative “to enhance [the] intellectual and social experiences of youth through art and media tools and processes”, and an ongoing experimental programme to “promote and develop professional art[s] practice in literature, performance, music and design” (Keleketla! 2015:[sp]). Other recent activities within these broader functions include curating the ‘Thath’i Cover Okestra’ – a collaborative re-exploration of Kwaito music;¹⁸⁷ hosting the launch of Panashe Chigumadzi’s novel *Sweet Medicine*;¹⁸⁸ a pop-up kitchen featuring Noji Gaylard’s Phaka cuisine; a rooftop braai with the Boda Boda Lounge crew featuring music by sound artist João Orecchia and DJ S’busiso ‘The General’ Nxumalo;¹⁸⁹ and screenings for the Feminist Stokvel Film Club.¹⁹⁰

In this chapter, I explore the development of Keleketla! from what was originally intended as a once off project into a complex and multifaceted artist-run participative initiative. I examine how, perhaps more so than any other platform discussed in this research, Keleketla! has necessarily experimented with a wide variety of economic approaches – negotiating the fine line between keeping its doors open, fulfilling its mandate as a community nexus, and retaining autonomy over its programming. In particular, I look at the concessionary politics associated with being awarded state and/or corporate funding, as well as Keleketla!’s use of ‘crowdfunding’ as an alternative framework for the support of cultural production.

¹⁸⁷ Kwaito is a South African specific subculture and electronic music genre that became popular amongst the “post-struggle generation” after 1994 (Steingo 2016:103).

¹⁸⁸ Panashe Chigumadzi is a South African writer and novelist. In 2015, she launched Vanguard Magazine – a “womanist platform for young black women in South Africa speaking to the intersectionality of queer politics, Black Consciousness and Pan-Africanism” (Chigumadzi 2016:[sp]). *Sweet Medicine* is her first novel.

¹⁸⁹ João Orecchia is an American-born sound artist and self-taught musician who currently lives and works in Johannesburg (Ten Cities 2016:[sp]). S’busiso ‘The General’ Nxumalo is a well-known DJ, writer, and founding editor of Y-Magazine (Turner 2008:[sp]). The Boda Boda Lounge Project is a video art festival featuring works by contemporary artists from Africa (VANSA 2016:[sp]).

¹⁹⁰ The Feminist Stokvel is a collective of artists, writers, and cultural practitioners who seek to engage with “the many social issues that uniquely face black women in South Africa” from an intersectional perspective (Feminist Stokvel 2016:[sp]). The collective comprises Danielle Bowler, Kavuli Nyali, Lebogang Mashile, Milisuthando Bongela, Nova Masango, Panashe Chigumadzi, Pontsho Pilane and Wisaal Anderson (Feminist Stokvel 2016:[sp]).

6.1 *Establishing Keleketla!*

In order to make sense of Keleketla!, it is first necessary to understand its development out of the convergence of two pre-existing ARIs, namely the Joubert Park Project (JPP) and the Innacity Community Collective.

Looking at the first of these, the JPP was established by artists Dorothee Kreutzfeld, Jo Ractliffe and Bie Venter in 2001 in response to the increasing dereliction of the Johannesburg Art Gallery (JAG) and the adjacent Joubert Park.¹⁹¹ The project sought to “support the development and rejuvenation of the precinct and to integrate the Johannesburg Art Gallery with its surroundings” via an ongoing public arts programme (Smith 2001:[sp]).¹⁹² In 2008, as part of the JPP initiative, artist Bettina Malcomess¹⁹³ proposed developing a library comprising books collected from in and around the Joubert Park Precinct as a means to engage with ideas of literacy and, more particularly, cultural literacy within Johannesburg’s CBD (Wigzell 2012:3).¹⁹⁴ Malcomess began working with Rangoato Hlasane and Malose Malahlela,¹⁹⁵ who were already well situated in the area through their own student-run initiative, the Innacity Community Collective. The Collective, a participative platform in and of itself, emerged out of an urgent need for ‘space’ for inner city artists and musicians to practice, collaborate and perform. Underpinned by a focus on hip hop, Hlasane and Malahlela hosted events and open-mic sessions at their Mariston Hotel University Residence, building a loyal network of peers and collaborators along the way.¹⁹⁶ Critically, the platform relied on principles of social interstice and exchange for its existence – with artists, performers,

¹⁹¹ Jo Ractliffe is an acclaimed South African artist and photographer. She was born in Cape Town in 1961, and completed her BAFA and MFA at Michaelis (Stevenson 2016:[sp]). Bie Venter is a South African artist and arts coordinator. She established August House in 2006, which became a ‘studio hub’ for many Johannesburg-based artists (Art Map 2016:[sp]).

¹⁹² The JPP programme included performances by Steven Cohen, Elu Kieser and Nomsa Dhlamini; video-projections and photographic work by Terry Kurgan, Robin Rhode and Sue Williamson; youth workshops on movement, leadership and HIV/AIDS education; sound and photographic interventions by Kathryn Smith and Goodness Nhlengethwa; sculptural installations by Willem Boshoff, Moses Seleko and Michael Coombs; and multi-disciplinary installations by Jeanette Ginslov and Marcus Neustetter, and Rita Potenza and the Joubert Park Photographers, to name but a few (Smith 2001:[sp]).

¹⁹³ Bettina Malcomess is a writer, curator, artist and lecturer at WSoA and Michaelis (WITS 2016:[sp]).

¹⁹⁴ Interview with Rangoato Hlasane in Johannesburg on 06/05/2014. See Appendix 9.5.

¹⁹⁵ Rangoato Hlasane is a Johannesburg-based artist, cultural worker, writer, illustrator, DJ and lecturer (WITS 2016:[sp]). He holds a Master’s degree in Fine Art from the University of Johannesburg. Malose Malahlela is a South African cultural practitioner with a specialist interest in sound and collaboration (Cowie 2014:[sp]).

¹⁹⁶ Interview with Rangoato Hlasane in Johannesburg on 06/05/2014. See Appendix 9.5.

and students contributing their time, artwork (flyer design), and living space, in order to make the events happen.¹⁹⁷

Malcomess, Hlasane and Malahlela proposed using the newly refurbished Drill Hall – situated two blocks from JAG – as the venue for the library.¹⁹⁸ The site was of particular significance in terms of the project’s intended purpose. That is, the Drill Hall was first built as a military base in 1904, and later became the location for South Africa’s infamous Treason Trials (1956–1961) which saw 156 anti-apartheid activists tried for so-called ‘high treason’ (Gauteng 2016:[sp]).¹⁹⁹ Within this context, the library sought to immerse itself in Johannesburg’s complex historiography through an “ongoing process of reading, interpreting and responding” to its context and surroundings (Wigzell 2012:3).

The library was named *keleketla* – a Pedi word for the consent to the beginning of a story. Specifically, “I am here, willing to listen to your story with active participation” (Art Map 2016:[sp]).

Hlasane describes its first inception:

When we launched Keleketla! it was just a single shelf with books that had been donated or bought from second-hand shops. We printed flyers and handed them out at inner city schools to encourage children to visit. It was small. But it generated a lot of interest from the Joubert Park neighbourhood and other practitioners, so there was a clear indication that the library should continue.²⁰⁰

¹⁹⁷ Interview with Rangoato Hlasane in Johannesburg on 06/05/2014. See Appendix 9.5.

¹⁹⁸ Interview with Rangoato Hlasane in Johannesburg on 06/05/2014. See Appendix 9.5.

¹⁹⁹ The lengthy trial lasted from 1956 to 1961 (South Africa History 2016:[sp]). The accused were charged with (inter alia) ‘high treason’ against the apartheid state for participating in drawing up the Freedom Charter, which “visualised the abolition of all racial discrimination and the granting of equal rights to all” (South Africa History 2016:[sp]). All charges were eventually dismissed by the court.

²⁰⁰ Interview with Rangoato Hlasane in Johannesburg on 06/05/2014. See Appendix 9.5.

Apart from the library and a few other tenants (including the JPP), the cavernous space of the Drill Hall was mostly unused.²⁰¹ Moreover, despite the City of Johannesburg's (CoJ) initial investment of R10 million to refurbish the space in 2004, there was no further provision of funds for project development at the site (Wigzell 2012:3). Seeing a two-fold opportunity for exchange, Hlasane and Malahlela proposed extending the initial scope of Keleketla! as a means to both activate the site for the CoJ, while simultaneously creating much needed 'space' for artists and practitioners:

We realised, here we are with no capital, but a lot of space. We took it and ran with it. We understood how difficult it was to find space to work and practice. So we opened it up to our network for shows or workshops. We were largely focused on youth engagement and education, but we also made it clear to artists who didn't necessarily have an interest in education that they could propose other ways of transacting with the space ...²⁰²

Over the next few years, Hlasane and Malahlela developed Keleketla! into a cultural hub within the inner city – cultivating the library (now in excess of 3500 books) and a variety of participative projects along the way.²⁰³ In keeping with the framework of relational aesthetics, each of these sought to establish new forms of sociality within the inner city by encouraging interlocutory relations between its various participants.

One of the first participative projects launched was 'Once Upon a Month', a monthly event incorporating performances, dance, drama and music.²⁰⁴ Daytime activities were "aimed at teenagers and children and created a platform for the wider ... community to experience a sense of the ongoing activities at the library", while various evening events gave up-and-coming Johannesburg-based bands and DJs the opportunity to perform (Hlasane and Malahlela 2014:[sp]).

Another, '56 Years to the Treason Trial', comprised a series of conversations between learners, teachers, guest speakers, and historians as a means to engage with

²⁰¹ Interview with Rangoato Hlasane in Johannesburg on 06/05/2014. See Appendix 9.5.

²⁰² Interview with Rangoato Hlasane in Johannesburg on 06/05/2014. See Appendix 9.5.

²⁰³ Interview with Rangoato Hlasane in Johannesburg on 06/05/2014. See Appendix 9.5.

²⁰⁴ Interview with Rangoato Hlasane in Johannesburg on 06/05/2014. See Appendix 9.5.

Johannesburg’s heritage, and its “lived experience” (Keleketla! 2016:[sp]). Speakers included Ahmed Kathrada, one of the original ‘Treason Trialists’, and apartheid-activist and graphic artist Judy Seidman, to name but a few.²⁰⁵

While Keleketla!’s library and ongoing projects proved highly generative in terms of their participative goals, the resource-intensive overheads associated with its swelling audience base (with library membership reaching 916 as of 2012), as well as those of the Drill Hall, increasingly necessitated some kind of income in order to keep the initiative afloat (Hlasane and Malahela 2014:241). As Keleketla! had emerged organically, with no long-term funding strategy in place, Hlasane and Malahela drew on, and experimented with, a variety of economic approaches to this end. The following sections will examine, firstly, Keleketla!’s relationship to ‘traditional’ arts funding, and secondly, their use of non-traditional participative economies.

6.2 Funding, ‘crowdfunding’, and institutional autonomy

As Nicole al-Samarai et al.(2014:128) note in their recent text *Creating Spaces: Non-Formal Art/s Education and Vocational Training for Artists in Africa – Between Cultural Policies and Cultural Funding*, within both a South African and wider Pan-African context, public funding for arts organisations is highly limited. Moreover, the funding that is available for organisations derives primarily from Western (mostly European) cultural organisations such as Alliance Française, Pro Helvetia and the British Council. While these structures undoubtedly provide much-needed support for the arts, they also come with their own structural conditions and limitations.

²⁰⁵ Ahmed Kathrada was born in 1929 in South Africa (Ahmed Kathrada Foundation 2016:[sp]). At the age of 17, he joined the Passive Resistance Campaign of the South African Indian Congress and became actively involved in anti-apartheid activism. After being found not guilty of treason in the 1956 trials, he was later re-arrested and imprisoned during the infamous Rivonia Trials along with Nelson Mandela, Walter Sisulu, Govan Mbeki, Raymond Mhlaba, Denis Goldberg, Elias Motsoaledi and Andrew Mlangeni (Ahmed Kathrada Foundation 2016:[sp]). During his 26 years of incarceration, he earned four Bachelors degrees, majoring in History, African Politics, Criminology and Library Sciences (Ahmed Kathrada Foundation 2016:[sp]). Kathrada is still actively involved in politics through his work at the Ahmed Kathrada Foundation and has written several books, including his memoirs which were published in 2004. Judy Seidman was born in the USA and raised in West Africa (Seidman 2016:[sp]). She developed some of the most iconic anti-apartheid struggle posters during the 1970s and 1980s – including posters for CODESA (Convention for a Democratic South Africa) and trade union COSATU (Congress of South African Trade Unions) (Seidman 2016:[sp]).

One overarching issue is that, ultimately, European cultural funding policy is designed for a European socio-economic context. As such, basic infrastructure is assumed to be 'a given' (al-Samarai 2014:128). Consequently, funding is often only available for short-term projects, rather than institutional necessities such as rent, electricity, Internet access and salaries. For Keleketla!, who urgently need support for the Drill Hall's basic overheads, this has proved particularly encumbering in terms of finding suitable grants and funders.²⁰⁶

A second problematic, which applies to participative and socially focused practice more generally, are the inflexible administrative conditions and criteria associated with cultural funding policies. Often, the difficulties are as banal as not having an appropriate category to 'tick' on application forms; or there being no provision for certain items of expenditure; or a quantitative focus on numbers rather than quality participative engagement (Hlasane and Malahela 2014:235). As Hlasane and Malahela (2014:235) note in relation to Keleketla!:

Instead of innovative, groundbreaking work created out of meaningful exchanges, funders' reports comprise graphs, tables, numbers, and photographs capturing smiling groups of children. While we try hard to avoid this – even at a proposal level and most of the time at the expense of sustainable income – we always slot in passages that foreground considerable numbers because experience has indicated that quantity constitutes an important tick on the funder's checklist.

The effect is that organisations are often impeded – ideologically, practically, or simply in terms of time spent – by the administrative acrobatics needed to be 'rubber stamped'.

A third potential concern that relates to international funding of local projects more broadly is that of institutional autonomy. This was the subject the recent VANSAs/PAN!C panel discussion 'What is Independent?' (2014), with participants Hlasane, Patrick Mudekereza (Picha Centre de Art, Lubumbashi), Donna Kukama

²⁰⁶ Interview with Rangoato Hlasane in Johannesburg on 06/05/2014. See Appendix 9.5.

(CHR, Johannesburg) and Dana Whabira (Njelele, Harare), with myself as moderator. What was evident is that amidst Europe's cost-saving austerity measures, cultural funding is being increasingly channelled to so-called 'high necessity' projects such as education, good governance, and the empowerment of women.²⁰⁷ In turn, these frameworks demand specific and often pre-determined outcomes, raising questions around the 'shaping' of African cultural production and content via agendas from 'the outside'.²⁰⁸ al-Samarai et al.(2014:128) comment in this regard:

Western funding institutions operating in African contexts have a great deal of latitude for action and decision-making. Since their structural situatedness enables them to exercise influence in a number of areas – concerning what happens in art, culture, and education; concerning which issues are considered relevant; concerning the forms, formats, and visibility of art productions and work approaches – they play a clearly discernible role in determining the direction taken by local, regional, and transcontinental developments in the respective fields and the corresponding interstitialities.

Amidst these complexities, Hlasane and Malahlela have increasingly looked to non-traditional, participative funding strategies as a means to retain autonomy over their programming, and circumvent the structural and ideological issues attached to traditional cultural funding sources.

One such project that exemplifies Keleketla!'s use of alternative economies is 'Stokvel'. A 'stokvel' refers to a South African specific "collective saving and resource generation scheme popular in rural and township communities" (Mckee 2015:3). Specifically, each member of the stokvel receives a combined lump sum from the other members on a cyclical basis. Often, this process of exchange goes hand in hand with a social gathering, where the individual whose 'turn' it is also sells food and drink as a means to generate more income (Webster 2005:68; Mckee 2015:3).

²⁰⁷ Interview with Patrick Mudekereza in Johannesburg on 06/05/2014. See Appendix 9.4.

²⁰⁸ Interview with Rangoato Hlasane in Johannesburg on 06/05/2014. See Appendix 9.5.

In 2009, Keleketla! drew on this contributory economic practice as a means to simultaneously generate resources, facilitate artistic production, and stimulate interlocutory relations, through three iterations of their own stokvel. ‘Stokvel #1’ included a fundraising exhibition in Hlasane’s own home; ‘Stokvel #2’ the creation of a hip hop ‘mixtape’ through public workshops and online interaction with various ‘bedroom’ artists and producers from Johannesburg, Detroit and Oakland;²⁰⁹ and finally, ‘Stokvel #3’, an ‘after party’ featuring various Johannesburg-based bands and DJs (Wigzell 2012:5).²¹⁰ In keeping with the sense of reciprocity evoked by a stokvel, and its emphasis on social interaction, the last of these was meant as a “gift to everyone involved in the experiment” (Mckee 2015:3). Hlasane remarks on the R30 000 generated by the three projects:

[The] amount speaks volumes with regard to the art community’s ability to support its activities. Of note is how, contrary to our own perceptions, attendees and bidders at the auction were not ‘conventional’ art buyers, but people who knew of Keleketla! Library and supported its activities.

Following the success of these events, Keleketla! released an album based on the content generated through the project, entitled *Street Thesis*, featuring music produced through ‘Stokvel #2’ (Hlasane and Malahela 2014:235). Moreover, and again emphasising Keleketla!’s focus on reciprocity, the album contained a specially developed ‘curriculum’ insert on the stokvel methodology, intended to assist other practitioners and ARIs in developing their own platforms of contributory exchange (Hlasane and Malahela 2014:235).

Another recurring Keleketla! project that utilises a community-centred approach to supporting artistic production is ‘Skaftien’. The name – an idiomatic term for a lunchbox – refers to “the idea of food being left over from the night before and sustaining you through the day ... [and being] something that people like to share” (Hlasane in Rawoot 2011:[sp]). ‘Skaftien’ invites guests to purchase tickets (R60–R100)

²⁰⁹ ‘Stokvel #2’ was undertaken in association with the 2009 Allied Media Conference in Detroit (Mckee 2015:3).

²¹⁰ The term ‘bedroom’ artist or producer refers to the increasing availability of inexpensive electronic music production software, whereby musicians are able to create and produce high-quality music from their homes (Yellepeddi 2015:[sp]).

for an event which includes a meal, entertainment and/or an after-party (Skaftien 2016:[sp]). During the evening, selected artists then ‘pitch’ their creative proposals to the audience, who in turn vote to fund one or more of the projects using the monies generated by ticket sales.

‘Skaftien #1’ took place at the Drill Hall in 2011. The packed event saw local food being served to the guests (including ‘bunny chows’, ‘braaiied’ chicken and ‘boerewors’), followed by pitches from Slang Entertainment Records for the production of an all-female ‘mixtape’; artist Breeze Yoko for a documentary on public swimming pools in Johannesburg; and the Boitumelo Sewing Project (who walked away with the most votes and R6000 in funding) for their community initiative ‘Veiled Hope’ – a large-scale site-specific tapestry (Figure 62) (Mnisi 2011:[sp]).²¹¹ The event finished with a massive after party featuring the band/performance art ensemble, The Brother Moves On (Figure 63).²¹²

In many ways, ‘Stokvel’ and ‘Skaftien’ mirror the global popularisation of ‘crowdfunding’ as a means to generate financial support for artistic production.²¹³ This mechanism allows for a community of interest to contribute small amounts of cash to specific projects in return for various ‘benefits’ or ‘rewards’ (Bannerman 2013:[sp]). In the case of ‘Skaftien’ and ‘Stokvel’, these include entertainment, food, and critically, a sense of genuine participative democracy.

Other ARIs that have utilised a similar strategy include FEAST (Funding Emerging Art with Sustainable Tactics) from Brooklyn, who host a recurring public dinner, and

²¹¹ Slang Entertainment Records is an independent recording label founded by Ophar Kenneth Moyo in 2008 (Skaftien 2016:[sp]). Breeze Yoko is a Johannesburg-based artist who works predominantly in film and graffiti (Infecting the City 2016:[sp]). The Boitumelo Sewing Project is a Hillbrow-based platform that offers training and skills development in the arts (Outreach Foundation 2016:[sp]). The project seeks to create “a safe space where men, women and youth can be involved in creative activities of arts/crafts development while learning key life skills to address the myriad complexities in their daily lives” (Outreach Foundation 2016:[sp]). ‘Veiled Hope’ was completed through the work and contributions of 153 Boitumelo crafters and exhibited at the Church of Peace, the Hillbrow Theatre Project (both in Hillbrow) and at the South African Site_Specific festival in 2011 (Site_Specific 2011:[sp]).

²¹² The Brother Moves On is a band/performance collective currently comprising Nkululeko Mthembu, Siyabonga Mthembu, Zelizwe Mthembu, Raytheon Moorvan, Ayanda Zalekile and Simphiwe Tshabalala (Future Music ZA 2013:[sp]).

²¹³ ‘Crowdfunding’ for cultural production is in fact nothing new (Bannerman 2013:[sp]). One of the earliest documented examples of crowdfunding is Alexander Pope’s request for donations to assist with his translation of Homer’s *Iliad* in the eighteenth century. Each donor was then listed in the front of the book as his or her ‘benefit’ for contributing to the project (Cunningham 2014:2012). In recent years, largely via online platforms such as Kickstarter and Indiegogo crowdfunding has become regarded as a generative economic force. In 2015 alone, crowdfunding generated over \$34.4 billion in support of new start-ups and creative projects (Humphries 2015:[sp]).

Sweet Tooth of the Tiger, also from Brooklyn, a mobile stall that sells a variety of home-baked goods (Brooklyn Based 2016:[sp]). As with ‘Skafien’ these projects are both a form of socially engaged practice in and of themselves, and a practical hands-on approach to generating and raising money in support of creative production.²¹⁴

From one perspective, it could be argued that crowdfunding offers a radical alternative to our current neoliberal, competition-driven arts economy. That is, the model has the potential to “mobilize small-scale funds necessary to provide more opportunities to more people” and, in turn, foster “widespread grassroots production amongst those who might not otherwise have access to the necessary start-up capital to fund their creative projects” (Bannerman 2013:[sp]). Moreover, it suggests the potential democratisation of arts funding whereby the ‘gatekeepers’ of cultural support (galleries, sponsors, government organisations, etc.) are circumvented in favour of direct support from the community of interest (Bannerman 2013:[sp]). In this sense, crowdfunding could be viewed as the ‘pragmatisation’ of social aesthetics, namely a highly practical alternative to pure relational exchange, whereby the audience becomes not only an active social participant in a given project but also a partner in generating and preserving artistic networks and communities (Candido 2009:[sp]).

While these kinds of projects have helped sustain Keleketla! for over six years, in 2015 Hlasane and Malahlela made the decision to leave the Drill Hall. Since its upgrade in 2004, the CoJ had all but abandoned any maintenance or upkeep of the site, leading to a number of ongoing security and safety concerns (JDA 2012:[sp]). In a press release Keleketla! stated:

Keleketla! had to close the daily library service, along with the after school programme due to the health and safety hazards presented by the deteriorating state of the Drill Hall infrastructure (Keleketla 2015:[sp]).

²¹⁴ As with ‘Skafien’, FEAST guests purchase a ticket for dinner and then hear various pitches from selected artists throughout the evening, one of whom is then awarded the money raised by the event to support their project (FEAST 2016:[sp]). Since its inception in Brooklyn in 2009, FEAST has funded 32 projects and awarded a total of \$21 406 (FEAST 2016:[sp]).

In leaving the Drill Hall, Keleketla! have downsized, and shifted back towards Hlasane and Malahlela's earlier approach to institution-building through their work with the Innacity Community Collective – namely, the use of live music and events as a means to stimulate cultural production and community development. The King Kong building was a strategic choice in this regard. With a stage and café facilities upstairs, Keleketla! are in the process of applying for a liquor licence towards developing a Keleketla! Shebeen²¹⁵ as a means to be entirely self-supporting.²¹⁶ Hlasane notes in this regard:

... it's important to think about how people live and what they consume. The art world always tries to separate itself from real life. Like we want to think art can just magically exist without the taint of consumption and consumer behaviours and habits ...²¹⁷

A similar strategy is currently in use at Picha Centre de Art, where the 'du Picha Bar' both generates funds, and acts as a community hub for meetings and social gatherings.²¹⁸ As with Keleketla!, Picha places an emphasis on music and performance, making the evolution from programming live music to hosting and coordinating the events a natural progression.²¹⁹

Critically, however, this is not a commercial or for-profit model. Rather, it is based on the idea of a community supporting its own – a practicable trend towards autonomy and sustainability outside of a reliance on funders or brand sponsors and the inevitable co-option, commercialisation and/or instrumentalisation associated with these practices. As Malahlela notes:

²¹⁵ A 'shebeen' is an informal drinking establishment, which developed as a result of the "1927 Liquor Act, which among other restrictions prohibited Africans and Indians from selling alcohol or entering licensed premises" (South African 2016:[sp]). Historically, shebeens have been used as "meeting places for political dissidents", but have become increasingly mainstream in recent years as venues for general socialising (South African 2016:[sp]).

²¹⁶ Interview with Rangoato Hlasane and Malose Malahlela in Johannesburg on 17/04/2016. See Appendix 9.5.

²¹⁷ Interview with Rangoato Hlasane and Malose Malahlela in Johannesburg on 17/04/2016. See Appendix 9.5.

²¹⁸ Interview with Patrick Mudkereza in Johannesburg on 06/05/2014. See Appendix 9.4.

²¹⁹ Interview with Rangoato Hlasane and Malose Malahlela in Johannesburg on 17/04/2016. See Appendix 9.5.

When people engage we can work without money because everybody then becomes a participant, partner, and collaborator.²²⁰

Looking forward, alongside setting up the Keleketla! Shebeen, Hlasane and Malahlela are in the process of expanding the library to include more musical content, with a specific focus on Kwaito.²²¹ This includes the addition of various books, cassettes and records, and the development of a unique Kwaito ‘soundcloud’ library.²²² Ultimately, however, their focus remains on creating a ‘hub’ for sociality within Johannesburg City, and a space for non-traditional, experimental, cultural production.²²³

²²⁰ Interview with Rangoato Hlasane and Malose Malahlela in Johannesburg on 17/04/2016. See Appendix 9.5.

²²¹ Interview with Rangoato Hlasane and Malose Malahlela in Johannesburg on 17/04/2016. See Appendix 9.5.

²²² Interview with Rangoato Hlasane and Malose Malahlela in Johannesburg on 17/04/2016. See Appendix 9.5.

²²³ Interview with Rangoato Hlasane and Malose Malahlela in Johannesburg on 17/04/2016. See Appendix 9.5.

7 CHAPTER SEVEN: CONCLUSION

This year (2016), artist initiative/group/magazine DIS will act as chief curators for the 9th Berlin Biennale (Gorton 2015:[sp]). The New York-based group – comprising Solomon Chase, David Toro, Lauren Boyle, and Marco Roso – have been described as ‘a wormhole’, ‘a social network’, ‘a community’, ‘ground zero for the future’, ‘the endgame of counterculture’, a ‘hub of context invention’ and, somewhat wryly, the ‘detritus birthed from a taupe nylon drawstring backpack worn by a candy raver from San Jose’ (Duncan 2012:[sp]).²²⁴ Congruently, this year’s 11th Shanghai Biennale will be curated by New Delhi-based artists’ initiative Raqs Media Collective (Harris 2015:[sp]). The group, which was formed by Jeebesh Bagchi, Monica Narula and Shuddhabrata Sengupta in 1992, describe themselves as “often appearing as artists, occasionally as curators [and] sometimes as philosophical agent provocateurs” (Raqs 2016:[sp]). Both projects are artist-led (run), participative, and serve as a kind of mutable ‘nucleus’ for the convergence of various fields of research and production.

These recent appointments provide a useful exemplification of, and endpoint to, a number of the primary outcomes of this research project on artist-run participative initiatives in South Africa. In this conclusion, I will briefly retrace the aims and objectives of this investigation, formalise specific findings, and then tie these back to the ‘trend’ outlined above as a means to explicate the critical and intercultural relevance of this investigation.

Briefly stated, this research project involved my tracking the (now much discussed) popularisation of social aesthetics within artistic practice and discourse since the 1990s, and the associated impact thereof on institutional structures. I examined how, in contrast to white-cube formats, social aesthetics demands multifunctional, flexible, and heterogeneous space suited to participation, interaction and interlocution. Critically, however, this emphasis on ‘the social experience’ is both time consuming and manpower heavy, and thus at odds with traditional institutional logic which

²²⁴ Extracts originally from Alaina Claire Feldman, Chris Kaspers, Brad Troemel, Josh Kline and Babak Radboy in ‘What is DIS? Going Where No Magazine Has Gone Before’ by Fiona Duncan (2012:[sp]) and from the DIS Magazine website (2016:[sp]).

favours mass audiences and ‘more bang for the buck’. While the lack of suitable infrastructure for social aesthetics (both ideological and physical) has been provisionally addressed through New-Institutionalism (within a European context) and the widespread popularisation of the project space (particularly notable within Europe, Australia, Canada), within a South African context these resource-intensive models have proved less feasible. That is, the public arts sector in South Africa is “dramatically underfunded” (VANSA 2010:104). And while funding is available through sponsorship from various European cultural organisations (Alliance Française, Pro Helvetia, British Council, etc.) and, to a lesser degree, a number of corporate initiatives (Heineken Next Level Bar, Barclay’s L’Atelier Art Competition, Absolut Vodka Residency, etc.), these resources are limited and often problematically attached to specific socio-political mandates and/or brand-building interests. Consequently, the dominant structures driving the organisational landscape for contemporary art in South Africa are commercial galleries (Stevenson, Hazard Gallery, Gallery MOMO, Goodman Gallery, Blank Projects, What if the World, etc.) or membership-based organisations (AVA Gallery and KZNSA), both of which are, either by design or necessity, underpinned by a focus on the commodity value of art and thus the promotion of traditional institutionalised forms of production (painting, sculpture, photography, printmaking, etc.).

However, and as the central thesis of this study suggests, in response to the lack of funding and infrastructure for open-ended, idea-rich and socially focused praxis, artists have adopted a do-it-yourself approach to ‘filling the void’. That is, artists have taken it upon themselves to address the absence of experimental and/or laboratory ‘space’ by creating autonomous, self-directed initiatives, through a variety of non-traditional, context-specific, participative methodologies – arguably a *new* New-Institutionalism. This research project sought to identify, document and analyse these independent artist-run participative initiatives, with a specific focus on the contextual factors that led to the creation of each venture, their economies, participative strategies and impact on a wider arts landscape. As the first comprehensive study of its kind on artist-run initiatives in South Africa, or more particularly artist-run participative initiatives, it is hoped the research will go some way towards filling a significant gap in the literature, and provide a useful resource document for further research and practice.

In developing the above thesis statement, I set out, firstly, to articulate via a meta-theoretical approach what is meant by a *participative* platform or initiative. Through case studies, and original documentary evidence, I tracked the development of participation, and the associated postulates of audience inclusion, agency and authorship, from their origins within Europe's early twentieth century avant-garde, towards the 'heyday' of performance art activities during the 1960s, and beyond. I argued that, despite the overt attempts at audience inclusion (a 'bridging of art and life'), the actual 'participation' within this performance art trajectory remains largely nugatory – a tactic of the artist's specific socio-political agenda (whether this is antagonistic or ameliorative) rather than an applied imperative in and of itself. In turn, I theorised that this approach to 'participation' paradoxically reinforces the division between artist (as author/agent-provocateur) and audience, resulting in a simulacrum of autonomy rather than authentic participative action in which the audience can claim any real agency or jurisdiction.

Moving towards a resolution of these problematics, I discussed the 'social turn' in arts practice and discourse during the 1990s, and the emergence of a new family of engaged, participatory praxis. In particular, I examined Nicolas Bourriaud's (now ubiquitous) formulation of relational aesthetics which, counter to the directed 'participation' of earlier generations, reimagines participation as a form of social exchange characterised by discursiveness, spontaneity and open-endedness. I then analysed various critiques levelled against Bourriaud's theorisation (including those of Wright, Bishop, Martin and Kester), central to which are questions around the quality and democratic efficacy of the relationships *produced by* relational aesthetics. I argued, however, that these criticisms are based on a misinterpretation of Bourriaud's project as a *methodology* rather than a *form*. That is, I contend, relational aesthetics suggests only the creation of 'arenas of exchange' – a format that is, a priori, intended for unscripted interlocution, debate and discussion. I further suggest that the counterproposals advocated by Kester, Bishop and Barber (namely dialogical aesthetics, relational antagonism and littoral art) produce relations that are, paradoxically, less democratic than those that result from relational aesthetics. Specifically, I argue that in their attempts to "emancipate", "to engender conscientization" and/or to overtly "problematise social issues", these supervening

forms of social aesthetics remain constrained by the prescriptive and relativist ethical politics of ‘traditional’ performance art (Barber 2004:[sp]; Kester 2004:2; Bishop 2004:73). As such, rather than allowing for authentic democratic engagement, these paradigms reinforce traditional artist/audience roles, with the artist as leader-edifier and the audience as follower-edifié. I further contend that in these attempts to effect social change, social aesthetics blurs the line between artistic production and the profession of social work, however, and highly problematically, with none of the supporting or regulatory bodies in place. Otherwise put, there are no ethical guidelines for artists; no clear directives around issues of transparency, accountability and confidentiality; and ultimately, no safeguard or protection for the ‘participants’.

I conclude that, despite being somewhat outmoded (having been developed in the 1990s), with its modest approach to human relations (Micro-communities), its clear locus as an aesthetic form (rather than an ethico-political project), and its focus on open-ended interlocution, relational aesthetics remains a relevant practice, and a generative theoretical framework for discussing the types of participation that are the focus of this research project. Here I marked the critical distinction between the terms ‘participatory art’ and ‘participative art’. The former describing audience involvement within a given project as part of an art historical and meta-theoretical performance art trajectory, with the latter relating to participation as a conceptual imperative in and of itself, in which, “participation IS the project” (Roux 2007:2). Thus, I use the compound term ‘relational participative’ throughout this research as a means to describe projects that promote open-ended and interlocutory relations (a relational form) through methodologies and processes that are necessarily driven by participation (a participative approach).

I then turned to the impact of relational aesthetics and participative art on ‘the institution’. I explored how the social emphasis of these paradigms necessarily divests the white-cube of its austere monumentality, encouraging instead, space that is active, mutable and capricious, where workshops are able to run alongside residencies, research alongside production, and so on. I examined the rise of New-Institutionalism in Europe, and undertook specific case studies of local spaces that have incorporated aspects of New-Institutionalism, whether opportunistically (as in Goodman Projects and Nirox Projects), or as part of a genuine investment in the development of

experimental praxis (as with GoetheOnMain). I concluded that, while these formats are potentially generative, amidst the widespread budget cuts associated with the global economic crisis, and the associated demands of a neoliberal economy, these resource-intensive models remain inescapably constrained by a reliance on funding and/or the need to generate income, which in turn results in varying degrees of a loss of autonomy.

I examined the phenomenon of the artist-run initiative as a practicable response to the lack of 'space' and infrastructure for the support of experimental and participative projects. While the rise of the artist-run project space has been a global phenomenon, the trend has been particularly significant within a Pan-African context. That is, the continent has seen an explosion of artist-run initiatives in recent years, such as Van Lagos (Nigeria), Aria Projects (Algiers), Picha Centre de Art (DRC) and KHaLISHRINE (Cameroon), to name but a few. Importantly, during my analyses, I distinguish between certain typologies of artist-run space. Firstly, the artist-run initiative that follows a commercial white-cube gallery archetype, focusing on exhibitions and sales, which may or may not include some kind of live or participatory aspect. Within a South African context, these include Kalashnikovv Gallery, CO-OP, Rubixcube Gallery, No End Contemporary Art Space, Space Between Gallery, and Jnr Gallery. There are also artist-run models that present as 'mockstitutions'. These include artistic projects such as the Center for Historical Reenactments (CHR) which co-opt existing institutional codes (terminology, aesthetics, rhetoric, etc.) as means to enact a critique of prevailing hegemonies. Then there are artist-run participative initiatives – the critical focus of this research project – which are entirely non-commercial, and seek only to promote open-ended experimentation and participation in the arts *through* open-ended experimentation and participation.

I identified and undertook in-depth case studies of the three artist-run participative initiatives currently operating in South Africa (as of 1 January 2015), namely the Parking Gallery, Keleketla!, and my own project the Sober & Lonely Institute for Contemporary Art (SLICA). Looking at the first of these, I explored the development of the Parking Gallery from its earliest incarnation as a white-cube project space, towards that of a participative platform for peer engagement, dialogue and praxis. I examined the Gallery's use of regularity (Wednesday nights from 6pm), user-generated programming and a collaborative approach to organisation as a framework for

participation. I detailed the outcomes of this methodology, including installations, round-table discussions, debates, screenings, and workshops. I then analysed the critical relationship between the development of the Parking Gallery and founder Simon Gush's own research interests in the politics of labour, Marxism, and autonomist-Marxism. Specifically, I argued that despite an overt curatorial neutrality, the Gallery operates as a highly generative 'socialistic' form of civil resistance – encouraging artists to reclaim their labour power and redefine their labour value outside of the terms dictated by the inherent Capitalisms of the South African art market.

Turning to SLICA, I examined the platforms' extreme variability. Specifically, I explored how each project, its format, site, economy and conceptual framework are devised on an ad hoc, as required, basis. The result was a wide range of projects from beetroot Jack 'O Lantern carving in a storefront window, to a curated display of belly-button lint in a museum-in-a-cupboard, to 'spooky' storytelling in the streets of Rotterdam, to butter aerobics in a gallery space, to a residency programme in a garden shed, and so on. I argued, however, that underpinning this seemingly capricious methodology is a consistent Postproduction form. That is, SLICA samples and reconfigures pre-existing 'data' (including everything from cultural products, to economic and social forms, to everyday objects) in order to create new narratives and storylines as a backdrop against which social interstice can take place. I further evidenced that, central to this 'open-source' methodology, are the participative potentials suggested by hyper-networked Internet culture – allowing for inexpensive and efficient ways to communicate, consult and/or share data.

I then investigated Keleketla!, and tracked its development from what was initially intended as a once-off project, into a complex, multifaceted artist-run participative initiative. I discussed their use of a wide variety of economic approaches in their attempts to balance institutional autonomy, sustainability and participative productivity. In particular, I explored their use of crowdfunding, and argued that the methodology offers a radical co-operative and democratising alternative to cultural funding, whereby the usual 'gatekeepers' (corporate sponsors, state organisations, etc.) are circumvented in favour of direct support from the community of interest (the 'crowd').

Critically, despite their idiosyncratic attitudes and outputs, the Parking Gallery, SLICA and Keleketla! share a specific approach to their institution-building activities.

Namely, a participative methodology that is central, not only to the kinds of programming and projects championed by the initiatives, but also to their (our) own functioning and administration. While the degree of organisational participation occurs on a spectrum – from the Parking Gallery being entirely driven by self-organising principles, to SLICA and Keleketla!’s ‘open’ open call approach – ultimately the initiatives are reliant on the continued input of their specific community of interest for their (our) functioning and operations. In this sense, they exemplify Bourriaud’s (from Marx’s) theorisation of social interstice, where counter to the reductive fiscal economies of contemporary art markets, the initiatives reimagine value-form as the inter-human exchange of culture, knowledge and skills. In turn, they are able to exist outside of the ‘Capitalisms’ of the art market, and thus showcase non-commercial, experimental and socially focused projects rarely encountered within traditional gallery or museum environments.

Importantly, as a result of this methodology, issues around sustainability and a lack of funding are rendered moot. That is, the Parking Gallery, SLICA and Keleketla! are entirely supportable as long as the artist(s) (as in artist-run), and the community of interest, remains invested.

Nonetheless, there are also a number of potential problematics within the Parking Gallery’s, SLICA’s and Keleketla!’s approach to institutionalism. One conceivable criticism that could apply to the three initiatives – and to artist-run platforms more generally – is the multipart role of the artist within the artist-run initiative. That is, the artist-as-curator runs the risk of becoming a ‘double agent’ – utilising the platform, and the affiliation or competencies of participating artists, for self-promotion. Taking this one step further, artists (as in artist-run) who view the initiatives as extensions of their artistic practice – including SLICA and Keleketla! – could be regarded as triple or even quadruple agents, acting not only as artist, nor as artist-curator, but also as artist-curator as artist.

However, the above criticisms seem dependent on two interrelated assumptions – firstly, that the figure of the artist-author is still relevant in today’s hyper-connected environment and, secondly, that there is value in pursuing such a role. In terms of the first assumption, the notion of the artist-author-originator has all but been done away with (see Chapter 5), with production and exhibitions increasingly being understood as a set of intersecting efforts between curators, theorists, participants, referents, etc. Regarding the second, the use of other artists for self-promotion would imply that there is some critical stake at play (perhaps notoriety, financial reward or being picked up by a gallery). However, and once again going back to the organisational landscape for the arts in South Africa, with limited funding and few galleries, there is in fact very little to gain. Moreover, the role of ‘double agent’ is almost entirely unavoidable within our economic context – with artists (including successful commercial artists) needing to supplement their income through employment in arts education, arts administration, policy management, etc.²²⁵

A further potential problematic shared by the Parking Gallery, SLICA and Keleketla! lies in employing a model of social interstice within a wider capitalistic system. Specifically, while initiatives appear democratic and inclusive, ultimately they privilege those who can ‘pay for play’. In other words, participation inevitably requires some form of capital outlay – be it incurred in developing the project, transport to and from the space, or simply by taking time off work to attend meetings, events and openings. This, in turn, perpetuates cycles of social inequality – where roles in the arts are more likely to be filled by practitioners from privileged backgrounds who, in turn, go on to control and shape that specific arena.

Moreover, galleries who utilise capitalistic systems of revenue are indirectly benefiting from the unpaid labour power of the practitioners involved. Specifically, as arenas for experimentation are available elsewhere, commercial galleries are relieved of any pressure to support experimental praxis from their

²²⁵ VANSANSA (2010:10) reports that only 19% of artists in South Africa can spend more than 70% of their time on creative projects and associated activities, and that the majority of artists have to supplement their income through other activities in order to survive.

side. And furthermore, are able to profit off the generative effects of process-driven experimentalism, without incurring any risk of investment.

7.1 *Towards a radical new discourse*

What has become abundantly clear throughout this research project, however, is that the emergence of the artist-run participative initiative cannot simply be reduced to a need for infrastructure. Rather, these initiatives are leading a critical shift within the historicisation of arts practice, towards increasingly heterogeneous, collective and pluralistic forms of artistic production – that is, a kind of concerted effort on the part of the community of interest (namely the artist(s), the institution, the audience, etc.). In this sense, the overarching attitude of the artist-run participative initiative can be likened to that of the open-source movement, namely, an inclusive, non-commercial and voluntary approach to production – the resulting ‘products’ of which, are then freely available to all (Hars and Ou 2002:25). Central to this is a critical reimagining of the notion of authorship and ownership, a co-operative methodology that stands in resistance to our current isolating and divisive Capitalistic systems.

What has also become increasingly evident during this research, are the limitations of art critical theory in relation to these co-operative authorial efforts. Specifically, no matter how compound terms become (‘artist-run’, ‘artist-curator’, ‘artist-director’, ‘artist-curator-as-artist’, ‘relational participative’, etc.) they seem ill-equipped to deal with the intersectional complexities of these new forms. While the expressive descriptors used by the various initiatives go some way towards characterising each project (SLICA being referred to as ‘a something’, ‘a scene’; a ‘universe of artists and projects spinning around the periphery’; and DIS as ‘a wormhole’, ‘a social network’, ‘a community’, ‘ground zero for the future’, ‘the endgame of counterculture’, etc.), ultimately it would appear that a new critical discourse around radical forms of participative artistic-institutional practice is urgently needed. And while this remains outside the scope of this research paper, it presents a compelling opportunity for future research and inquiry.

In conclusion, the initiatives and methodologies discussed in this research project chart radical new directions for artistic practice, not only in terms of alternative forms

of institution building, but also regarding a critical re-imaging of authorship, ‘collectivity’, economic democracy, and inclusivity. And with an ever-increasing number of artist-run participative initiatives emerging (two in South Africa in the first half of 2016 alone – namely, Molly Steven and Juliana Irene Smith’s Alma Martha, and Dineo Seshee Bopape, Gabi Ngcobo and Sinethemba Twalo’s Nothing Gets Organised) and the appointment of initiatives such as DIS and Raqs Media Collective as curators for this year’s Berlin and Shanghai Biennales respectively, these kinds of heterogeneous, destratified, co-operative approaches to artistic production will undoubtedly result in a critical shift in arts discourse and theorisation over the next decade, and beyond.²²⁶ The question remains as to what form this will take, and whether the inevitable attempts at co-option, re-institutionalisation and commodification can be resisted.

²²⁶ As these initiatives fall outside of the timeframe delineated by this research project, they have not been included in the investigation. However, interviews with the artist-directors have been included in the appendices, both to record their emergence, and to assist with future research efforts.

8 LIST OF SOURCES CONSULTED

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9 APPENDICES

9.1 *A conversation with Simon Gush, Ruth Sacks, Euridice Kala and Joseph Gaylard of the Parking Gallery*

Date: 05/06/2013

Venue: VANSa, King Kong Building, 1st floor, 6 Verwey Street, Johannesburg

Present: Robyn Cook, Simon Gush, Ruth Sacks, Euridice Kala and Joseph Gaylard

Robyn Cook (RC): I thought a good place to start would be with the first iteration of the Parking Gallery – why you initiated the project, and so on?

Simon Gush (SG): At the time, I was obviously a lot younger and in a very different position in relation to the art world. I believe that if you look at the art world and you don't see a space for yourself, or you don't see things you like, and you want things to be different, you have to *create space*. At the time I had been fairly active in curating and facilitating various projects with young artists and trying to show work that I thought was interesting. It was also around about the time I was living in a building in Pritchard Street, and a friend of mine who was originally supposed to be part of the Parking Gallery moved in, and we thought that there must be a space in the building. We found a storeroom in the basement parking lot, hence the name. At the time there were a lot fewer project spaces or alternative spaces and a lot of young artists who didn't have the opportunity to show their work properly. So one of the things we thought we could offer was a proper exhibition space to show work that normally wouldn't have been seen. So it was more a traditional exhibition space than it is now. It was aimed at giving people the opportunity to show work or have a solo show where they otherwise wouldn't have been able to. It ran for six or seven months, and we had twelve shows. So it had a really high turnover. It was meant to be a short-lived project.

RC: So the intention from the start is that it would be finite?

SG: Yes. In the end, I landed up going to Belgium, and it closed. But the idea was always to close it after a period. One of my critiques of artist-run spaces in this country is the lack of momentum and regularity. So this wasn't something that needed to go on, but I wanted it to be short and intense so that it kept its momentum for a time and then just stopped, rather than getting to the point where nothing is happening, and

you wait two months for a show, and then things just fizzle out. I thought it would be more interesting to do something short and intense.

RC: Is that why the Parking Gallery now runs every Wednesday?

SG: Yes, the idea of regularity is important. One of the things I was concerned about with the first Parking Gallery was not becoming an institution. I didn't want to become a space for helping to move people from here to there. It was just a moment that should happen and then disappear. For this Parking Gallery, however, it was important for it to be more institutional. To have that sense of stability and regularity which I think is often lacking. Not that there isn't place for spaces that are more fluid, but there need to be other spaces that offer consistency. I also think there is something about repetition that is useful in thinking through ideas, to do things over and over and to develop conversations about how these models work. Take the Biennale's for example – because there isn't a second or a third or a fourth, there isn't that criticality that comes from repetition. So I thought this was an important aspect of the space. With the first Parking Gallery I really just did it because I could, and figured out a lot of things along the way. At the time, the main focus was to ensure that the exhibition was well installed and executed, and offer that as a service to the artists that came through.

RC: What was the thinking behind the continuation of the original project into this version of the Parking Gallery, rather than creating a new project space entirely?

SG: Joseph can also speak to this. But coming back to Johannesburg, I wanted to do something similar, but at the same time do it differently. When we first started, we thought it would be nice to collaborate with VANSA, and they offered us the space. But it also made sense to be distinct from VANSA at the same time where the organisation could step in and out of the project and choose its level of participation. And because the Parking Gallery had already existed it seemed to make sense to keep the name.

Joseph Gaylard (JG): To add to what Simon is saying, the original idea around this iteration of the Parking Gallery came about because of a confluence of things. One being Simon coming back to Joburg, and then us moving to a much larger premises on Fox Street after being in two very small spaces. We became aware of this large space that seemed to be saying 'use me'. It is important to emphasise that VANSA is not an organisation that is fundamentally about the presentation of artists work, and so on. However, we thought it would be interesting to see how we might use the space to

open up opportunities for new sorts of discussion, debate, and encounter. And at the time we were thinking about engaging a curator or curators, in the most expansive sense of the word, for three-month slots – and it was during these internal discussions that we received an email from Simon and Ruth suggesting the Parking Gallery. There seemed to be a good fit between the interests they were outlining and where we were, and our sense of how we might use this space. So what was originally envisaged as a three-month project has expanded and developed.

RC: Could you talk about the shift in thinking of moving from a more ‘traditional’ gallery space towards an experimental platform?

SG: I think there are two major factors, at least in my head, in that shift. When I left there was a very different need and gap to those that I came back to; where a discussion space may not have been as useful initially, and there was a need for a more ‘traditional’ exhibition spaces, and we responded to that need. When we came back, there were other spaces filling that void, so it didn’t make sense to try and work in that way. But at the same time seeing spaces in Europe that worked so successfully around discussions and presentations created a model for what could be possible. So it was about existing in two very different art worlds – from 2006 to 2012 a lot had changed. You need to look at what is going on and try and to figure out what might be useful.

Ruth Sacks (RS): Absolutely. At the beginning of last year, if you were a young artist, there were places to go. There were options in Johannesburg, so there wouldn’t have been any real need to provide a ‘gallery’. We wanted a discussion group.

RC: When you say lots of options?

RS: Room, the Bag factory, Center for Historical Reenactments, the list goes on.

JG: Cloak & Dagger existed for a short while. Outlet.

RS: And also opportunities like Ithuba, which is still running, GoetheOnMain, Sober & Lonely. And none of those were in existence when the original Parking Gallery was running.

SG: In 2006 the only existing space outside of a very traditional gallery/museum environment was the Premises Gallery, the Trinity [Session] space. And that was a much more formalised exhibition space. The Parking Gallery has always had no rental, no fees, that kind of thing.

JG: I think that also touches on an interesting point. When we were originally thinking of what we could do with this space, and we looked at the wide interests of the organisation [VANSA], there was, on the one hand, the practical reality that there was

no budget to create exhibitions or a public programme. So one of the points of departure was that it would have to operate on a zero budget basis, and have to draw on a community of interest. And that remains the case to date. We don't have a separate project budget, and if people do things it is on their own steam. I mean, we now have small things – like the Parking Gallery budget has ballooned to a car guard... (laughs)

RC: A heater... (laughs)

JG: And occasionally having to subsidize other people's drinking (laughs).

RC: I think this leads nicely to questions around practical methodologies and economies within these independent spaces. Both the Parking Gallery and Sober & Lonely run on zero budget premise, so the question becomes what can you do within those parameters and constraints.

SG: Well the first Parking Gallery's budget came entirely out of my salary, around R1000 to R2000 per show, which meant when I left for Europe I was actually in a lot of debt. Which is also why it had to come to an end.

RC: Yes. Even with Sober & Lonely, there is always some expenditure incurred, which comes out of our salaries.

JG: But the costs are actually incredibly small if you compare it to the costs of staging an exhibition at a gallery.

SG: But this structure needs a lot less than the original Parking Gallery. For example, I repainted the walls before every exhibition, had vinyl text cut for every show, and so on. I paid for the alcohol. It was all free; there were no donations. I also sometimes chipped in for production. The thing is, I thought if I can somehow make the show happen, it is important. But there was no way that the same model could be used this time.

RS: With the new Parking Gallery, we had a paid bar, people were asked to pay for drinks at cost price. Even so, it still lands up costing us around R1,000 per month.

Euridice Kala (EK): I just wanted to add a point here, that the fact that the space is a forum for discussion liberated us from the idea of expensive production costs. And if you look at the past two exhibitions, Mbali [Khoza] and Naadira [Patel], being more 'traditional' exhibitions, they have covered all of the production costs themselves.

RC: I'm not sure if you recognize this explicitly, but there seems to be a unique sense of generosity operating here. Money-wise, time-wise, energy-wise, it must be

incredibly exhausting organising these projects, and having an event every single Wednesday.

RS: It comes down to how you function in the South African art world. There are issues, and there are problems, you either complain about them, or you take action. Most projects I have been involved with, that has been the reason for doing them. In 2012 the best way to manifest that was the Parking Gallery. And it was a very happy partnering with VANSA, because they do provide the infrastructure. It isn't the same as being totally on your own running a project, which is incredibly draining. Everyone puts in as much as they can. We are a big group. There is Lester, Euridice, Joseph, Simon and myself, and whoever else is around. And the artists also usually sit in on the planning meetings. And that's how we manage it.

JG: I think your idea of generosity is very important. As a different kind of ethos or ethic to run transactions in the art world, which are often quite mean-spirited and competitive around something that is actually very small. Where the heat generated is usually in inverse proportion to the actual significance or consequence of what is happening. I think generosity for VANSA is a complex issue. We are an organisation, we pay salaries, we have employees and are responsible to those people. But I think it is extremely important that there is a part of our work that is not premised on writing funding proposals. Increasingly and generally within the overall organisation we have been moving away from the funding/proposal framework. But that is obviously part of the reality of the organisation, as is consultancy and commissioned work. But within the economy of the organisation, to have a space where there is no expectation of financial return, but rather of return on other levels, I think is very important for the overall health of the organisation.

RS: That notion of generosity is also important in our participants. People who take on a Parking Gallery project, artists/curators or whoever they might be; they also need to have a spirit of generosity. I mean the only proposals we have turned down, and we really don't get very many, are ones that think we are a gallery that sells things. And we have a standard response of 'actually this is what we do, we are a discussion group'. You have to have a lot of generosity to invest in a programme that is only open on a Wednesday night. It is a big ask; you need to have kind of a gentleman's agreement about it.

RC: I think that is very important. We have noticed at Sober & Lonely, and perhaps it has been our fault in that we haven't articulated things clearly, but occasionally this

idea of the reciprocity of generosity has been missed by the participants. Where there hasn't been a common understanding of 'give and take'. And you can land up feeling quite taken advantage of.

EK: I think we have been fortunate; we have never really had that issue. But the idea of generosity plays a big role, people understand that this isn't a space that generates income.

JG: For me, it's also dealing with a very different sense of capital. So when I see the amount of time and energy and resources, that say Naadira and Mbali have invested, I am amazed. And that is a very happy transaction that involves no financial exchange at all. And I think we have somehow managed to achieve that balance where everyone feels like they gain.

RS: I think it is also about setting a precedent. There was much confusion at first with people thinking that we just had speakers. When people were having great exhibitions and then just wanting a speakers panel with us. And that never really worked out well. It's not quite that sort of space. But we have never felt put upon.

EK: I just wanted to add to the idea of capital. It is human resources and equipment that we have to offer. That is the currency.

RS: We are lucky, we have a professional installer, a professional arts writer, and VANSa which manages such a lot in the art world. We are fortunate to have a nice mix of people. And again, Euridice came here as an intern who just had to fulfil her hours. And we didn't let her leave. Those kinds of generosity have kept us running. I mean without Euridice I have no idea what sort of pit we would be in (laughs).

RC: You have been running for over a year...

RS: Every Wednesday night...

RC: Which is quite an amazing run. Jumping to the opposite end of the idea of generosity; I wanted to ask about Niamh Anne Kelly's critique of artist-run spaces as arenas for self-promotion. She is, however, referring to the so-called 'Glasgow-Miracle' and the rise of artist-run initiative there. Do you think that the idea of the artist as a 'double agent' is problematic?

RS: We actually refuse to talk. When visiting artists ask Simon or myself to participate we say no. That's not what we do here. What we always say to Joseph, when he used to try and make us talk (laughs), is that we didn't set this space up to pontificate.

SG: I mean that isn't a hard and fast rule. But there is a group, and we can happily disappear into the group. I don't think there is a huge amount of gain to be had

actually. I think it is more perceived gain than actual gain. With the first Parking Gallery, I was more visible as the person running it, and I am sure that had some influence, but I don't think it had very much.

JG: I don't think that critique makes a lot of sense in this context. It operates from a kind of understanding of what one is doing that is predicated on a certain sort of cynicism and mean-spiritedness. When Simon started the first Parking Gallery in 2006, I had been in Johannesburg for about four or five years, and it was the first thing that I saw that really struck me of being of any kind of interest, and of really creating a space for people to work and experiment in what seemed a very moribund framework. I think you need people to make those spaces. Maybe it is a particular marketing strategy for artists in Scotland, but I think it is a bit absurd to critique that in our context (laughs). Here the stakes are very different.

RS: You have to look at the CHR, which is more personality based. It functions as a group. Every external artist that comes into CHR becomes sort of regurgitated up into the practice of the other artists. And that is a totally different thing; that is a real collaborative practice. We just provide a platform. And there is no need for us to have our names on anything because that's all we do. You know other project spaces that have sprung up by artists who really see themselves in the space, or in their houses like Kathryn Smith; it is just a totally different model. We just provide a stage. We barely give a curatorial critique unless it is asked for. As I said, the only work we have turned down is people that wanted a commercial gallery show. And even then we have said, this is what we do, come back with a proposal.

JG: I wouldn't say it has been a non-curatorial stance, more of an agnostic one (laughs). There is no clear agenda.

RC: The Parking Gallery website calls for work that is 'topical'? So within that, there must be some kind of underlying thematic?

RS: When Simon and I started we were really just looking for youngsters.

SG: You want people who need the opportunity. A mix is healthy. You want to have a large quantity of people who need it and find it useful. And then it is always nice for projects that don't fit well elsewhere. Also, maybe for people who could find other spaces easily, but find this space interesting. It is a bit of a balancing act. I think these spaces are quite organic and you never really know what you are doing, you are always thinking 'well that didn't really work out' or 'it didn't work as well as it did in my head' or 'maybe we should change it' or 'maybe that its fine and it needs to happen again and

next time it will be better'. Of course, you make decisions and have input. We generally meet with the artists and give input, so we can't say we are entirely neutral in terms of curating. But it is more like 'what do you want to do and how can we make it possible' or maybe 'that isn't really feasible' or 'that is too expensive'.

JG: I mean if you look at the European models, the Anglo-European models, they are interesting as a point of reference but are also unhelpful. Partly because the economies they exist under are of a completely different order. So you might have people who are notionally, in a heavily subsidized world, orchestrating some complex curatorial personal marketing agenda, but in South Africa, unless you are going to go and become a commercial gallery in a very small world, I don't see that as an option. The economy demands a very different kind of response from people. Which is why your idea of generosity is so interesting.

RC: Yes, I think part of this research project is trying to envisage and articulate possible methodologies that can and will work in this context because clearly a European model is not appropriate.

JG: Absolutely.

RC: I think something I find very interesting is your position in that it is counter to what Sober & Lonely does, we see our programming, events, and so on, as an extension of our artistic practice...

RS: It's actually collaborative...

JG: But I read your project as much more focused, than, say what we do.

RC: I'm curious then to know how you maintain your interest in the programme. Lauren and I are interested in the work as it aligns with our research focus on collaboration. So while there is this idea of generosity, there is also a direct sense of reward in working with these projects because it is so participatory. I am sure there are projects you don't really feel stimulated by or feel an affinity towards, so my question is, how do you maintain an ongoing interest?

SG: Some projects need more input than others, also depending on the amount of time we have. Some artists are just left to their own devices entirely. I think because there is a group of us, different people enjoy different projects.

RS: I mean we are all artists in one sense or another. This isn't our artistic project. Except for perhaps yours Euridice. And that has been reflected in our programme. Euridice is working on real collaboration and ideas around 'what is collaboration'. So she has been much more involved, and a very necessary presence whereas the rest of

us, Lester, Joseph, Simon and myself have independent practices that aren't to do with collaboration. So we don't think 'let's take a month to work through our ideas as a group' which is what say Nontobeko [Ntombela] and Clare [Butcher] did. Those are totally different artistic practices, and I think far more in line with Sober & Lonely. You say 'we are proposing this theme, let's work through that'. We do have themed programs here, but it is for our guest participants to dictate the concepts. The Parking Gallery team is happy to develop them further if called on, but it is up to the artist or curator to say what they require.

SG: There is also just an element of believing in the space. So you don't always have to like the work to think that the space should be there and available for things you don't necessarily like.

JG: I think that's a very important point. We have quite a porous agenda, which has its own interest. But I think it's very interesting to look at other spaces like CHR or Sober & Lonely which have a much more defined agenda.

RS: And an artists' statement, a declaration of 'this is what we do here'.

JG: We are starting to think more about, not what the creative agenda would be, but to think more sharply about the points of connection between the Parking Gallery and other areas. What we could generate from those points of contact. But it wouldn't amount to anything as coherent as say to CHR or Sober & Lonely.

SG: I think there is something interesting that comes from the first Parking Gallery as well; the interest in the idea of the structure or model. So it is less about content and more about thinking about how can we do these things.

JG: I think Simon's original point about repetition and format and then seeing what comes out of that is quite fundamental. If there is a creative agenda for this project, that's where its centre of gravity would be.

RS: When we first started, there was the idea of maybe having a theme for the month. But it was just too prescriptive. And now we are very loosely looking at spaces across Africa.

RC: To try and open your network up?

RS: Yes. And not project spaces necessarily, but really focusing our upcoming programme on working with people across the continent. Where things can just happen with no budget, just an Internet connection, and work that lends itself to such a project. We are looking at people working with similar models.

EK: I think much of the success of the Parking Gallery is in its diversity. It has become quite impactful. Coming from this framework of repetition – that is the relevance. But expansion is next on the agenda.

RC: The network is important in your context; you don't want the same five people coming every week.

JG: Drunk Wits students (laughs).

RC: Is there anything else you would like to add that we haven't covered?

RS: I think the only thing is something I have noticed a lot with the best commercial spaces and galleries, is that you work with people you can work with. There is no grandstanding. You have honest conversations, and it flows. The best work is done at the Parking Gallery is when there is a fantastic discussion, not heated or sensationalist. Just something interesting that happens in a moment.

RC: That suggests a democracy in both in the way that you work and in the model itself, that is kind of counter to traditional gallery models.

JG: I think the idea of doing things in a more normal, humane way is interesting. I think to run a commercial gallery in this country you would have to be fairly crazy. You have a tiny market. It's really very hard to do that. And those people have to be mad, alongside a host of other things (laughs), to really make it work. And in a way, within a European framework, these spaces are seen as being the alternative or peculiar and I think in this context they have a potential to be much more normal.

RC: Artist-run spaces are often, in a European format, used to enact a critique on a larger institutional framework.

JG: Absolutely, and I think that is of little interest in this context in a way.

9.2 *A conversation with Cara Snyman of the Goethe-Institut*

Date: 06/03/2014

Venue: Goethe-Institut, Johannesburg, South Africa

Present: Robyn Cook, Cara Snyman

Robyn Cook (RC): I wanted to speak first about GoetheOnMain and its relationship to the paradigm of New-Institutionalism. There are so few project spaces in South Africa. The Goodman Project Space is now defunct. So GoetheOnMain is, in fact, the only project space in the country currently showcasing and funding experimental work. Could you give me some background to the project space, when did it start, what was the initial impetus behind it, and so on?

CS: We opened it in May 2009. The idea was to look at our own role [as the Goethe-Institut] within South Africa. We were really concerned with the quite paternalistic way in which European institutions often function abroad, especially in Africa. This idea of 'bringing content', which the local context is then expected to respond to. We found this very problematic, obviously, and it's not a way that we wanted to work. So one of our ideas was to have an independent platform that would be decided on by South African professionals, but also be run by the artists. So not to say 'we are here to make things happen' but rather 'we can provide you with space to make what you want happen'. Which is a little bit different than how things usually operate. Certainly, it is also an awareness of what it is that one leaves behind in the end. What kind of infrastructure is developed and physical infrastructure. So it came from quite a critical space.

RC: So have you been involved right from the beginning- from 2009?

CS: Yes.

RC: And has the format of the programme developed or changed as you've gone along?

CS: It's changed in some ways, but it mostly depends on the kind of projects in the space. Things don't always function completely independently. So in an ideal world we give support financially, do basic things for the opening, the press, and so on – and then the artist comes into the space and it functions independently as an artist-run space. So it's really just about giving the very basic infrastructure. And saying to somebody, so it's yours now – do what you need to do.

RC: The programme itself is very diverse. There is screenings, dance, discussions, more traditional ‘exhibitions’ – it’s genuinely a ‘laboratory’ platform. Was there any discussion in the beginning about having some kind of framework for the kind of work shown?

CS: There is an underlying framework, but the framework is quite loose. Part of it is that we wanted people to engage with that particular space, to be connected to Johannesburg and the urban City Deep area. And of course, that’s quite broad. But for us, it’s key not to have projects fly in and fly out. Which is also the way Goethe-Institut works. That we are interested in supporting projects from the ground up and forming sustainable long-term relationships.

RC: How do you see the difference between the exhibitions at the Goethe-Institut and GoetheOnMain?

CS: Well curating at the Goethe-Institut is directly connected to the actual institution as it’s in the lobby of the institute’s space. So for better or for worse it is very much involved with the students that move through, with the administration on that side, the office, all of us that sit here and work. And of course it is connected to the Goethe-Institut. So there are certain limitations connected to that. Certainly in the beginning, before we started doing renovations it looked a lot also like an office. It felt quite sort of accidental institutional space.

RC: When did the exhibitions start at the Institut?

CS: When I started in 2008. But I didn’t have a programme at that stage so it’s been developmental. The benefit of this space, and why we keep it going, is that it’s very flexible. If we are running an architectural programme, for example, we can say we want to bring in a specific project to speak to that. So we can always use the space connected to our programmes. It also becomes kind of like a connective tissue because obviously, we run a lot of projects off premises, most of our projects don’t happen in the Goethe-Institut itself, so it’s a nice to connect with the rest of the programme.

RC: Do other GoetheOnMain-type project spaces exist elsewhere internationally? Is it kind of a standard Goethe-Institut initiative or is it quite unique?

CS: Ludlow38 in New York is similar in some way. That is the only other project space that I know of.

RC: So it’s quite specific?

CS: Yes, it's quite exceptional. Also what they do at Ludlow38 is to have German curators that are selected and then they run programmes there for 6 months to a year. It's a very different idea.

RC: Earlier we spoke about the idea of you wanting to create kind of an open platform and not dictate agendas, was there also a sense that this kind of space was needed here?

CS: Absolutely, this was very clear from the beginning. At that stage, there weren't any project spaces. In the meantime, there's been the Parking Gallery, CHR, and so on. But most of the project spaces have very particular agendas – they aren't just open to anybody. So they are also different. But at that stage in 2008, there was very little happening in terms of project or experimental spaces. And certainly, nothing that was inter-disciplinary. So there was a significant gap. There are so many people trying to say so many things, and there is fantastic artistic content and there just isn't enough space to show it.

RC: It's interesting the way that Maboneng has become a cultural precinct now.

CS: We were there prior to all of that. When we were there, it was still a construction site. There was nothing there at all.

RC: Do you know what the GoetheOnMain space was before? It has an interesting layout.

CS: It was used as an industrial space as far as I know. It had been a factory.

RC: And then why was that site decided on?

CS: The first thing for us was that the Goethe-Institut is here in the leafy suburbs, it's quite residential, sort of an obvious 'arts-scene' spot. The Goodman Gallery is around the corner, David Krut, and so on. It's sort of like an established scene. We were really interested in pursuing something else – to have a younger more urban audience. When I started in 2008, Peter Anders and Katrin had also just started. So the three of us were like a brand new department, really. And at that stage there was an audience that was much older, and mostly white middle class with German ties. So having different projects for different audiences was really important to us. So today that's not true anymore – the Goethe-Institut actually pulls a very similar audience to GoetheOnMain now, which is in itself quite interesting.

RC: So what would you describe the audience as now?

CS: It depends on the project. We had the Muntu Vilakazi exhibition open a couple of weeks ago. And at the same time they have these once a month Thursday night

markets. And the night markets is very much about the Northern suburbs ‘braving’ the trip to town. So it really depends on the show, and what is happening alongside it.

RC: Could we talk a bit about the applications? How have they changed from the first open call to now?

CS: There are a hell of a lot more! Last year we got 65, which is a lot to work through – there are only 8-10 slots a year. Of course, there are a number of them that obviously didn’t read the brief or bother to check what the space was about, but mostly there are very interesting proposals that are hotly debated. The criteria question comes up in those meetings. How do we measure this? Is it more important to give a young artist a first showing? Or is it more important to give an established artist a space for them to show experimental work? And what if either one of those doesn’t engage particularly with the city context but they are doing really interesting work that wouldn’t be shown elsewhere? So there are always these sorts of conversations. In the beginning, we thought it would mainly be for young artists. We imagined that we would open the space and it would only be for people who are showing work for the first time, theatre productions, choreographers, whoever, but that are just starting out. And over time we realised there is such a massive gap for spaces that show experimental non-commercial work, that we were getting really established artists sending in proposals. You kind of look at proposals and think, ‘wait, what?’ Why are they approaching us, surely this is for the Market Theatre or the Dance Umbrella. I mean what’s happening? Why is there such a dearth of space? You know, GoetheOnMain is a difficult, tricky space to work in.

RC: I think that’s what Lauren and I have found with Sober & Lonely, is how keen people are to participate. Artists who are really established and you wouldn’t think they would be interested.

CS: It’s incredible.

RC: I think it has a lot to do with not having to produce work to then sell. I mean, how many of the artists on the programme actually try to sell work?

CS: They can do with the work as they please it’s a general Goethe-Institut policy. If we support a production of a film, of visual art, of choreography, or whatever, we support it; we don’t dictate how the content is used afterwards. It might be that they use the space to develop the content and go on to have a full opera version at the Met, unlikely. But we don’t define that. The same goes for artwork, if artworks are produced

with the grant money for that space. They can go on and sell it if they want or do another show. We ask that they mention we co-produced it.

RC: But has there ever been anybody who actually sells work in that space?

CS: Let me put it like this; I've just been contacted actually by somebody who was interested in buying work from another show.

RC: Is it a caravan? With flashing lights? (laughs)

CS: Sorry to disappoint (laughs). But I just put them in touch directly with the artist. If the artist wants to sell them work they will sell them work and that's it. We don't get involved with that at all. I know for instance with certain exhibitions people have been quite up front with the fact that they want to sell. But I'm like that's fine but understand that we are working with public money, and so please respect GoetheOnMain as a non-commercial space.

RC: That focus is why you are the only authentic project space in the country. Nirox Projects, for example, refers to itself as a project space – but at the end of the day its a commercial gallery.

CS: I also think the difference with Nirox is that it's not entirely clear how a project is selected.

RC: Or how you approach them.

CS: Absolutely. And you also pay for that space. It's a commercial gallery.

RC: But that brings into question the practicalities of sustainability.

CS: Absolutely. Places like Blank Projects and the Parking Gallery are really one-man armies – they are maintained through an individual's energy. Without it, they close. Or they need to shift to a commercial model, as we have seen with Blank.

9.3 *A conversation with Jonathan Garnham of Blank Projects*

Date: 26/03/2014

Venue: Johannesburg & Cape Town, South Africa

Via Skype

Present: Robyn Cook, Jonathan Garnham

Robyn Cook (RC): To begin with maybe we could chat about the initial impetus behind Blank?

Jonathan Garnham (JG): Blank started in July 2005. I had been living in Berlin and came back to South at the end of 2002. I had spent 10 years in Berlin prior to that where I was involved in a kind of project space as well. But there were a lot of those kinds of spaces in Berlin and that time. A lot of creative people and a lot happening. I came back to South Africa and saw that there was nothing like that going on. I thought then, and I still do, that it is a very healthy thing to have independent project spaces. Those days in Cape Town you had a handful of art galleries. The art environment was different then to what it is now. Bell-Roberts and João Ferreira were pretty much the only two galleries showing contemporary art here. I was still an artist and actually worked quite a bit with João and discovered what it was like as an artist here. In those days you had to pay rent to the gallery, pay for the printing and the posting of your invites, and so on. It wasn't that professional to tell you the truth; it was very provincial. The point is that there were no alternative spaces for people to show art, and because of those conditions people were forced to sort of recoup their money – it was commercially orientated. And having come from Berlin where there was an abundance of those kinds of spaces, I just thought it would be great to have a space like that. So I was kind of thinking of how to do it, and I was quite fortunate in that some people that I knew had bought an old warehouse in the Bo-Kaap and there was a tiny room, on street level in that warehouse; it was 18 square-metres that I was able then to rent from them. So I was prepared to put not only my time but also some money into doing up a space. I wasn't really thinking about how to make it sustainable really, I just really wanted to do it. In a way, I considered it part of my practice – an extension of my work as an artist – I was still a practicing artist then. So really I just wanted to create a space. And that's how the name came up as well – just creating a blank situation for colleagues to fill. I renovated the space into a kind of a white-cube –

it had a big glass window facing the street, so that was the main way that people could view what was inside. I was working in education at the time, which is why I could afford to rent the space, but there wasn't time for people to man the space. So it was only open for the opening of the event and by appointment if anyone wanted to see it, or people could see the work through the window. So I just started without much of a medium-term view, let alone a long-term view. That's how Blank started and from that I began putting an exhibition programme together. In the beginning, I never knew what I'd be doing in a month's time. And often the shows were very short; they would be a couple of weeks long each.

RC: How did you choose the artists?

JG: When I was in education I was working with a bunch of young artists. Remember I had been away for 15 years, so I didn't really know the art scene in South Africa. But some of the lecturers were young recent Stellenbosch graduates that I had gotten to know and got to know their work to a certain extent. For example, the very first exhibition was by Pierre Fouché who was a colleague of mine, and I just thought he did amazing work, so it started off by asking Pierre whether he would like to show a project that he was working on. And in fact it wasn't a finished work that he showed back then. It was a process of a tapestry that he was working on, which I think took him about two years to complete. So that is quite a good example. It wasn't like a finished work for sale; it was about the process and the content of what he was doing. The second show was by Nhlanhla Hlongwane, who was a ceramics teacher at the place where I was working. So, in the beginning, it just started off with people close to me whose work I had seen incidentally. From that an artist might have drawn my attention to a colleague of theirs that they thought was then doing interesting work. It just moved on from there really, when I look back at the first six exhibitions they were selected quite arbitrarily really.

RC: So at that stage, you didn't have an open call or anything?

JG: No, nothing as official as that. When you look at that first group of artists were friends of Lisa Grobler and myself. That's important to note. When I opened the space, I realised very quickly that in order to run the space I needed help. So I asked Lisa Grobler whether she'd be interested in doing this with me. And she was. So she would have brought in Lynette Bester and Tamlyn Blake and Christopher Slack because they were all connections of hers. She was also working with me at that college, and like Pierre, a recent Stellenbosch graduate. It was started in the beginning by Lisa and

myself; it's important to mention that. Then if I look at the next shows, we had an artist called Kerim Seiler from Switzerland. He was doing a residency at Greatmore at the time. Greatmore offered them exhibitions, but it wasn't really all that attractive to him to do a show there, and he really liked what was happening at Blank and wanted to show the results of his residency there. He was quite instrumental in then introducing me to Pro Helvetia who had an existing residency programme. Which was a great move, because we started hosting residency artists as well and received money for doing that. Most of the money went to artists for their accommodation, studio, materials and all that. But there was a smaller admin fee of a few thousand Rand a month. Which we would then take and use that to pay the rent. So within, let's say, several months we started working with Pro Helvetia there was income suddenly, we had a bank account where there was some money where we could now pay the rent. Like I said, the first few months we paid the rent out of our own pockets and with hosting the residencies we now had the rent covered. It wasn't that expensive. Back then it was something like R1500 a month. That's how things just started. You know I see in 2006 the list of artists: we had people like James Webb, Cameron Platter, Jackson Hlungwani, some good names. After quite a short amount of time, we started getting some good artists there. And people started approaching us to show at Blank, and then it was this process of selection. And also approaching people ourselves, if we thought people were doing interesting things we'd go and talk to them.

RC: How was it working with Pro Helvetia? Did that affect your initial intention? Were you able to choose the artists coming from Switzerland or did Pro Helvetia do that?

JG: No we didn't get to choose the artists – they are chosen in Switzerland and then decided where they wanted to go whether to Johannesburg or Cape Town, and off they go. It did become more selective over time, but back then we really just took whoever came along. I think in 2006 we had two Swiss artists, Kerim Seiler and Peter Regli. It was amazing to be able to show artists from outside of our little world in Cape Town. Blank's main aim was to show experimental art, in other words, art that wasn't necessarily a commercial prospect. To offer a platform for younger artists to do solo presentations or shows, and the other reason was to host residencies and to show artists from elsewhere. Those were three of the main aims I think.

RC: When you say host residencies, did you ever actually host them in the space?

JG: No. In South Africa, as you know, we are not supported that well by local or national government. So there wasn't a studio and accommodation set up there. So we

would organise the artist's accommodation and a studio depending on what their practice was like. I mean Peter Regli didn't really need a studio, Kerim Seiler did, Phillip Gasser and Bruno Tremblay did. So we would organise them studios, often in a kind of communal studio, which extended the reach of the practice. It involved the gallery and whomever they were sharing a studio with. And back then I was still practicing as an artist and I had a studio, Pierre was also in that studio. So the studio was a kind of an extension of Blank. In a kind of loose and informal way. And it was another way of these artists getting to know local artists who were working in the studio. So we did it on a kind of ad hoc basis with whatever we could find. And it was quite a hassle to tell you the truth, because the artists always wanted to come in summer. It took up a lot of our time for very little remuneration. And that money we didn't use to pay ourselves or anything we just put it back into renting the gallery, telephone costs, material costs, paint and polyfilla, vinyl and what have you. Any money we had, we just put back into the space.

RC: Just going back to what you said about working with some really established artists within the first year or two, where you surprised at the response from South African artists?

JG: No, I don't think the word I would use was surprised. Someone like James Webb didn't have a space to show his work simply because there wasn't anywhere else to show it. I also think that Lisa and myself had some credibility. So I don't think I was surprised. I don't think I even thought all that much about it. In 2006 we did 16 exhibitions, we just loved what we were doing. It was great. I mean it did start taking up more and more of our time, I'm sure you know that from your residencies. I think during the course of that year we were able to pay ourselves the grand sum of R1500 each for our time because we had applied for funding from Pro Helvetia. In the first year, it was it was something like R30 000 for the whole year. So we had that on top of our three-admin fees a year. We were probably working on a budget of about R50 000 a year in 2006 or 2007. Without which, I don't know if we would have been able to sustain it. And that funding grew over the next few years. We were very new to this whole fundraising thing. Putting out a fundraising proposal is definitely not my forte.

RC: So with the funding from Pro Helvetia were you allowed to do what you wanted with that money at that stage?

JG: Yes. Fortunately, the funding that Blank received first from Pro Helvetia and later from Goethe-Institut never prescribed what we should do. And back then they also literally paid me into my bank account. We weren't any kind of legal entity, so that was also quite fortunate. They understood what we were doing and by the time we were applying for funding, we had a track record of exhibitions. We had evidence, and they could see, I guess, the quality of the programme. I often find when you can explain something simply it's the easiest way to get funding. We were offering a place for artists to for show for free. That was one of the basic things, and it had to remain a basic thing and it did, you know.

RC: It's great to be trusted and not micro-managed to the point of incapacitation.

JG: Absolutely. I don't think there was ever a time where they thought their money was being poorly spent. We delivered. I mean you can see with the exhibitions we put on back then. Sometimes we sacrificed quality at the expense of quantity. But there was such a need as well. There were so many artists who wanted to show their work. We kind of tried to squeeze everyone in.

RC: And you were working at the same time?

JG: Yes, but by then I started working part time. So I was juggling part time work, my studio practice, and running Blank. So we were doing it with nothing for the first two years. And then, like I said, the first time we received funding was in 2008. So the first couple of years we were truly doing it out of the love of it.

RC: And in terms of your own practice...?

JG: It faded away basically (laughs). But Blank became my practice essentially. It satisfied me creatively. I've never been the kind of guy who can go work seven or eight hours at night in the studio by myself every day. I'm not that person. Even in Berlin, I would be running a space combined with running a club that happened once a week. Where we were doing a lot of projections and things like that. I've discovered I really like dealing with people. And coupled with that, my practice was never really gallery orientated; I never worked with a gallery and I wasn't really getting any income from my practice. I carry out the odd commission. One thing I learnt to do during my studies in Germany was work with stone. And I have always had, and always parallel to my studio practice, carried out commissions and making stone sculptures for people. I kept my studio up until the end of 2012, I think. But in the course of 2012, it just gathered dust, and I put the time that I would've spent in the studio into Blank. I mean already then I was pretty much working for Blank, even though I wasn't earning any

money. It's only now, in 2014, that I can pay myself a salary that I can survive on. Up until now, I've never been able to do that. But now I'm jumping the gun a bit. The point is, I had to work and run Blank, and I've got two kids and I'm quite a participatory father so I just didn't have the time for studio practice, it just faded away really.

RC: The shift in role is very interesting. I was laughing with Lauren the other day and said maybe we should have been party planners rather. You end up becoming more of an events manager or events planner you know – it can be very administrative.

JG: Absolutely. And that's one thing that did start increasing more and more. It's not just fun stuff, but the admin as well. We started realising if we were going to be able to receive funding from other funding sources, like the National Arts Council, for example, you either apply as an individual or as an organisation and we realised in order to be able to receive more funding we'd need to become a legal entity. And to that end, with the help of a law firm acting on a pro-bono basis we set up a trust called the Contemporary Art Development Trust. And that's been going since 2009. It actually didn't help all that much (laughs) because we never received any funding. That's also a bloody point for your doctorate we never received any funding from a local or national sources.

RC: I was about to ask. Nothing from the NAC at all?

JG: No. And that's where we should've been receiving our core funding from. It angers me in a way – we were showing mainly young South African artists, giving them a platform, promoting contemporary art, all that stuff. It wasn't through lack of trying we were just never supported by the city of Cape Town or the national government at all. And that's also a big reason for why they aren't all that many project spaces in South Africa. The government, local or national, should be supporting initiatives like that. That wouldn't even cost all that much. Young practitioners, they just need the rent paid somewhere really. But going back to 2008 – we were receiving Pro Helvetia funding by then – so we took over the room next door as well – doubled in size.

RC: I don't know Cape Town very well. What is the Bo-Kaap like? Is there a lot of foot traffic?

JG: It was on the periphery of the Bo-Kaap, on Buitengracht Street. Buitengracht is from the old Dutch, which you might know, – it was on the 'outside gracht' – the periphery of the centre. I live on the road behind there, which is purely residential, but Buitengracht Street is a mixture, there are offices and like I said that space used to be a

warehouse. It's an interesting mix, and it's a working class neighbourhood. Today it's still mainly Muslim; it became known over the years for being Malay – the Malay quarter. So that was quite interesting working in a predominantly Muslim neighbourhood, but it didn't really affect us. We didn't have hassles; it's quite conservative in many ways. But I live here and know the people in the neighbourhood. For example, I remember at Ramadan we had an opening and we didn't serve any alcohol. We couldn't show any blatantly pornographic images or anything like that that people could see through the window that was one thing we did need to be aware of. But we weren't too bothered; we can't censor ourselves.

RC: And then in 2009 you moved into the new space?

JG: Yes. By then I was also a bit tired – we'd been doing the same thing for a few years and started questioning what's the point. There was a question of grow or shut up shop. A lot of people still miss that old space; there was something very charming about it and something really nice about how the artists responded to the space. But for one magic year, we had funding from Pro Helvetia and the Goethe-Institut, so we had some resources to make the plunge into a bigger space and pay more rent. It was quite a stressful thing to do – signing a lease and not knowing if I would be able to pay the rent, which was quite a bit more. We moved from what was 18 square metres, to double that when we took the space next door and then to the Woodstock space, which was about 50 square meters. So that was also very exciting, that you know, that growth. I'd known of this run-down building opposite Stevenson and Goodman and one day I just saw this 'To-Let' sign up. It was actually in the evening, and I phoned straight away. They auctioned all the shops in this building; there were five available and we ended up taking the largest one. But it took several months before we could actually move in. And when we did move all we did was get a truck and clean it out and build one wall in the space. It was a dump; there was rubbish, corrugated iron on the façade. It had been used as a 'tik' den. We cleaned it out and built a wall to accommodate a projection, we borrowed electricity from the shop next door and just started. And then it was quite interesting because then we started fixing up the space as we went along. Sort of between and sometimes even during exhibitions we'd be there renovating. So spatially it was quite exciting. The first exhibition was floor to ceiling projections inside this very rough space, with one very clean wall that I made. And we'd literally take down the projectors at the end of the day, and then put them back again the next day. Stephen [Hobbs] was the second person to show at the space,

and he was a perfect guy to work with within that kind of environment. He worked with the exposed structures of the building. For Candice's [Breitz] show, for example, we had to suspend monitors from the roof as there was no ceiling at that stage. The first show in that space where the construction was mostly completed was James' show. And that was a really interesting show that dealt with the area and the gentrification of Woodstock.

RC: Did the type of work you were showing change when you moved into the new space?

JG: It did – it became more of a gallery now because the original space, as I said, functioned with people seeing the work through the window. And now we had two spaces. A big front space, and a smaller back space, and behind that a storeroom and office. It became a 'proper' gallery space. And the artists' work changed accordingly. Often the artists made that choice; we weren't that prescriptive – they also wanted to sell their work and make some income. Having said that, most of those shows in 2010 were not commercially orientated at all actually. Trasi Henen and Mary Wafer's were because they were paintings, but other than that it was all performances, installations, and that kind of work. But it was a strong programme. In 2010 Cape Town was quite exciting – there was Stevenson and Goodman and What if the World.

RC: So did it feel as though Cape Town art scene was becoming more vibrant at that stage?

JG: Prior to that even. Goodman moved to Cape Town, and Stevenson moved from Greenpoint to Woodstock. And What if the World moved to Woodstock and grew into a proper gallery. Stevenson and Goodman brought in highly professional gallery systems. Those were the three proper galleries operating then. And we came in as sort of more underground, alternative, space.

RC: Did you have opening hours at this stage?

JG: We did. When we moved into the new space, it became necessary. I can't remember what the exact opening hours were, but they would have been short because both Pierre and I would still have been doing other things to earn money.

RC: How did it work if there was a more commercial show – Trasi's for example – did you work on a commission basis?

JG: We did, I can't remember how much it was. But you know that also then started becoming a source of income for us in order just to run the show. And back then we didn't know much about selling art and we didn't know any collectors, it sort of was a

coincidence that stuff sold. But that's how we slowly started getting into this, the more commercial aspect of things. And without those sales of those three or four shows that year we wouldn't have been able to pay the rent or ourselves to run the place.

RC: Was the transition difficult for you? Ideologically? Practically?

JG: No, it happened quite naturally over a long period of time. I ran Blank as a project space for six years, and like I said when we sold work the artists were very happy. So it's not that I had an ideological problem with it, I think I changed along with the project space. And we also just needed that income in order to run things at the end of the day, to the benefit of the artists as well – to be able to put out professional press releases, invites and have a website where the work was shown, and so on. So, I didn't have an ideological problem. I might have had that back in 2007 or 2008 – I was quite anti-commerce in the beginning – but that was also to do with my lifestyle. My history is squatting in London, squatting in Berlin. So that's also been a personal choice of mine to live like that but I've just changed over the years, and it happened in such a slow and natural way. I mean, there was criticism from many people and that 'ah you selling out' – but I didn't let that affect me; I thought *you* go do a project space for six years and don't pay yourself. By that time I also thought, come on there must be younger people who can do this. I mean I'm 48 years old, you know, and for the first time in my life I can start paying myself a salary from my project space. So there was some criticism from certain sectors. It's a funny little world that we live in – this art world, but if you're not academic in an institution getting a salary, and you want to devote your time full-time to contemporary art you going have to earn money from it somehow. Also, another one of the things that I found quite exhausting about having a project space is that artists come and go, and come and go, and it's almost like watching a Ping-Pong ball bounce. I was also getting tired of fundraising, going to people with a begging bowl and trying to explain to them what we were doing – and I wasn't very good at it – we only received money from Pro Helvetia and Goethe-Institute. There was something more simple and honest about simply making a sale you know. And I knew that actually that was made the artists happiest as well. It was exciting for me to start working with artists like James [Webb], who was one of the first artists I took on. The conversations started becoming different, thinking about longer term projects, about strategies, both creative and career strategies. Again it was a natural transition. And I guess that was during the course of 2011. Another thing is people coming to South Africa from elsewhere, say European curators, for whatever

reason, would often tend to overlook a space like Blank, just like I'm sure they wouldn't come visit Sober & Lonely you know. They would go to Goodman, Stevenson you know what I mean, that kind of thing. I think I was thinking that at the time by running a gallery – I can really help like ten artists a lot, as opposed to a hundred artists a little I guess. But I think one of the reasons was purely financial. By then the Goethe-Institut was our only funder. And in conversations with Cara I realised that it was going to come to an end. A lot of these funding bodies fund only for three years – Pro Helvetia for example, aims to fund someone for three years in the hope that the organisation becomes self-sustainable. So I think that was important to us to become self-sustainable, and the only way we could do that really was through sales. We still do a little bit of fundraising for certain things, but I negotiated with Goethe-Institut in their final year of funding in 2012. I said look the money that we are receiving from you is obviously not enough to sustain this thing, and we're not receiving funding from anywhere else, so we need to make sure we get it ourselves. So for their final year of funding I said look what I propose is half of our programme be more project orientated or not commercially orientated and the other half we would like to sell work, and they understood that and were happy with that. It was in away a perfect transition – we had a year to get our shit together. At the start of 2013, there was no one funding us anymore. We had to start selling R250 000 worth of art just to pay the rent. So it was a financial reality, and we were quite fortunate that by then we had experience and respect from the community. And we'd in a way done six years of research, so we really knew what we were doing when it came to putting on exhibitions; from putting the vinyl on the window to doing a press release, we had like a database of over a thousand people, you know we were kind of set up. So yes it was mainly financially driven – by now I had invested so much in Blank that it had sort of become my career you know, I didn't just want to let it die. I wanted it to continue to grow, and it has. I mean Blank has just continually grown since that tiny space in 2008 and it's rewarding for me – the challenge now is to be sustainable and relevant. We have a good programme still – I could just put on painting shows and make a lot more money, but that's never been my aim- Blank never was and still isn't driven by me wanting to get rich. I do want to make a living from it and to be able to pay my daughter's school fees. I still drive a fucked up 1991 Nissan 'bakkie' (laughs) and I'd like to get a nicer car eventually one day. But right now we put the money back into things like making catalogues, and participating in art fairs, and so on.

RC: Looking at your artists you've got Josh Ginsberg, James Webb and Donna Kukama – they certainly don't make traditional saleable work, so how do you get that balance right?

JG: Yes. Well, I can remember starting off working with two artists who are poles opposite each other, James Webb and Jan-Henri Booyens. And they are, I mean (laughs) as people and in terms of what they make, polar opposites. They were two people that I just thought were great artists, and over time had gotten to know them through conversations, and they wanted to work with me, and I wanted to work with them. And it pretty much started off like that. Donna was another one who I knew wasn't represented. So it was James Webb, Donna, Jan-Henri, those were sort of the more established young artists who were not represented by anyone who I thought were good artists. And then I took on some really young interesting artists like Kyle Morland, Jared Ginsberg and Gerda Scheepers, Turiya Magadla and then later Kerry Chaloner. Ingshaad Adams I actually taught when I was in further education. He's a young Muslim guy from Bonteheuwel who I taught back at the college of Cape Town, and I had followed his work from a distance the whole time. Just people that I believed in. We do have a young stable – that's one of the things we are also known for. So how did I choose them? I just think they're good artists, and they're good people and that's also important for me, that we are able to get along well with each other. It's maybe a failing, but I don't know, it is definitely important. Over the first year or so I was taking on artists quite quickly, but that slowed right down because I'm trying to be more strategic with the capacity that we have. We don't have the same capacity that some of the bigger galleries have and it's about being able to do the necessary work for these artists. So I could click my fingers and take on another ten artists by the end of the week, but because they're young artists, because their practice is often quite difficult, definitely for the local market, they need a lot of promoting them and trying to place them in collections. So we don't really want to take on any more artists.

RC: So is a lot of your time now spent speaking to collectors?

JG: I probably should spend more time doing that (laughs). I sometimes think it's not in my nature to be a gallerist, selling art is not my forte. But having said that that's just one part of being a gallerist. I hope that just by having a solid programme with good artists that the rest will come. That might be a bit naïve, but so far it seems to be working. I mean we're still around as a gallery, which still surprises me. Collectors have also sort of slowly found us. As a gallery, people understand you are 'open for

business'. Before that, we were this tiny project space; people possibly didn't know how to handle us, and now it's obvious – we sell art. So now collectors can approach us as well. So some of my time goes towards developing relationships with collectors and collections. A lot of my time goes toward dealing with our artists, talking about their work, and studio visits – sending images to and fro and talking about what they next solo show should be about and that kind of thing. There's also a hell of a lot of admin as well. It's been a speed learning curve for me to move from running a project space to a commercial gallery. We still have a lot to learn.

RC: Do you find that you get a lot of sales at the openings?

JG: No never. We do our business primarily before the opening. That's part of communication with collectors, letting them know what's coming up. Trying to get the work documented in a PDF and then sending that through to collectors. So a lot of sales are made before the opening – we know which collectors are interested in which artists, and we'll be in communication with those collectors and trying to place work before the exhibition. Having said that what we also have is a kind of 'stock' so there are also sales that happen on an ongoing basis.

RC: So it's quite rare that you'll get somebody stopping by the gallery and saying: 'oh that's nice I'll buy it'?

JG: Very rare – it almost never happens. But there is quite a nice story; right now we have two sound installations by James Webb in our gallery, that I never thought we would sell (laughs), and a couple of weeks back some older German man comes walking in – a typical kind of educated tourist kind of person. I engaged him telling them about the work and you know he listens to the two pieces and then off he goes. He pops back twenty minutes later asking if I'd seen a camera he had lost either at Blank or at the Goodman. And I looked around, and it helped a little bit that I could speak German I guess – we looked, and we couldn't find it. The next day he came in again, and he asked to listen to the one work, *Children Of The Revolution* – I played it for him, and he said can I reserve it until next Tuesday? (laughs). He is a director of a museum in Germany. And we actually ended up making the sale; the first walk in sale is a James Webb sound piece. So that was really amazing. But no we don't really get walk-ins – it's more targeted. What some galleries do is create hype around the artists and then at the exhibition almost like a feeding frenzy ensues, and I find that quite tricky to do. Like I said, some of the things around selling are not in my nature; I think I need someone in my team who is a much better sales person and more charming and

sales driven. It's a tricky business selling art, especially with our local market, which is relatively small and quite conservative. Coupled with that we have very few institutions. If we were living in Germany, for example, a lot of our business would be done with institutions that have acquisition budgets. So we deal with a very small market here, and it is challenging. Part of my plan is to try and access the international market, and to that end, we do an art fair in Europe every year, but its expensive. For Liste, which is a young art fair in Basel in June, you have to have a really good programme to get accepted into that fair, and if you're accepted it's costly – I just paid them R95 000 for the stand.

RC: And you have to get all of the work over there.

JG: Exactly. The project cost around R140 000. Last year I did NADA New Art Dealers Alliance section of Art Cologne, and the year before that I did Art Berlin Contemporary.

RC: And did you find them quite successful?

JG: We hardly made any sales from NADA or Art Cologne. But it's about just slowly trying to get your name and the name of your artists out there. My aim was always to get into Liste which is the right place for a gallery like Blank, and I hope we can stay on there for a few years to come. I think it will help a lot. There aren't that many galleries in South Africa, maybe ten, and Goodman and Stevenson are out of our league anyway. But it's not my aim to be a massive gallery – I'd like to keep things pretty small and tight. And doing the international fairs on top of that – I think there's definitely a gap in the market. We don't have the resources that a lot of galleries have, but I think we've got the content.

RC: And how have you found the South African Art Fair over the last few years?

JG: As art fairs go, they are not as strong as some others I've been on. And I do have my problems with them. I mean last year I made a bit of a point going to the Art Fair where we took the smallest possible stand, and then did a big show at the Ithuba space. I mean it's so weird that it's in Sandton, I don't understand why it has to happen there. So I do have my problems with them, but at the same time, it's necessary that we as a Cape Town gallery have a presence in Joburg. We also did business there, so it was worth it. And now we have this Cape Town Art Fair, which is in its infancy, and you know that's a bit of a no-brainer just to get good stuff in a 'bakkie' and just take it over there. So they are valuable for us and good for our industry. They are trade fairs at the end of the day, and you go there to make money

not to put on a curated project. I have done that before sort of at the Joburg Art Fair while we were still a project space, as you know, you know where it was people say what an amazing stand, what pretty cool work, that kind of thing and you don't make any sales.

9.4 *A conversation with Patrick Mudekereza of Picha Centre de Art*

Date: 06/05/2014

Venue: VANSa, King Kong Building, 1st floor, 6 Verwey Street, Johannesburg

Present: Robyn Cook, Patrick Mudekereza

Robyn Cook (RC): I've been doing a bit of research about Picha.

Patrick Mudekereza (PM): There's not that much information (laughs).

RC: Not so much. You don't have a website?

PM: We don't, we have a domain. But we will work on the website. I think I will discuss that with Lauren [von Gogh]. We have a small grant for that so we will work on that.

RC: I did find some stuff on the New Museum website. There's a nice description there. So Picha started in 2006?

PM: That's true and not true (laughs). 2006 was the starting point of the project informally, but not as a structured initiative.

RC: So you and Sammy [Baloji] started the project informally in 2006?

PM: Yes. We were still part of another collective at that moment.

RC: So what were the ideas when you started? What were you envisaging?

PM: It was more of a way to go after the collective, which became too heavy for us. Because the collective was teenagers working together in the 90's who really just wanted to have fun and not do anything serious. But for us we wanted to become more professional. So when we met in the collective, he was a comic artist, and I was writing for the comics first, and then for like small videos, documentaries, that kind of thing. There is no art school in the DRC. Well, there is an art school, but its more technical, there is no university. There was no reference point so we were just exploring what we could do. We didn't know how it all worked; we just tried doing it. And so around 2006, it became very important for us to set up a type of professional collaboration to be open to the world as well. And from that, we started a process, which put us slowly out of the collective and pushed us to create a new framework to work with. And this framework still remains a collaboration between image and text – that's still a founding model of our structure. So Sammy works with image and I work with text. In 2008, we did our first Biennale, which was our founding project. In 2009 we decided to register Picha formally and be an organisation.

RC: As a non-profit organisation?

PM: Non-profit organisation registration is key for us in Congo. It seems as though it's not that important in South Africa, but in Congo it's critical.

RC: Why is that?

PM: Because if you don't have a registration you can't exist as an organisation. You can even be put in prison. For instance, even to put posters up you need to have a registration like an organisation.

RC: So you have to be formalized?

PM: Absolutely. To have an organisation bank account, and so on. The first project after the registration was named *Le Desert Imaginaire*. It was a dialogue between a collective of writers and video artists – some from abroad like Dorothee Kreutzfeldt, Berry Bickel from Mozambique, and also local video artists like El Magambo. It was a very important project for us as we were able to show our own production in the second Biennale with Simon Njami who was very happy to help us set up and to be the curator of it.

RC: Was Picha a full-time job at that stage?

PM: From 2003 until 2010 I was working for the French Cultural Centre. First in communications and then administration and then exhibition programming which was a full-time job. So I was running Picha at night. But it was fun. So I finished working for the French Cultural Centre in 2010, and we started the art centre.

RC: Where was Picha based at that stage?

PM: In the city centre of Lubumbashi. Sammy and I were living in the same flat, and it also served as the Picha office. But we started looking for a place to live with fewer power cuts. So we found a place in the city centre where the electricity is more stable. It was really big for the two of us – it was a compound with an empty abandoned house, and another building behind it. But the rent was still very cheap, so we could afford it. We also had a little money left over from our first projects, so we decided to invest that money in rebuilding the house to make it habitable. And in the end, it just grew bigger and bigger and bigger, and it became the Art Centre.

RC: Are you still living in the original place?

PM: No, no. I had to leave – there was no privacy – people would arrive on Sunday morning (laughs). I lived there for two years. But the centre is still there.

RC: It's an interesting thing living in a residency space that you are simultaneously running. With Lauren and I, staying in the original Sober & Lonely house with artists and working, it became quite exhausting.

PM: Yes. It was our place, but we became foreigners – we were pushed away by the art centre and all the activities. The art centre started giving a place to all artists, not only writers or photographers or visual artists – the musicians were the first to come, and they convinced us to open a studio for sound recording, and then people making films wanted to do other things. So it became an important home for all the young artists in the city. We were together at the French Cultural Centre, and when I left the French Cultural Centre there was a group of people who wanted to continue with that dynamic, so we continued that at Picha. So at that moment Picha was working across different areas – as an art centre, and a local art development tool, and in the Biennales – which is a more visible tool for the international scene.

RC: Could you tell me about your funding structures and economies?

PM: We are about 90% dependent on funding.

RC: And the other 10%?

PM: We pull that in from a few areas. For instance, for the last three years all the consultancy work, for UNESCO for example, that I did, I did through Picha. When I sit and act as a juror for selecting artists, I put that into Picha.

RC: When you initially started the space, and you were paying rent, were you paying that out of your salary from the French Cultural Centre?

PM: Yes totally, both Sammy and I. Sammy more in fact because he is now a famous photographer and his work is selling quite well.

RC: It's such an interesting thing re-investing your own salary within a project. Do you see it as a business or is it more about ensuring the sustainability of Picha?

PM: As long as I have enough money to live I have no problem. For many years I didn't have any bank account – all of my money went into Picha. So it was not easy. But now we have a three-year option to have co-funding. So you work for many years to establish the organisation, and now I can take a salary – and feel that it's ok and for the benefit of the organisation. And if the co-funding ends, and we can't continue running the centre, we will have to close it. Which would not be an easy decision. In the beginning, Picha was everything for Sammy and I – we had no families – but certain things change and we have to make decisions – to put in boundaries. So for the moment we have an Arts Collaboratory Grant, which will carry on for another two

years. And then we have a small grant from an American institution who work for human rights, but that is for a specific project. So that's the funding we have right now.

RC: How do you see your role at Picha? Do you see the administration as part of your practice?

PM: I think I'm spending more time as an administrator than as an artist. They are not the same thing. In French, we say *opérateur culturel*. I think the idea and the concept of a project are much more important than the resources – it's not a question of having more and more funds to do whatever. And that's what makes something different from doing the administration. I think these proposal forms they want everyone to have the same values, to share all the same vision of the world. We want this and that. That is a very simplistic way of thinking.

RC: What's interesting is that the vast majority of project spaces in Africa are funded by European institutions.

PM: Yes.

RC: Do you see yourself as an independent space then? Can you see yourself as independent?

PM: No one is independent (laughs).

RC: Do you feel like some of your projects are being directed because of a funder's particular agenda?

PM: It depends really on the funders. The Arts Collaboratory is really great – they don't prescribe anything. People often speak about European funding or local funding, but I think the situation is more complex than that. For me, one of the key points is funding from foreign corporation's operating in countries where they have political, maybe neo-colonialist, aims. But I think the most difficult issues around independence are linked to embassy funding – that money comes with a specific agenda and position on how the organisation should be run. For instance, I've done a project with the European Union and they had a specific framework of what our organisation should be – how to spend the funds, ways to make decisions, and so on. So I think the important thing about a funder is for them to understand the actual physiology of an organisation – who we are, what we do, and so on. Not for them to say we will give you € 100 000 but you can't spend it on 'x y z'. What is a challenge for local artist organisations is that, due to the global economic crisis, the only funding is being directed to humanitarian projects – for example, the empowerment of women, good governance grants on how to run the state, how to build democracy, and so on, and so

on. So those are pretty much the three funding models: the first one is grants from cultural institutions like Alliance Francaise, but those are quite small. The second model is through people working as artists or consultants and then putting that money back into the organisation. And the last one is through humanitarian sustainability projects.

RC: Have you worked on any of these humanitarian projects?

PM: For the Revolution Room project with VANSA, we have a grant of \$20 000 from an American organisation who are working for human rights. It wasn't an easy decision for me to apply for it, but my sister who was working with them said I should apply because of the kind of work we do. So, in this case, it was a good fit.

RC: The question of artists working on humanitarian projects, or acting in the role of social worker, can be potentially problematic.

PM: From what I have seen of humanitarian efforts in Congo, I think maybe artists are a safer bet (laughs). I think what is very important for anyone in that situation to regard the community as a whole – that's never the case. Communities are very varied. Artists, I think, are better equipped to capture this diversity – maybe at the end, it won't be relevant for advocacy, but at least it might help create a map of sorts to help people understand complex situations more.

RC: Have you ever looked at a commercial model for Picha? You said you had the sound studio?

PM: Yes that's also part of the 10% of what we were talking about. We don't have so many customers because we don't have a complete kit – we are still missing guitars – but it's still happening, so we get some funds from that. Another way to bring in some income, which we just started before I left, and which was quite a difficult decision to make, is that we have opened a bar in the art centre.

RC: And do you charge your residency artists?

PM: No. Lubumbashi is a destination that international artists to want to come to, also if we start charging and expecting money we won't have artists coming – they will be tourists. So there is never a charge for artists-in-residence – we have three rooms available, and they are always for free. Sometimes if an artist comes with a large-scale funded project we can come to an agreement – but even then we charge \$20 dollars or something, and a normal hotel in Lubumbashi is at least \$80.

RC: Are there any other artist-run programmes in Lubumbashi?

PM: There is nothing else. There is the French Institute, there is the cultural museum, and there is one woman who runs a performing arts centre for the youth. That's all. So the landscape is really empty. The need for space also makes it quite overwhelming for us. For the moment we have hired two people – an administrator and a programme manager officer to help.

RC: Is there any funding from government sources?

PM: There is a Department of Arts and Culture, but they don't have enough to pay their own lights (laughs).

9.5 *A conversation with Rangoato Hlasane of Keleketla!*

Date: 06/05/2014

Venue: Wits School of the Arts, Braamfontein, Johannesburg

Present: Robyn Cook, Rangoato Hlasane

RC (Robyn Cook): I think a nice place to start would be just to take me through Keleketla's background.

RH (Rangoato Hlasane): The space came together through different kinds of interest from different people. Originally Malose [Malose Malahlela] and myself were part of a collective – we were both students at UJ [University of Johannesburg], I was in the Fine Arts Department and Malose was studying marketing management and advertising. We met through music, hip hop. We were writing music and performing, and we just started inviting other people to come rap with us at our student accommodation in Joubert Park. It started on Fridays and then moved to Sundays. We started in my room and then in 2004 we moved to someone else's room, 2006 somebody else's room, 2007 Malose's room (laughs). So I guess that's where some of the ideas of organising and mobilising the arts, and of opening up spaces for making and showing, started. So, in the beginning, it was mostly music based, but we started incorporating other things such as the design of each flyer for example. My interest, of course, was in the visual arts, so I would do most of them. But I would also open it up for other students to design flyers for the event, and then we'd go around and put them under the doors of rooms – it was thirty floors or so of nineteen rooms each with about two people in each room – so it was a big audience. It was really about creating art for peers from different learning areas, very few were in the arts. And that was quite an interesting dynamic for us, particularly in retrospect. It was quite a popular event; obviously it was seasonal because we went home when school was closed, but at the same time, it was inside a student accommodation, so it was very 'closed'. Entry levels and access were limited to those who live there; every now and then other people would sneak in. When we knew that we would be graduating and leaving this student accommodation, we started trying to engage with broader Johannesburg art spaces. At the time, when in fourth year, I had wanted to do a photography workshop with young people – so the idea of 'organising' was also a part of my studies and practice. Wits Tech had an experiential training programme, so I became interested in that, as opposed to

curating or other things on offer. So I did an internship with Arts Source and learnt how to organise in a formal kind of setting. I wanted to work with young people from the Twilight Centre, but it wasn't possible. That's when I dipped into my connections and at the time I knew that Dorothee [Kreutzfeldt] was involved with the Drill Hall as they had the Joubert Park Project (JPP). So I proposed to have the workshop there. That was in 2007, and that was the first time I got to work with the Drill Hall and use it for something

RC: And at that stage was it just an empty space?

RH: Yes. A lot of the space was closed up where Keleketla! Library is now. So the JPP was one of the tenants along with the Red Light Infantry, the Community Chest who are still there today. So the JPP were working on a project-to-project basis mostly from within the Point Blank Gallery. And that's where we did the workshop. After that it was just a matter of keeping in contact with Dorothee – she would call me up when things were happening, to get engaged and involved. And then in 2007 we were invited to participate in Cuss Collective, which is a project by Dutch artists, where we were asked to organise music sessions for a festival because of our expertise in hip hop. That was one of the first times we got to know people involved in hip hop from outside of Johannesburg. Some of the people who performed on our stage were then people we went on to work with. So after seeing the potential of the Drill Hall, we proposed to the JPP to start a project – and they were very happy with the proposal because after working on a project-to-project basis, they wanted longer-term strategies for the Drill Hall. At the time we had wanted to do things like print studios, a library, a bookshop, music studios, record shops, and cafes. You know we just wanted to expand the kind of life we were living in a student accommodation into a bigger space, and open that up to other people. When we came up with this idea there was nothing like Maboneng. And I think that also speaks to the idea of independence and what gentrification really means. At the time Bettina [Malcomess] was still working between Cape Town and Joburg and she proposed to the JPP to do a residency. As part of it, she was exploring ideas of opening a library as part of her research around literacy in a city like Joburg. So when we started the library, on the one hand, it fitted in with some of the ideas we had wanted to do with the Drill Hall. On the other hand, it was also just meant to be a once off activity with Bettina as an experiment. But once that was done, we wanted to continue – and more important was the fact that towards the launch of the Library there were activities around it. We fused our recent network that we had and our

interest in the performance arts to create exchanges between young people and other young arts and cultural practitioners. So we invited people in theatre, dance, and music to do workshops with other young people, who became the first beneficiaries of the library when it opened.

RC: And did JPP fund this?

RH: Yes. They funded Bettina's residency, which, in a sense, included the creation of the library. But it wasn't really much. When we launched Keleketla! it was just a single shelf with books that had been donated or bought from second-hand shops. We printed flyers and handed them out at inner city schools to encourage children to visit. It was small. But it generated a lot of interest from the Joubert Park neighbourhood and other practitioners, so there was a clear indication that the library should continue. And another part of it was that we realised, here we are with no capital, but a lot of space. We took it and ran with it. We understood how difficult it was to find space to work and practice. So we opened it up to our network for shows or workshops. We were largely focused on youth engagement and education, but we also made it clear to artists who didn't necessarily have an interest in education that they could propose other ways of transacting with the space.

RC: So was a lot of that process around investigating different economies and different ways of trade and bartering?

RH: Absolutely. It worked and it didn't work because at the end of the day other people still proposed workshops even though it wasn't something they were interested in. And that created some very weird dynamics between themselves and the young people. But a lot of the time it worked very well. And that process created a very dynamic monthly event for most of 2008 called *Once Upon a Month*, obviously taking its departure from the idea of story-telling in reading and oral literature. But it was an interdisciplinary event, so there would be opportunities for performances for young people, dance, drama and a combination of whatever was offered during that month. It was very exciting and very interesting because it was a daytime event for young people and parents from the neighbourhood, moving right into the evening where there would be live bands. It created a very interesting sense of a place for making and showing art. That really defined the next five or so years of Keleketla!. I think one of the turning points was funding that came late for the Joubert Park Project. So the last full-scale project the Joubert Park Project did was *Urban Scenographies* in 2009. Their members were exploring independent work, and it was timeous that Keleketla! was

now in the space. It was the right time to bring in new energies. Which was great. And then they continued to play a supporting role for Keleketla! – but that support was really amplified by the National Lottery funding that they received. The funds gave us the opportunity to explore our processes and practices better, and to create healthy environments for meaningful exchange over time.

RC: Were you making a living from Keleketla! at this stage?

RH: No. When Keleketla! started in 2008, I was also busy with my Master's at UJ, which I finished in 2010. So during that time I was making money by teaching at other institutions and being a research assistant – but really just focusing on Keleketla! and my Master's, which were speaking to each other of course.

RC: What was your Master's on?

RH: I was working with a group of papermakers in Welkom and acting as a research assistant to Kim Berman. The research was also linked to the Phumani Paper Enterprise. So I think the National Lottery was the first kind of funding that was long term, two years – that finished at the end of 2012. So our promise to the National Lottery was to use the Drill Hall as a place where young people can learn about our history, and the 1956 treason trial in particular, and as a place to create connections between other aspects of our political and cultural history. So it was a rich process because it was designed in three ways; one was to invite former 'Treason Trialists' to come to the space to speak to young people in local schools, the other was a project called 'Hundred-Metre Radius' that invited artists from within a 100-metre radius of the Drill Hall to re-imagine the space, and the last project was an after-school programme which used story-telling and tour guides to bring high schools into the space. We obviously had to review the programme because we applied in 2006 and the money only came through in 2010 – with inflation and the recession of 2008, a lot had changed. So we had to combine those three aspects. Just make it as interdisciplinary as possible so that things spoke to each other and that the money was used effectively. We also stretched the 100-metre radius further – partly recognising that we are living in an increasingly technologically connected world, but also because in a way we had already been working within a hundred-metre radius since 2008 through the library. Of course, we had artists that we invited from the neighbourhood as well – like a choreographer who worked with a dance group to produce a piece which remains a strong reference point for the Keleketla! after-school programme – and led to the longest standing members of the after-school programme with the dance programme

still running today. They choreograph their own pieces, collaborate with other dancers – recently they were working with Lindiwe Matshikiza on a piece at the Hillbrow Theatre. Some of them are now over eighteen and in higher education but others are still young – it’s a very dynamic group that is continually developing itself and doing very interesting things.

RC: Were these workshops funded?

RH: Yes they were funded. Prior to that no – we were still experimenting with trade and exchange.

RC: Just returning briefly to this idea of trade, did you find people were open to that kind of economy?

RH: Yes, they were. But there are different kinds of urgency when one is working for exchange and when one is working for remuneration – different levels of commitment and time given. And again if somebody comes to us because they want to use the space and then they choose to do workshops as an exchange, it doesn’t necessarily mean that they are genuinely interested in the process. So we always had to try and get a balance. There were also ideological problems – I remember there was a group of musicians who were very heavy on the kids in terms of them being Rasta and the type of content they were doing and smoking before and all those kind of things. So we had to manage and negotiate.

RC: Going back to when you received the funding. Did you notice a big change in the way you worked during that shift?

RH: Yes. The one big shift for us was between 2008 and 2009. We had opened ourselves up to other people to be part of the collective, but half way through 2010 we began to see problems. Being in a collective of about eight is extremely difficult just in terms of being on the same wavelength. So it was difficult to try and maintain a place for kids along with grown men who smoke and drink and leave things out. So the practical parts of cleaning up and taking care of things just got in the way. It became quite difficult to manage. So we started working on a sort of code of conduct of how to use the space. We did this in a really open and collaborative way – but when it came to the formalisation of this code people started falling away, saying this is not the direction we want to go – we want to be hard-core and street you know. And then there was much more responsibility towards other people because it was quite a complicated triangle of sorts. So there is Keleketla! but the money is via the JPP and another organisation that helped us apply. So there were three involved which

required a certain kind of maturity, and some of the members fell off because they didn't want to live up to that kind of responsibility. And it's interesting because it didn't necessarily mean that we weren't still independent – we still wanted to see ourselves as open for participation and open to many other people out there. Even the formal programme itself created lots of interesting open areas; particularly because we had to combine three originally separate proposals into one programme that works with schools in the neighbourhood, young people in the neighbourhood, artists in the neighbourhood.

RC: And in terms of the participation was part of it done through open calls?

RH: Yes. So part of the requirement was that there had to be an element of open calls and an area open to proposals. So the guy who did the dance programme with the youth members, for example, he was living in the area so he would see events at night on the rooftop from his window and he came by one day and said 'what actually happens here, I'm a dancer and I'm interested', and then we said ok great there is a programme that is open here. It was really amazing.

RC: So did you feel as if having open calls really helped maintain your sense of independence as an organisation?

RH: Yes. I mean we entered the after-school programme knowing very well that it would be administratively heavy, but it also enabled collaborations. For example, the choreographers were joined by three members from *The Brother Moves On* for the performance. Thenji [Nkosi] for example was involved in the video backdrop of that dance piece. Thenji, of course, has long been a collaborator and now board member of Keleketla!. So the programme in a sense allowed people to continue to work with us and to maintain independent relationships. Another example was an orchestra that re-envisaging Kwaito music in 2012; three members of that orchestra then got involved in another project our partner school Freedom College's choir. So retaining and maintaining independence and trying to run structured programmes and strengthen networks is very complex. And then a lot of the programmes that happen do so outside of education or school programmes – but always really it comes back to the idea of knowledge and knowledge production. You know, keeping to its origins, and the initial ideas around the library and what that could potentially be. So the weekly school choir, for example, was closely linked to the study of history because it was an investigation into protest. And then together with the bands, they were able to go into history and revise protest songs, combine them with contemporary melodies and

perform them live for an audience of teacher, learners, parents, and so on. The work on the Chimurenga poster for example ... the installation we did at Goethe-Institute for the launch of the Chronic, the posters themselves, the distribution, as well as the design, are all elements that relate very well to our work on knowledge production. And also again those are programmes that operate independently in a sense. And there are countless independent projects that also just go unnoticed. And also some of them are unfunded which goes back to the notion of ‘making’ and ‘sharing’. I think that idea is really strongly influenced by a hip hop background before Keleketla! – the idea of making art and sharing it. Also, the way we used space – the way we engaged with space went back to the methods we had used at our student accommodation. ‘Skaftien’ I guess was also one of the most direct ways of talking about independence and working within means. So ‘Skaftien’ as a project uses collective fundraising and also references to Southern African socio-economic practices. It was a very interesting project that created an opportunity to know what’s happening and what people are thinking and what kind of proposals are out there. So I think ‘Skaftien’ addressed the awareness that we as a community of artists and practitioners can help each other realise our imaginations. Prior to that, we did another project back in 2009 called ‘Stokvel’ – ‘Skaftien’ was in a sense a revision of ‘Stokvel’. And in that case in the traditional sense of a stokvel it was about making something together. The first one was in a context of a fundraiser that Keleketla! was having. So it was half a campaign to raise artwork for a fundraiser auction, but also to bring forth the idea of ‘making together’. So the first one was a group visual arts show at my place, which I had just moved into. And, of course, music featured, food featured working together featured. Explore how we can innovate something that is our heritage, a stokvel, you know. In its second iteration a lot of art was raised, and we made a lot of money, well not a lot, like R38 000. The gallery actually messed us around a bit. It was a weird gallery, I don’t know how we ended up there.

RC: What gallery is this?

RH: Art Afrique. It’s moved to Sandton now – it used to be down Robert’s Avenue in Kensington. So anyway, the second ‘Stokvel’ was themed around music. So the first was visual art, the next one was music, and it was at the gallery at Drill Hall in the context of a media arts conference in Detroit. So we were asked to keynote about ‘Stokvel’ where it comes from and how we try to innovate it and also put it into practice in a Skype conference link to their conference. But in Joburg it was a real

event so we invited two studios to set up a workshop for musicians, writers, fashion designers, and people interested in hip hop, how it's produced, distributed, shared and where it's going, to come and have a dialogue with the group of musicians at the conference in Detroit. There was also a person who was also developing file-sharing software. I mean this was in 2009 when things were really experimental – things like *WeTransfer* and *Dropbox* weren't around. So it's also very interesting to track how the development of technology has impacted on independence. But anyway so we were using software to share music created in Detroit and here. After the dialogue, people were writing lyrics and rhymes, reflecting on what they were doing and saying and rapping to each other live. It was totally dynamic, and really the first time we really used technology in that sense. It's not just talking to people, but creating together across different spaces. So that was the second 'Stokvel'. The third one was not as well thought-out. And that's when we actually stopped doing 'Stokvel'. And then two years later we were re-interpreted it as 'Skaftien'. So another thing I guess that is important from Keleketla! is its name. Bettina was like wow Keleketla! library this is perfect, the first event we did we wanted to call it Keleketla! as an event but we didn't name the library because it was just an experiment, we didn't think of it in the long term. But the event itself we named Keleketla! and then Bettina was like what Keleketla! After explaining she was like wow this is perfect, cool, we'll call it Keleketla! Library. So from there, naming has become very important when we programme; like what kind of names do we put to these things because of our interest in language and our histories. So names such as 'Stokvel' and 'Skaftien' and a project we did at The Substation called 'Nonwane' and we used terms that encompass multiple ways of reading our histories. And also create them in other contexts beyond the arts, stokvels, nonwanes and skaftiens are very much real life situations. So naming for us has allowed us to attract people from areas outside of the art world to our events. And that keeps things really fresh. So those methods and those namings and the kind of people you bring to the space have always been very important to our programming.

RC: I understand that the Drill Hall is undergoing some changes at the moment?

RH: It's tough at the Drill Hall at the moment. For Keleketla! there is a space issue – we aren't property developers you know, so it's quite an overload on us in terms of time and administration. The City of Joburg doesn't want to take ownership of the space, which leaves us as the property managers essentially. Because the space is big and because of where we come from, we wanted to open it up to other artists to

occupy, and use as studio space. But of course that means extra management work on our side, and at the end of the day because the city won't take any ownership of the space we are responsible. So it's a weird situation. We want to leave because the threat of the space being taken away is too much, and on top of the work and that Keleketla! itself doesn't have enough funding for its programming, let alone managing a building. So that's where the difficulty lies.

RC: One last thing that I'd like to speak about today is just your practice as an artist in relation to Keleketla!. You come from a printmaking background – do you still practice or has Keleketla become your practice?

RH: It's definitely my practice. And my way of life.

RC: What's next?

RH: So the relationship between Keleketla! and the Drill Hall – how long it's going to be there is something we don't really have answers for. But also the people involved with Keleketla! are active in the scene in Johannesburg and different collectives. And these are the collectives that we've been working with since the 'Stokvel' and 'Skaftien' days so the Keleketla! remains the one place in Johannesburg, the one open kind of space where people can propose projects. So there is that immense potential. Every time someone comes out we get a new proposal. Yesterday Malose had a meeting with *The Brother Moves On*, who have this great proposal about how to maximise our work and all of that. So, I think it is up to us to re-imagine how Keleketla! continues to live outside of the Drill Hall's identity. Because it doesn't necessarily have to be a physical space. I think the one thing that we've realised is that it is important for things to die. It was not easy to accept that, particularly with the library itself being the centre of Keleketla! and something that is open to the community. So that part was very hard to let go, but it's very possible the library will be closed soon. Simply because we can't afford to pay a librarian anymore and also because of the difficulties in managing the space. So we need to imagine it how we can continue to operate as a project you know. And there are models to look into like *Chimurenga*, who work out of a two-room office but operate across the continent. So that is the kind of where we are now. Keleketla!'s projects are also very archival, so we will also be looking at creating a solid archive and digitizing everything. I think once we do that, we can begin thinking of Keleketla! as independent of the physical structure that is the Dill Hall. So that we can work on a project-to-project basis at different spaces in time differently. But at the same time

that physical structure is a very important space – and I think the loss of the Drill Hall will be a big loss for Johannesburg.

RC: And moving forward with funding?

RH: One thing about funding is that Keleketla! doesn't fit into tick boxes, and in terms of local funding agencies, that's what they want. The bait with international funders is that there is a bit more freedom to programme. But, they also have mandates to fill, the money is not neutral – there is an agenda. But maybe it's more subtle, which allows most of us who are getting fed from these funds to be more independent. With local funding it's always very particular – like '20 years of democracy', or 'previously disadvantaged', and so on. All of these terms that are very problematic for us to deal with. Often one doesn't get much money for administration, but the administrative load prevents many organisations from surviving. But that's the dilemma and the place we find ourselves between foreign funders and local funders. I mean there are innovations like Vuyani Dance Company hearing the directors speak about how they are trying to move away from all of these and also just go back to the basics of looking at the product and how the product can sustain whatever it is that one is doing, you know. And coming up with those innovations of having faith in, putting faith back into the product itself.

9.7 *A conversation with Lauren von Gogh of Sober & Lonely*

Date: 8 July 2015

Venue: Hordaland Kunstsenter, Bergen, Norway

Present: Robyn Cook and Lauren von Gogh

Lauren von Gogh (LVG): When we started working together at university, I never envisaged Sober & Lonely (S&L) building so much, or becoming an institute, or anything. I remember we started working together out of necessity, and because it was more fun to work with another person. I guess that one of the keys, or essential things of what S&L is, is that it is an organic structure, where things happen and evolve in ways that even we often don't anticipate or expect to happen.

Robyn Cook (RC): Can you speak about the first kinds of collaborations we worked on?

LVG: In the middle of first year we went to the National Arts Festival in Grahamstown together, without knowing one another so well. We spent the majority of the trip thinking of public art interventions, works that might be smart or relevant at the time, and that is where our Appendix project came from, which in retrospect doesn't seem to fit in with anything else we've done. In the second year, we were encouraged to cultivate an independent voice – you were putting illegal posters up all over the CBD, and I was working in my neighbourhood, tying festive/sinister party balloons to neighbours' gates. So we were both doing these clandestine 4am interventions that couldn't be done alone – mostly as it might be dangerous and we needed an accomplice to keep a lookout and drive the getaway car. We agreed to help each other and after a few months we decided to submit the projects together; the sense being that if both of us worked on an idea and executed it, the work would be more useful, interesting or effective. The process of 'making' was also just more enjoyable when we were together. Our collaboration developed quite naturally and instinctively.

RC: I remember when we saw Marina Abramovic, and how she worked with Ulay, and then also looking at Gilbert & George, and other collaborative projects, and all of a sudden we realised that people could work this way. We'd never really been exposed to this notion; it had always been more about the artist as this one person. I think it became quite important to us to identify as one.

LVG: And also important for us to erase who we were as individuals. We spent a lot of time trying to figure out the perfect identity. What is interesting in looking back is that up until seeing Marina Abramovic at JAG, we didn't really have any art historical reference point at all.

RC: And then the references we did have were super dated, performance from the 70s.

LVG: There was also a feeling that we had to do something pressing or important all the time, which is why we tried to do more political type of work.

RC: Yes, if you look back, a lot of what we first did was typical 60s, 70s performance art, or activist art, which our lecturers encouraged us to do. That was our only real reference point.

LVG: In 2007, I remember we bought cheap business suits from Mr. Price and began performing PowerPoint presentations. They were absurd. Humorous. Brash. Clip-arty. Ironic. Overall, the reaction from the audience was positive – but there was no real critique. In retrospect, I don't think anybody understood what it was about – least of all us. Now the lecture as performance is common practice – Kapwani Kiwanga and Jeronimo Voss for example. But I see that period as a turning point, where we gave ourselves permission to be playful, to not have to try and change the world or comment on pressing current affairs.

RC: Perhaps another turning point was where we did those door-to-door sales. There was something about that, where we created absurd objects and tried to sell them... that idea of trying to engage with people outside of the art world.

LVG: That links back to our residency programmes, where we thought a lot about and worked with generosity. We were willing to give these absurd objects away, in exchange for some kind of human interaction. We didn't really know what we were doing, which I think is what is quite beautiful about our earlier work. A lot of it is undocumented and will probably never be used, but I think it is important to how S&L has been shaped.

RC: Another way of looking at the fundamentals of our practice, which we often struggle to articulate are things like the idea of generosity, or trying to engage with audiences outside of the art world, which we often see only in retrospect. Two other performances that are also key, not in that political 'angsty' kind of way, were *An Experiment to Test the Destiny of the World* and *Attempting to Create a Telepathic Connection for a Long Distance Relationship*. That starts moving towards pseudo-science and magic.

LVG: I always link our specific works back to an emotion, or a memory, and with those two works, for example, I remember being so completely thrilled by them. They were exciting and scary and uncertain. It was a different experience from the more political angst type work we'd done before that was quite disconnected from us and often felt like we were imitating what we thought artists would be. With those two performances, it felt like we were doing what we like, and by framing it in an art context, it became art and was okay to do.

RC: Looking back at *An Experiment to Test the Destiny of the World*, I remember thinking about the idea of the magician's box, and being cut in half. I like that it was as simple as being curious, that there were endless possibilities of what we could be doing in there. The title suggests these possibilities and curiosities.

LVG: Two interesting things that came from that performance were that we tried to make it more of a 'legitimate' art project. We took the box and went and performed it in public places around Johannesburg and were photographed doing it. We had that documentation to prove perhaps that it was a larger body of work. I feel that the documentation wasn't successful, the shots were too slick and composed, and the essence and curiosity of the original performance was lost. We also curated a show in 2013 with the work as the starting point and title of the show, and we had a model of the structure up in the show. I feel that that worked, and it is interesting that the original performance had a lasting impact.

RC: If you look at the show we did at the Red Line Gallery in Troyeville, we had two separate rooms, one was very much us pretending to be artists. It was black and white photography of documentation from performances that related to socio-political commentary.

LVG: The other room was absurd. We'd hired a hamster and drugged your dog.

RC: We also had the colour photographs of us in costume – as tennis players, hairdressers – these strange narratives. It is interesting that we split the work up so definitely.

LVG: We always tried to play different roles.

RC: We were very confused. At the time we didn't get much critical feedback, we weren't taught how to write about our work, or analyse it.

LVG: And then afterwards just feeling shame and embarrassment. I think maybe what has become of S&L Institute, or S&L, or whatever it has become now, is that I guess we're older, more comfortable, and understand what we like. We had to create an

umbrella that is S&L, where we could fit all the absurd and serious things and be able to make sense of them all, without feeling too embarrassed and ashamed. If you put the S&L umbrella over any of those things we did then, it would probably work; there would be a context to it all.

RC: I hear what you're saying, yes, at the time we were struggling to understand what we were doing.

LVG: We hadn't called ourselves Sober & Lonely yet. It was like, Lauren and Robyn have three rooms of really unrelated, awkward things.

RC: When did we make the decision to use the name?

LVG: I think it was near the end of third year (2007). Or even 2008.

I think a lot of what we were doing then would sit more comfortably now, under a larger S&L context. A lot of what we were doing then was finding our place in an art world, or an art school world, trying to be recognised as an artist, or legitimate.

RC: The idea of legitimacy is really interesting.

Speaking about some of our earlier projects, like our final project, for example, *Attempting to Create a Telepathic Connection for a Long Distance Relationship...*

LVG: I think if we didn't do that performance we might not have carried on working together.

RC: Yes, it was very deliberate. That was something very specific that we spoke about in deciding how we'd collaborate in future.

LVG: Which became a huge framework for a lot of what we're doing now.

RC: That also relates back to another area of interest – the idea of working collaboratively, looking at the idea of collaborations. And then you hypnotised me so that I stuck a needle in your leg and I hypnotised you to feel drunk... even that final work was very performative, we dressed in black and shot everything in black and white.

LVG: It was a durational performance; we did it for four hours. I remember afterwards being exhausted and worried about if it had made us fail Fine Arts. But in the end it wasn't about that at all, it was so much about our working together.

RC: We also published a book, because we didn't feel like it was legitimate enough to only do the performance.

LVG: in retrospect the book is a piece of shit.

RC: It also speaks to how we felt at the time, with object making. Maybe that is just art school. I guess after that, it was quite a big break. I went to Durban and did my

Master's, and you went to Belgium to go to the HISK. That is interesting to look at how we developed separately and then what we did together.

LVG: That is one of the points I wanted to bring up today. I guess we don't speak about it together as much, but individually how we've followed such different paths and have quite different influences and points of reference..., which is still happening now. I guess they complement each other. I often wonder what would've happened if we both did our Master's, or if we'd both gone to the HISK. If I look at everything we do, I feel very influenced by my path, and you must be by yours, obviously... I was thinking yesterday about how everything from the past three years for me has linked back to the three-month curatorial programme I did at Machine Project. I was also trying to think of our practice from your point of view – you doing your Doctorate and having done your Master's, you're in a hard-core academic environment whereas I guess I've largely rejected that, or taken a more alternative route. I'm just thinking out loud, and imagining that maybe we view our practice completely differently because of our varied backgrounds. But we understand each other well enough that we trust we're going in the same (or at least a comfortable parallel) direction.

RC: Coming at the same thing from quite different approaches.

LVG: Maybe there's this absurd conversation going on. I think it is another core essence of what Sober & Lonely is.

RC: I'm curious, going back to your time at the HISK. At the time it was really interesting because we were both in a position to see if we could work separately. I'd really like to hear how you experienced that time, or separation, what you saw about yourself and how you developed.

LVG: I was really naïve going there. I was given a nice studio, and we'd never really worked from a studio before. I wasn't sure what to even do there, and remember trying to figure out what everyone else was doing behind closed doors. I didn't have a computer or archive of any past work. I only had that small book we'd made for our final show. We had studio visits after three days of being there. It was frightening – having to speak about my work with five people, for an hour each, without my 'artner'. I didn't know what to expect, and for the most part it was small talk about South Africa and things like that. The one artist was a real dick though. I was really offended by him at the time. He asked me what I was even doing there, and that I wasn't even an artist because I didn't have anything to show him. He wrote a really shitty report about how immature I was and some other things that upset me at the time. I came across the

report the other day and realised it was all actually true, and he was the only person who was straightforward maybe, that didn't encourage this fantasy of me as an artist in my studio. I guess that was a really interesting starting point for my time at the HISK. I had to really question what I was trying to do there. I hadn't done work that wasn't S&L stuff for years.

RC: We also didn't know what it was.

LVG: I remember trying to speak about it in studio visits, and showing people the book we'd made. They responded well and were interested but always followed it up with asking what I was going to do by myself now that I was there. It was a definite assumption that people made, that I was there to move on as an individual artist. I spent a lot of time with Audrey Cottin then, trying to see what she did, as an artist. I could relate to her on some level – we were the same age and had both just come straight out of art school. I think I started mimicking other artists.

RC: Like imitative games?

LVG: Yes. The first month was really uncomfortable in a lot of ways. I felt a pressure to spend time in the barracks (studios) but didn't have anything to do really. I wondered what everyone was doing in his or her studios, but you didn't just go in for visits. The studios were private sanctuaries; even by the end of my second year there... you only really went into the studios of your closest friends.

I figured out that most people were just sitting at their computers watching YouTube videos. I didn't have a computer, so I really struggled to imagine what to do in an empty room with no resources. I slowly started going to the library and reading the books there, figuring out what a European artist did.

RC: The idea of time is also interesting. At Wits for example, we had a very specific curriculum, where we'd have a set project with theme and a timeframe to do it in. It was very outcomes driven, with mini goals to work towards. I guess the HISK must have been a strange adjustment.

LVG: It is meant to be a programme for artists who'd been practicing for a while already. Me, Audrey and Andre were the youngest people they'd accepted at that stage, fresh out of art school. I'm not sure we should've been there. It was amazing though, the people I got to meet, and having access to so many interesting places and institutions. There were also visiting lecturers who came in and pigeonholed you for their own agendas. I often got invited to random group exhibitions, often to have a South African artist included. I'm not sure it was productive all the time because it

meant producing small works, unrelated to a bigger practice. You couldn't say no, and there was also always a fee included. It feels like I made so much crap for those shows.

RC: Do you want to speak about some of the stuff you made? I never really saw what you were doing but I remember at the time that you always seemed quite tentative about it.

LVG: Projects often didn't come together, or I didn't finish them. I mostly wasn't happy with anything I was producing. When we did stuff together, I think it worked because there were two of us – one (you) more proactive in seeing the project through. I was always the person second guessing things, and so when I tried working alone, my ideas seldom got further than just sketches. If you look at your work as Carmen Sober, you produced a crazy amount of stuff in a short period of time. It was finished work that got exhibited.

RC: And it was kind of flat.

LVG: And my solo work never got made because the infinite nuances got in the way. I just sat around thinking.

RC: And I used the idea of producing.

LVG: When we did that synchronised performance – where you waded out into the sea on stilts at the same time as I floated down the canal on a handmade raft – I wanted to do those kinds of things every day. They were beautiful, and exciting, and had real connections. I understood though that you had a job, and were doing your Master's, and had a relationship and dogs. But people's reactions to that work was great; everyone loved it. And I know that doing things from a distance doesn't always work, so it was difficult in that we had extremely different time schedules. I loved that project though. The other things I did I'm just embarrassed by. I also tried collaborating with Audrey. She was jealous of our collaboration and I think tried to initiate something similar. It never worked out though; we spent two years trying and finally just made a sad documentary called *Failed Collaborations*.

RC: I remember you telling me about some works you started, which I thought were really beautiful. You were photographing dogs through windows, which I loved, also noting and filming when the streetlights went on and off. All these really sweet, romantic gestures. For me, I was always wondering what you were doing with them, thinking that you needed to film them and finish them.

LVG: I never did anything with any of them. That stuff comes from that romantic idea of being an artist, and I saw other people working in ways similar to that – those

simple, beautiful gestures and coincidences. I started to pick up on beautiful, intimate things from daily life, and I love that. I still do that – I have notes all over about when certain lights went off, or messages about an interaction I saw, or the most interesting thing from a day. I don't feel I need to do anything with that; I see it more as a reminder of a different time, and a reminder that there are sweet nice funny things in the world. I had excessive amounts of time to contemplate everything and pretend to be an artist for those two years. I'm not sure how productive all that time is, but I'm glad I experienced it.

RC: I've always worked with having no time to do anything, so knowing that I have two hours set aside and that I have to produce something, without really being able to enjoy it or interrogate it or sit with it. It is always very rushed.

LVG: I don't know what the right balance is though. Like how we were talking earlier about that guy who had too much time and money so he ended up having sex with his mother. Or like Robert Durst, who had all the money and time in the world and killed his wife, his best friend and his neighbour.

RC: Yes, I don't know what the balance is.

LVG: I think we were in completely opposite situations. I remember speaking to Anne Schiffer and wondering that what if those were the best two years of my life. What if I'd never have anything great again? So I obviously loved being there, and the time I had. There was no urgency; I wasn't totally productive those two years.

RC: I remember feeling that I learned so much from you while you were there. I feel like I vicariously learned mind-blowing amounts of stuff from you mentioning things, sending me articles, and your way of thinking.

LVG: Yes, there was a luxury in having access to so much contemporary art.

RC: Also you were speaking about what people said in studio visits. I remember you saying something about people quite often commenting that you should stop being so brash. I could see that you were starting to work more gently. There wasn't this erratic aggressive way about you like we had at art school. It was much softer and gentler. I honestly think if you hadn't gone to the HISK our practice would've been quite different.

LVG: That's interesting you say that.

RC: I know I've said this to you before, but I feel like we can share our experiences and learning.

LVG: Yes, maybe I'll be Dr von Gogh when you finish your doctorate. (laughs)

RC: I feel really enriched by your experiences.

LVG: I remember when I was at the HISK and we were constantly in touch. I felt this guilt because you were working so fucking hard and doing so many things – exhibitions, your job, your Master's. I was just sitting in my studio watching YouTube and people would invite me to group shows and pay me for them. It was so weird, like I'd lucked out. I worried that when I came back that maybe we would be working too differently, that you wouldn't be interested in working together anymore, we had very different rhythms. It wasn't ever a given that I'd move back and then you'd move to Johannesburg and we'd carry on.

RC: No, it wasn't.

LVG: It was very organic how it worked out.

RC: It is interesting retrospectively. I didn't think you'd come back, I thought you might stay in Europe. I had to think, what would it mean to work on my own? I was trying to see if I could do it. Who would I be as an artist? For my Master's, I had to produce a body of work and 'an exhibition' and 'a catalogue'. The course requirements were quite conventionally framed. That I chose to work under the sobriquet Carmen Sober is interesting.

LVG: Yes, like you were on your own but you didn't want to be.

RC: Exactly (laughs). Ultimately I was very unhappy with the body of work I produced during my Master's, and the way I exhibited it. It felt flat and unimaginative. Afterwards, I was devastated by the show, and unsure of how or even if I wanted to carry on producing work.

LVG: I think we always feel devastated after a show... but then having another person to feel those things with makes it so much better. And that is what I want in my life. I'm very alone in my personal life, so to have a solid, legitimate partnership in my art life is perfect. It makes it good to be alone in my other life. It is incredible to have an 'artnership' based on trust and dedication and mutual understanding. It makes more sense than any other relationships in my life I guess. Going back to the HISK stuff – I also collaborated with Anne Schiffer. I loved the process of the work we did together, the reenactments and road trip. I was never that excited by the finished product though. She is a painter so was also better at an outcome or product. And then for the final show, I only showed Sober & Lonely stuff. That June we did our Watermill Center residency, and in July I did the Russia project with Anne, so I was only focusing on collaborative stuff again before the final show. Together with the curator, I planned to

show work from both projects. A lot of the artists were showing much older work. In the end, only the S&L works fitted in the show, which I was happy with. It was like going full circle maybe – arriving at the HISK with my little S&L book, and leaving with showing S&L work. I did feel like a dick though, because in the press the HISK publicised it as Lauren von Gogh, not Sober & Lonely work. It was partly because the works hadn't been finalised before the publication was out and also because the HISK was so much about individual artists being very serious and individual. I've had conversations with Robyn Nesbitt about her collaborative work with Nina Barnett. I was telling her that you and I have an agreement where we use our collective work however it is appropriate. I'm not sure if I made it up now, or if it was ever unfair to you. I think I was never confident enough at the HISK to demand things, or ever very sure of what I was doing. I was happy that you were going to come and see the final show, and that our work got to be finished in that space. I never got any feedback about it though.

RC: This is a good place to start speaking about our residency in New York, at the Watermill Center. We worked together to apply to the programme, when you came to visit me in Durban. Other than that we hadn't really worked together since art school, we'd done a few long-distance projects. It was an interesting point in time because we'd both been swimming in new waters, and then to suddenly come back and meet. We'd both come from different unresolved experiences.

LVG: Yes, and that was the starting point for the residency. We'd applied with that concept – as long-distance collaborators reuniting to see what happened.

RC: I remember I was very concerned with how things would look, how they were produced. You'd try and do the opposite, or were coming at it from your perspective. I enjoyed that; I enjoyed being challenged and this kind of productive antagonism between different ways of working. Everything we did there was about working together again. It was the first time we'd done that.

LVG: Yes, like the chair/rope piece, I remember you being adamant that we film it in our uniforms (that we had made in art school), and I didn't want to. There were a lot of challenges, stylistically, of how we'd see a work through. You were very sure of what you wanted and I would test you on it. The compromise for that work, for example, was that we filmed in black and white.

RC: I would look at how it would look as a finished product and your point of view was more about the gesture or the experience.

LVG: And I think at them time I often thought that making it look good would take away from the essence of the gesture. I also remember being quite anxious during that time. I knew I had six months left in Belgium and at that point I really wanted to stay longer but not knowing how, and being unsure about a lot of things. That was when we decided I think, and started imagining where our work could fit in. We thought of where we might show work in Johannesburg, and couldn't think of anywhere. We also both knew that we wanted to continue to be excited and influenced by other artists' work if we were in Johannesburg. And that I guess is when we first started thinking of S&L as more of a platform or an artist-run space. We thought of ways of how to be surrounded by exciting work. In the final presentation at Watermill, we loosely announced these intentions. It was a bold move in retrospect. I think another significant thing from that residency is that we left our luminous yellow matching uniforms there. Do you remember that? It was liberating somehow, or sealing the promise perhaps. What sealed the promise, to make it sound dramatic and exciting, is when you visited me in Gent that December, after the June residency and just before my return in January. We were at that weird orange bar and we spoke about the name of the thing, we spoke about the Sober & Lonely Institute for Contemporary Art. You hadn't made a plan to move to Johannesburg. By then I think I'd resigned myself to try and be there for a bit. Then came the big weird Arbroath house, quite serendipitously, and then you came to Johannesburg for an interview at Vega.

RC: I was finishing my Master's, you were finishing the HISK, and I guess both of us needed a kind of shift. I didn't want to stay working in advertising. That end presentation at Watermill was where we first presented this bigger idea.

LVG: We were secretive about it, but I think that is largely what made it okay for me to come back. It gave me something to look forward to and fantasise about.

RC: Yes, it was an artistic and an emotional commitment to say that yes, we agree to work together and also having something for us both to look forward to, with a lot of freedom still. It was so we wouldn't be creatively depressed, so that we'd both have something.

LVG: It is a really beautiful thing.

RC: Initially the plan was for me to run the Institute in Durban, and you would do it in Johannesburg.

LVG: Yes, we started off doing synchronised events. Logistically it became quite a nightmare.

RC: And Durban is just incredibly depressing. There isn't space or interest or an audience.

LVG: It was weird how easy (I mean it wasn't easy) it was... I remember speaking to David Brodie about it, and he said I should go across the road to speak to a guy called Carl who had a space, which was Outlet Project Space. They had the space but not the content, so it just worked out quite easily, and they even had Bronwen Shelwell write about our projects. So many people came to the first thing. There was definitely an interest, or a demand for that.

RC: We created a kind of brand, with the website set up, and the newsletter. It was very traditional gallery-like, with a clean logo and a white website, and a text about the show.

LVG: And we approached art spaces – Durban Art Space, WSoA, etc. I guess we needed that to legitimise what we were doing. I also remember thinking how great it would be if we were both in Johannesburg, how it would be more manageable and more impressive, but I never could've expected you to move for S&L. I remember sitting alone in the big Arbroath house, I was very lonely and had no friends after just coming back. It was extremely isolating after having spent two years constantly surrounded by 23 other artists, speaking about art, going to exhibitions, visiting museums and walking through new cities, having a highly stimulating environment. I remember realising that I was going to have to recreate this for myself. And that is when I thought to invite artists to share the house with me, to have a residency programme at Arbroath. There was so much space; it was a waste not to use it and share it. I emailed you and even made a bad flyer that I suggested we use. That is I guess where the idea of the residency started – and so much came with that, quite organically.

RC: I remember when you approached me with the idea of the residency, and I thought it sounded cool, but also thinking who the fuck would want to go and stay in that weird house out in the suburbs?

LVG: And I said that maybe if we gave them free dinner every night, and framed it as a suburban residency, then it would be okay.

RC: I didn't know why anyone would want to stay there, bearing in mind that my idea of a residency was the Watermill Center! Looking back on it now, it was really amazing that we started it.

LVG: We were still challenging each other a lot, which was good. I think I had a definite vision for the Suburban Residency, but I wasn't quite sure how to convince you. I knew from looking at dodgy weird art spaces in Europe that this kind of thing is necessary and exciting. I knew you might worry that it could come across as scummy, and it might make people not take us seriously.

RC: Yes, again this idea of legitimacy.

LVG: I remember just knowing that I really wanted people in there and that it was a perfect space for experimentation. We also spoke about how we'd have the residency, but still have the Outlet projects, etc. And then it all eventually just came to the house..., which became a kind of island of weird art I guess.

RC: The Arbroath house, even aesthetically, has shaped a lot of what we do now.

LVG: I guess Audrey at VANSA at the time picked up the advert somehow, and that is how it got spread around, and how we got applications from Robyn Nesbitt, Dineo Bopape and Francis Burger.

RC: Apart from the personal need for creative expression, what were the other reasons for establishing the Sober & Lonely Institute for Contemporary Art?

LVG: Partly because we realised we probably wouldn't find a space that would be interested in showing our 'flakey' artwork at the time and we hadn't really seen anything we liked.

RC: There were no other alternative art spaces.

LVG: Sure, it is easy for us to say that but I think it is more of a case of us not having found a community that we fitted easily into. There were obviously other Micro-communities and happenings, but just nothing we were really made aware of or were included in. Neither of us had been living in Johannesburg for two years.

RC: Yes, that is also true.

LVG: For example, I'd never heard of Outlet Project Space, but it was there all along. I think it became a lot about creating our own community.

RC: And a community of interest, so we could curate it in a way that became meaningful to us, and others.

LVG: Also partly to be in control I guess.

RC: Maybe, but also about bringing things we were interested in together, a bit like starting a club I guess.

LVG: Looking back, I'm happy with the direction it's taken. It could've easily turned into another project similar to Outlet – in that it became so dependent on the space, so

when there was no physical place for the project it kind of disappeared. S&L would've developed very differently if we'd started off having a space, and I guess that is why I'm so resistant to having a space – there's that fear of becoming dependent on, or defined by it.

RC: Do you want to speak a bit about how the residencies worked, how it was for you, living there at the same time, opening your house up to people.

LVG: At the beginning I was just happy to have friends, to not be alone in that huge house. The first artists to move in were Robyn (Nesbitt) and Nina (Barnett), and you were due to move in halfway through their time there. We'd set up one month long residencies at first. It was a weird, fascinating time, having artists in the house. It was like I'd created a situation for others that I wanted for myself. I wanted to be on a residency with my 'artner', doing art stuff, without any other responsibilities. It was like watching in on a world that I wanted to be a part of. We got a lot of applications for the first set of residencies, and we both instinctively knew that we wanted Robyn and Nina, Dineo (Bopape) and Francis (Burger) to take part. We made the decision over Gmail chat while you were in Durban. So that was three solid months of artists living in the Arbroath house. By the end, I remember being exhausted, especially because we'd given up everything for the artists. I was sleeping on a camping mattress in the musty damp room. I remember wanting to engage more in their practices, but in retrospect, I see now how that wasn't necessary, and that a residency programme really is so much about the process, and about the artist having that space and time.

RC: The reason we chose those artists were that a lot of the other applications were about exhibiting work, and weren't interested in the process of a residency, whereas Robyn and Nina and Dineo and Francis understood it better, probably even more than we did. We asked all of them to have some kind of public engagement or presentation as a conclusion to their stay.

LVG: I was really surprised that people came to those events, and quite a lot of people too.

RC: The events became almost like a house party – there was the Ping-Pong table – but people could still look at the work and engage with the artists. It was very sociable. Dineo had people over to the house all the time.

LVG: Yes, I remember coming home and Khwezi Gule was in the garden. She had all these well-known art people come around that we never would've met at that time. And all of these residencies have had curious and nice long lasting relationships... it

opened up a lot of interesting situations. It opened up the Johannesburg art world for me at the time.

RC: Francis introduced us to Jared and Josh (Ginsburg) and Kyle (Morland) and Georgia (Munnik) who all did residencies at later stages. So where it was generous for us, giving artists space and freedom, it came back to us in so many different ways too. Our network built from all the different artists coming into the house.

LVG: S&L also created this mask, or platform, that made it easier to approach artists I might never have spoken to as an individual. For example, we both liked James Webb's work, so we emailed him as S&L and asked him to participate in a project. He obviously saw that we'd worked with Dineo and Francis, who he knew, so he agreed, and we've worked with him on many occasions since then. S&L became like a mask of bravery, which I believe is what a collaboration is. It is a partnership where someone has your back and therefore you have more confidence in whatever tasks you set out to do. With Francis for example, I think her time at our residency is maybe why she moved to Johannesburg later on – so it is nice to imagine that it played an important role in the lives of some of the artists who passed through. At the same time as these residencies were happening (July/August/September 2011) we started the *Oh My Oh My* project at Wits.

RC: We were running the residency alongside having exhibitions.

LVG: Because we thought we had to have multiple layers, and have exhibitions to prove S&L's legitimacy in some way.

RC: I think *Oh My Oh My* was really interesting.

LVG: Yes, also what happened with Zen calling us out for having such a white exhibition. I think we would've reacted much differently now, and I totally respect his position. It was such an interesting learning curve for us. There were so many artists involved in that project; it was also a good way to know more people. Looking back on it, I don't know if I would put myself in so much forced socialisation again.

RC: How did we have the energy to do that every Saturday for three months? We'd install a new project every week, taking so much care to make each artist's project right. We drove to the other side of Johannesburg to hire a bubble machine for example. It was also financially draining. We gave each artist a tiny budget, but we also had vinyl lettering printed for each week and paid for printing costs and various other things. And we documented everything closely, so the artists had a good record of what we'd installed.

LVG: It was a lot of admin and coordination, and then a lot of critique mid-way through the project.

RC: I think it goes back to how we were at art school – we just did it. Sometimes you just have to do things before you overthink them and not do anything.

LVG: The nature of the time we're living in now is that everything is questioned so much, and scrutinised and poked and checked for political correctness.

RC: And then we had the 24-Hour residencies soon after that, which I really enjoyed. I had never heard of another 24-Hour residency, and I know we initially did that because it was exhausting having people in the house for much longer. What happened after that?

LVG: 'The Internet is Made of Cats', and 'Failure House. Oh, 'Failure House' was actually in 2011 still. It was at the same time as 'Oh My Oh My' actually, but at the house.

RC: That was probably one of the projects that I've enjoyed the most. It felt right, it was clever and funny and sad.

LVG: Do you know why I think that? We were speaking with Bas (Schevers) for a year and a half before the actual project – just sharing thoughts and ideas related to failure and what might happen. It was a long engagement, which I think was good for the project.

Then we went to Arteles Residency in Finland.

RC: Where we came up with *The Nancy Holt Teleportation Device* project. Which again was quite strange, because we'd been playing the role of the Institute and then Nancy Holt was more a personal art project again. The Institution was all of a sudden running quite well; we had interesting things happening and people were responding to it. It was all ticking along quite nicely.

LVG: The Institute had got to a point where it was working, and I guess we wanted to challenge ourselves again. Or we had some respite from being organisers and administrators to be more artistically engaged.

RC: We also had the big show ('An Experiment to Test the Destiny of the World') at Ithuba.

LVG: Yes, that was the beginning of 2013, and then I went travelling for five months, to Los Angeles and The Netherlands. I got itchy feet again and felt like I needed to run away for a while. I never thought of not coming back, or of not continuing with S&L, but it must've been horrible for you, that I was erratic and often leaving unexpectedly.

I never saw it as an end to things, but more of a way to refresh myself so that I could come back with more interest or energy to put into S&L. I was also unstable work wise and without a steady living situation, so it felt like a good time to travel. The Machine Project programme (June/July/August 2012) was a really good experience for me and how I saw the development of S&L...how we spoke about a version of a school we will one day start, etc. and then while there also thinking again about the Mountain School and how to experience that. I guess I look at those programmes as some kind of postgraduate experience, without ever having done a Master's. They are vital for how I view S&L.

RC: For me too.

LVG: In retrospect I feel bad for just leaving.

RC: I never minded you going, I think the fear was that you might not come back.

LVG: I never had a job, so I spent all my time obsessing over what S&L was doing, but not really doing anything except wishing that you could also have as much time as I did to work on things together. I had fantasies that we could do S&L stuff all the time, but I know now that we both need other things going on. That period, with traveling for longer, was my way of immersing myself in some kind of art world fantasy I think.

RC: Your time at both of those places (Machine & Mountain School) are critical to the way we work now.

LVG: The Mountain School didn't seem as useful, which is interesting because it is something that I'd put on a pedestal for so long, whereas Machine Project was such a new and unexpected thing and that turned out to be so fulfilling.

RC: The fact that there is this place in LA that holds ridiculous events and people support it and love it and it is sustainable, and it isn't a gallery, and then also the Mountain School, an alternative school that runs out of a bar in Chinatown... knowing that other people are doing these things is wonderful because it made me realise that I'm not completely mad, that stuff exists in the world. There is a precedent for what we're doing. The idea of opening a school is still so important for both of us, but just not at this point in time. I know it will be something we come back to later on.

LVG: Yes definitely, we just don't have the capacity and energy now. It also seems to have been a trend lately, starting alternative art schools (VANSA's Winter School, Beirut's school programme, etc.).

RC: I remember originally speaking quite strategically about S&L. We'd accepted that we had no funding, and we did have a long term plan – to build up a reputation, an

audience, some kind of credibility and sustain ourselves like that and then apply for funding. That is exactly what we did, and it worked.

LVG: I think we're at the point where we feel the need to challenge ourselves again, and maybe we didn't fully expect for things to work out.

RC: Yes, and we've started a lot of sub-projects within that: the running club, MIAC, etc.

LVG: When you were applying for your doctorate, it was a thing, that you had to know if we would still be running S&L by the time you ended it. We had a conversation where you kind of asked me if I was committed. We made a forty-year commitment – kind of as a joke at first.

RC: I think I made you make that promise.

LVG: It was quite a turning point because I knew I always wanted to do this, but there was also that possibility that I'd piss you off, for not being there enough, and you might want to call it quits. So it was good to make that decision.

RC: It made me feel better. You can go and travel all over the place, but there is this forty-year commitment you've made, so you'll be back.

LVG: Do you feel that your writing and theorising about S&L shapes in any way the projects and work we make? Or do you feel some kind of pressure to make things work better, because you're writing about what we do?

RC: No, not at all. Last year it got to a point where it did – when we got funding, and feeling kind of trapped by it. But that isn't how we work, so no; I applied for the funding based on what we do, so I can't let it dictate that. We have to make it work for us, and as we've spoken about it before, if it isn't working for us anymore then we will stop it. It is so bureaucratic and it was starting to shape how we worked.

LVG: I think it was a good point to leave the (Melville) house when we did. It shows that our project is not dependent on money, or a space. It doesn't make us better at what we do.

RC: The idea of a space is completely unimportant to what we do – whether it is a fancy space or a tacky space. Something interesting we could talk about is the position of our previous spaces – in suburbia, or on the periphery. There's an interesting quote I'm looking at now in relation to the Parking Gallery, about it creating this reverse exclusivity, because it's on the periphery so people don't really know about it, and it creates its own clique.

LVG: The Arbroath house was even further out. At the Melville house specifically, we've been very aware of our audience. It doesn't represent the society we live in very well, and I don't know if I want to have that responsibility, of being hosts to such a public platform and it not being representative, or rather as coming across as very white. We aren't going to change our content to attract a different audience, but it might be related to the locations we've been situated in too. I don't have any conclusion, except that it is a point of anxiety for me.

RC: That is what comes with using the word 'institute' as opposed to an artist and their own practice.

LVG: In Johannesburg I feel you have to be aware, and you have to put structures in place to be more responsible.

RC: That has been an interesting thing, because originally I don't think we totally saw the Institute as our practice, whereas now everything we do is *completely* our practice... so where does the responsibility lie then? And we always speak about how concerned we are with our audience. But is it our audience, which is very small, or an art audience, where you suddenly have to be more responsible.

LVG: It is anxious-making – who we put calls out to and stuff.

RC: They are always open calls, but at the end of the day we do select them.

LVG: And we do also attract a certain...

RC: ...white woman. I don't really know if it is a problem. It makes me feel uncomfortable.

LVG: I don't know.

RC: For example, I'm looking at the Parking Gallery now, and the idea of reverse exclusivity. Their mandate is as a community for peers, which is very specific. It can't be called exclusive if the mandate is for artists only. If we were more explicit about things, would that make it better or worse?

LVG: I don't know, that is a tricky thing. We are an organisation or institute, but we don't have official documents stating so. It is actually an art project, we aren't registered as anything, and we don't have any policies in place. I guess what I'm trying to say is that I'm more comfortable for example when we're here at this residency and some people come to see our presentation. We don't have so much control over who comes or doesn't, as opposed to when we're putting out open calls and invites to events, then the audience does become a reflection of us and our 'policies' as opposed to an audience that might be interested in our work.

RC: I guess one of the main reasons we stopped the Melville house after a year is because of the admin, and it was becoming less and less about our practice and more about fetching people from the airport and making sure there are enough pots and pans and toilet paper.

LVG: Without ever even having time to really engage what is happening at the house.

RC: Another thing to talk about again is the idea of generosity. We were giving up a lot of our time and money and space to try and open up these conversations. In the beginning, I think it was really important, where there wasn't really space for experimental work. But then the flip side is to consider the idea of using other artists for self-promotion; it is something that is quite difficult. I know that was never the intention when we started.

LVG: It did become a way to make ourselves known, and it is exciting when you see on an artists' CV that they included a residency or project at S&L. In retrospect it could seem manipulative and evil, but that was never the intention.

RC: Do you want to talk a bit about funding?

LVG: We spoke earlier about how it doesn't make that much of a difference, it doesn't necessarily influence our practice. Before ever receiving funding I think we expected that we could do bigger, better things...but that doesn't really fit in with how we work. There was a point since you got the NRF funding where we thought it might fuck shit up, where we might have been on the edge of not really sticking to what S&L is about, which is partly why we stopped accepting open calls and closed the Melville house. I was thinking more about it last year, when I started that Master's in Arts & Culture Management – I thought S&L might be an interesting case study to see whether funding would have a more negative or positive effect on the overall artistic practice of the 'organisation'. However, I think it goes against our nature and how we work within S&L to ever let it turn into something we're uncomfortable with. Over the years we've been pretty good at stopping, reflecting, and taking a new direction when the time is right. With regards to the NRF funding, what it has done is create a lot of administration for you that only you can deal with within the bureaucracy of UJ. I feel bad about that, that I can't always help with the really annoying things, like ordering bunk beds and frying pans. Our ideas of how S&L can or needs to be funded has shifted a lot over the years I think. In viewing S&L more as our artistic practice than the Institute (which I'm sure will flip again at some point), we realise we probably have less need for outside funding. There are different, shorter-term possibilities for making

work then – for example, this residency (at Hordaland Kunstsenter) and future project-based residencies.

RC: Do you think having been funded changed the way we worked?

LVG: I think it did. For a while it became stressful because of the ways in which money has to be spent, and there are definite timeframes for money to be spent. I think you always are more practical with those kinds of things. So for example with ordering the books for our library project, you had to go ahead with it straight away, in order to get three different quotes and follow procedure. On the other hand, I thought that we had to take our time to select and research each book and curate it quite thoughtfully and carefully. But in the end, it becomes a compromise between those two positions – which I feel works much better. In that sense, the funding sometimes mimics the way we would work anyway, but it isn't ideal that you often need to deal with the more administrative side of things, or be more responsible somehow. The funding adds a certain pressure of course, which you have to be mindful of. People also look at you differently, and question where you got funding from and why you got it, which is natural I guess. People sometimes seemed suspicious of us having funding, and why we were able to give up space for free.

RC: What I find interesting, with the residency space, is that I'm sure it was valuable for the individual artists that participated, but I don't know how useful or interesting it was for our audience, which is what we were more interested in. That is maybe why we've decided to work on the library project more.

LVG: Initially we hadn't expected that the Melville house would turn into just being a residency, we'd envisioned a lot more project-based works and events happening there. But there was something about the domestic setting that encouraged the idea of a residency. When planning the library project, we also got temporarily tricked into the idea of renting a space, a small shop front or something similar. It is such a nice idea in theory, but it isn't really necessary – the library just needs a shelf really. But the idea of housing it at VANSa is appealing because we then still have some kind of presence, which is probably important for our state of mind.

RC: I think how we've resolved it – the library, the running club, etc. – is that the Institute is now underneath the umbrella of Sober & Lonely. I'm not sure why we didn't see that before?

LVG: It is only the last few weeks or months that we've seen how it makes sense like that. Rethinking the website has helped too, and changing our Facebook page name. I

think we started this shift about a year ago anyway when we changed our logo on Facebook to just S&L instead of SLICA.

RC: Our attention spans are very short, so I think things shift around quite quickly. But with the library, it is also good that we'll be recycling the money through another arts organisation (VANSA). So instead of renting space from a landlord, we can use the VANSA space, and they will be able to use the small amount of rent for developing their organisation. The other thing I'd like to speak a little about is the idea of generosity. We have previously spoken about the possibility of opening up a for-profit residency space, similar to Arteles. It isn't what we want, but we have thought of it as a possible job opportunity. I'm going to be looking at Upominki quite analogously, and I think it is something quite important that we need to speak about.

LVG: Every time we've had that conversation about a for profit residency or similar things, it just sits so uncomfortably. It was maybe a dream, to be able to make money off S&L and be sustainable, but any moment we almost do that or even think about it, it is super uncomfortable and just doesn't feel good. There is a fear of ruining S&L through something like that.

RC: Maybe it is less about generosity and more about hospitality?

LVG: It is something that runs through our practice. If you look at our very early work, where we'd walk around with the ceramic dogs, or tie balloons to people's gates, or even with regards to catering at any of our events, we'd spend our own money on champagne and bake all night (Red Line Gallery) or make free 'wors' rolls or tomato soup. And remember how upset we got when Ithuba wanted to charge our audience for wine, so they could make a small profit and cover the costs, and we refused and then bought the wine and gave it away for free.

It might come from being insecure, that we feel the need to give people tangible things to make it feel worth their while to be there, or to thank them for engaging in our work. I don't think it really is that, but might have started like that. It has become a characteristic of what we do, to try make people enjoy the whole experience. We've played around with these ideas and principles for a long time, even at the Arbroath house.

RC: even more so then, because we really had nothing.

LVG: Yes, we weren't funded at all then, and it somehow felt better then, sharing the little we had. But we did get burnt out after about three months. At the Melville house we realised that it started not to be good when we felt taken advantage of.

I know we've brought it up a lot, the idea of generosity, but maybe it is essentially how we are as humans, and it is in our nature to believe in kindness and generosity, so that becomes an underlying structure that we work from, instead of a theme?

RC: Yes, how you would engage with people, a value system.

LVG: Yes I think we share the same value system.

RC: It has been interesting with the various artists, how they've reciprocated that, or not. We've spoken about that feeling of being taken advantage of, but maybe it is just very different value systems.

LVG: The biggest differences were with international artists, who obviously have a very different value system to us, like when to say please and thank you and when to share or not share.

RC: For example, when James (Webb) stays at S&L, yes, we've administrated a way for him to have accommodation and a studio while he's in Johannesburg, and he's reciprocated in really nice ways, by bringing wine from his family's farm or taking us out for dinner.

LVG: That for example, is probably also why we're here (in Bergen), because he's put in a good word for us, and we know Anthea (Buys) through him. So there are also ways you definitely can't calculate when generosity and hospitality are reciprocated.

RC: It is like gestural generosity, a kind of symbolic value of things.

LVG: It is difficult for us to articulate that to artists, so it is extra special when people just understand it. With Abri (de Swardt) for example, I don't know what it is yet, but there is this connection that is ongoing, where I feel we both benefit from the relationship in different ways. There's that way of sharing or generosity that you can't articulate, but you know it exists.

RC: With Anna Romanenko we were so happy with the effort she put in. It was a really small event, but it was really worth it. The gesture of bringing these objects and sharing the time with an audience was really special.

LVG: Yes, it is a difficult thing to think about because it is so intangible. It is more in our actions in how we hope people will understand or reciprocate. When things haven't always worked out so well, it is often because the generosity was not sincere or genuine. For example when we've been involved in curating and putting on a huge exhibition – we were enthusiastic about the space and felt the gallery was so generous in inviting us. However, when working with them it was awful, and in retrospect, I feel it is because they could get instant interesting programming from us, but they couldn't

follow through on any of their promises, from things as simple as opening the gallery, or installing a projector. And then we get hurt, that they didn't fulfil their end of the bargain, and we get defensive.

RC: It is really simple actually, that transaction. It is so human and personal.

LVG: It is about very small exchanges.

RC: Another example is when Piya (Wanthiang) was at the residency. We felt taken advantage of because she went behind our backs and misrepresented what we do. She faked to her funders that we were hosting an exhibition of her work. It was really unpleasant as it compromised what S&L stands for, and it made the relationship with her difficult. It was very inappropriate. It goes back to degrees of institutionalisation, which is what we were struggling with. We've wanted an open call, but that became unmanageable. We received a lot of inappropriate applications and requests. So we tried to curate the call, with the forms you could fill in, which was partly humorous, but also gave people a sense of what we do. At the same time, people would do that and we'd often be disappointed when they arrived and didn't engage, but rather just came for the free space. The problematic is then do we, because we're becoming more and more of an institution and less of a satire or parody of an institution, do we then have to come up with a very specific mandate for what the artists do?

LVG: Which is why we've closed the space. People don't really get the joke. Well, not the joke...

RC: The satire of it.

LVG: You could also look at it from their perspective. Nobody wants to be made a fool of, and nobody wants to not get a joke. I'm sure people often came across it and just thought that sure, I want to go to an art institute in Johannesburg, let me apply.

I guess our past application form is opening yourself up to being a collaborator of ours. For us we saw it as a joint venture, when artists came for a residency, but I don't think people were that open to it. I don't feel we ever meant to trick people, but maybe they sometimes felt that way.

RC: Maybe we weren't explicit enough about the fact that we saw it as a kind of collaborative venture.

LVG: Earlier you spoke about how we like the idea of collaboration, which we do, but I think what we've learnt in the last four years is that we can work very well together as an artistic duo, as a collective, but we aren't that open to collaborating on projects with others. We don't have the capacity, or the inclination, to work on projects where we

have to compromise our practice. I think that is okay, but I think we need to admit that.

RC: Maybe that has been the biggest antagonism: that we see it as our artistic practice but present it as an institution. We haven't fully known how to balance it.

LVG: That comes up again in the writing we've just commissioned for our website. We wanted people to do a very specific thing, but the brief gave them the possibility to do anything. And then we weren't completely satisfied with what we got.

RC: I guess the point of running an art institution is that you believe intrinsically in the idea of the space. When we started the space we wanted it to have specific programming, because there was nothing like that in Johannesburg. As with the library, it is very specific; we want a Feminism & Science Fiction library. So we started the Institute with the mandate being wishy-washy because we didn't want to be prescriptive.

LVG: We wanted to be open to anything.

RC: But actually it was a very specific project we were trying to do. The good thing about it is that we did a whole lot of things we would never have and met a lot of people that we probably wouldn't have if we weren't open to anything to start with. It would've been interesting if we had started with, for example, the S&L Institute for Feminism & Science Fiction.

LVG: I'm pretty sure we'll go in a circle again, and do a project where we invite twenty artists to do something crazy. I think that is okay.

RC: Originally when we first spoke about it I think we did envisage that the institute would land up being more formal. We wanted it to be like that. The closer we've got to that, the less we realise we want it.

LVG: In retrospect, looking at that idea is kind of frightening. It is so much more interesting now that it is and can be all of these things. We now realise that it is kind of easy to make it a specific serious thing, but it won't keep exciting us if it becomes a static project.

RC: And there are so many other things happening now, so many art spaces in Johannesburg.

LVG: Yes, there are opportunities for all sorts of artists and people and we don't really have to be doing that anymore. There's also that idea, I've heard Artist Proof Studios used as an example before, about how when Kim Berman dies, the organisation (or the form it is known in) will die too. There are a lot of those personality-driven

organisations. I thought about that the other day, about what will S&L be when we're both dead?

RC: Or one of us. I'm not going to do it on my own.

LVG: Exactly. That is how I want it to be. I don't think we're trying to build a legacy, and that is what I guess an institution is supposed to do. Institutions are meant to set up sustainable structures and policies that can work under the direction of different people.

RC: As soon as it becomes bigger than you, you lose creative control over the thing and then it becomes an institution.

LVG: It is important, that there are institutions that are run by specific personalities that make them unique, but it becomes problematic when the institution can't run without that person.

RC: Yes, for example, I wonder what will happen to Kalashnikovv if Murray leaves? He has a very specific persona that runs very clearly through the programming of the gallery. It is very driven by his personality.

LVG: Talking about legitimacy again, and calling it different things, like an artist-run space for example... maybe the Institute became a kind of mask or a way to be an artist. Not a mask. Do you know what I mean?

RC: I do know what you mean. I don't think it was.

LVG: Looking back I don't think so either, now that we're looking more inwards again and trying to make a different kind of art again. Maybe we needed the confidence of the Institute to legitimise our art making?

RC: Oh I see what you mean now. Like saying that we're capable of creating this legitimate institute...

LVG: As an artwork.

RC: In a sense I think the funding has been good for that. We've proved that we can do this. You've often referred to us as being on the periphery. Do you want to speak about this some more?

LVG: Geographically, and also in the art world/ crowd. So when we were at Arbroath, it was really far out of the centre and where any art things were happening. So if anybody came to an event, it was because they were really interested in it. Same with Melville, up until very recently, it was pretty dead again and not much was happening there. It doesn't feel like we're involved in the Johannesburg art scene. We don't go to all the openings and visit all the shows. We know most of the people, because the

scene is so small. It is only recently that we've been thought of for specific things, like the Art Map, or being involved in some things. But I feel we're most often not included in the general happenings of the art world. Not in a bitter or sad way, I think we just do our own thing. I like that quote David Brodie once gave to us for our website, about S&L being its own scene. When talking about periphery, I think we are kind of outsiders. We don't really fit anywhere, as artists, as we aren't really showing our work anywhere else in Johannesburg. I don't think we're trying to be antagonistic or otherwise.

RC: Maybe you can speak a little bit about opening up to new audiences and what that means.

LVG: We see the value in what we do beyond the art industry, in that we are trying to create or curate or administer interesting, curious events. We want to use S&L as a place where people are comfortable stepping out of their comfort zones, a space where people might come to a lecture on science or sport. We're calling it art, because that is what we know and how we're trained, and we want it to be accessible to a wider audience. When we're looking for new audiences, I don't really know what we're looking for?

RC: Maybe it's less about us looking for new audiences and maybe trying to introduce art audiences to other experiences.

LVG: Make it a bit bigger than itself.

RC: That is a good point.

LVG: That relates to the idea of the periphery, or trying to put art into a bigger context, which I think people often don't want...

RC: ...for art to be demystified or made accessible. I guess accessibility is interesting. A lot of what we do is, or should be very accessible, like a running club, or a library.

LVG: I think people are sometimes suspicious of it.

RC: It almost does the reverse of what we set out to do occasionally. It almost seems like a trick, but it is just genuinely a running club for artists.

LVG: I do believe if we keep doing that then people will catch on. Keith for example will often say that he doesn't get what we do. He believes that there is some catch, but usually, it is exactly what it is – we're offering a free palm reading session for example.

RC: We can speak about it in a certain way.

LVG: Yes, we could art-speak about it. There's so much more to say.

RC: There is. We touched on a lot of things though, and can come back to it at a later stage if we need to.

9.8 A conversation with Juliana Irene Smith of Alma Martha

Date: 5/05/2016

Venue: New York, USA, & Cape Town, South Africa

Via Skype

Present: Robyn Cook, Juliana Irene Smith

Robyn Cook (RC): Hi Juliana, thanks for meeting with me. Maybe we could start with just chatting about the initial impetus for starting Alma Martha?

Juliana Irene Smith (JIS): I've been coming to South Africa for years, and when I arrived in Cape Town in November 2014, Lize Grobler said you have to meet this great artist Molly Steven who is part of a collective called Martha. We just clicked. She's the best partner someone could have. We work really well together. In October/November we decided that we should continue working together. We've officially been an NPO since April 12th.

RC: That's great. So you're officially an NPO?

JIS: Yes. It took about four and a half months. I actually tried to pick up the documents today.

RC: Yes, I believe it can be quite onerous. Why did you choose to go that route?

JIS: Largely because of funding. It just seemed that in order to get support, the NPO status is needed. So we're hoping this status will help us, we'll see.

RC: Could you tell me a bit about your background as an artist?

JIS: My work tends to be political, and I enjoy creating social spaces. Both Molly [Steven] and I are artists and we don't want to be thought of as curators. We never tell artists we work with what to exhibit, or to do something specific. We just ask them to play with us and offer them as much as we are able. Not that we don't respect and love curators of the world it's just not what we do.

RC: So how would you describe Alma Martha then?

JIS: I think it's different for both Molly and me, and I don't want to speak for her. But basically, we thought it would be great to be able to offer an alternative space for artists where we could say just have a good time and play.

RC: So you felt there were certain 'lacks' in the art scene?

JIS: Yes. There are other initiatives like Jnr. and more collectives popping up. But, yes, I felt like there was no place that was going to say 'do whatever you want'. I feel that

that was lacking, in Cape Town due to funding. Artists need to be commercial to make a living, and I respect that, however, it is nice to go big and wild. There's a big desire to want to get into the top four galleries. Personally, I like experimental, site specific and production based art projects more than white-cube exhibitions. And a lot of the artists that we've played with have had a similar attitude. The major issue is how to get paid to do what you dream of and in fact, it is a luxury to want it, but why not at least try?!

RC: One thing that has emerged, and please stop me if I'm wrong, but platforms like SLICA and seemingly Alma Martha, are quite hard to categorise. They seem to evolve quite intuitively. One of the words that you use is 'play' – is that something key to your project?

JIS: Yes. That's kind of our whole ethos. You know, she's not your mother, fuck the rules, do whatever you want, and we'll try to support that as much as possible. Even though we love our mothers. That gets us into trouble sometimes. People are like 'what's wrong with your mother?' and I'm like 'nothing my mom's amazing but I do not want her breathing down my neck when I am using porn in my work...'

RC: Will you maybe talk to some of the projects that you have worked on? I read an article recently that placed you in both the best and worst shows for 2015. Not that I think write-ups are the be all and end all.

JIS: What we learned from our first year is that it's as important for us to create space for artists to play in as it is to see how many new audiences we can reach. And by being in a place on Albert Road across from What if the World, and in the gallery area of Woodstock, we were just accessing the same art crowd, and not actually achieving our goal. We never really had much street traffic except on Saturdays for the Biscuit Mill crowd. We had great shows but were not really a part of the community.

RC: How long did you have the formal project space for?

JIS: We had it for 10 months and eight exhibitions. We were given a rent-free space, which we renovated in trade. But after a series of break-ins, it wasn't fun anymore, we didn't feel safe, and as I've said, we also realised we weren't reaching new audiences.

RC: Could you tell me a bit about some upcoming projects?

JIS: The show that's coming up that I'm most excited about is at the central Methodist Church at Green Market Square. We're being given the church for free. The pastor is great, and he works with all sorts of advocacy groups. It's a great community space. He's allowing me to have a smoke machine coming out of the church to bring people

in, and we have four really talented young artists, three women, and one man, and the title is ‘Embrace Tiger and Return to Mountain’.

RC: Could you speak a little about what frames your project and how you make the choices you do?

JIS: I think every year we have an overall umbrella theme. The first year, for example, was ‘Learning by Doing?’. And this year we’re experimenting with new venues. But we felt like we had too many shows last year, so we’ll have a maximum of six shows this year. Another important aspect for us is to give as much back to the participating artists as possibly. And I guess I also really like the quote from the Bubble Gum Club which called us “the uni-brow to highbrow art practice”.

RC: I really liked that. I’m giving you these loaded questions because it’s kind of where my research is going – that there is a lack of vocabulary and terminology to frame these kinds of emerging initiatives and these new ways of working with other artists. Where we are not curators, and not artist-curators, or artist-curators as artists.

JIS: Absolutely.

RC: If you do get funding will you look for another space?

JIS: Not this year. We’ll pay back some of the production funds to artists for shows we’ve had this year. We really try and be generous and give as much as we can. If we can’t pay for the production, we always buy beer, and dinner at least. So if we get funding this year, we’ll pay back some of the artists, and put the rest of the money into producing future shows.

RC: The notion of Generosity is interesting, and keeps coming up in my research. Would you tell me a bit about your thoughts on this?

JIS: I think paying artists is critical. VANSA’s just released norms and standards around this, but then they didn’t give specific numbers – only percentages. I think we should have a proper wage certification. Even if we are not selling, artists should be given an allowances / stipends.

RC: So most of your shows are non-commercial?

JIS: Other than two works that sold at the supermarket, we’ve never sold a thing. And even if we did the artists would get 100%. We don’t want money from sales, and we never want to make that transition into being a commercial gallery.

RC: Are you still producing your own work? Do you see the two as separate, or has Alma Martha become your practice?

JIS: I haven't had a lot of time to work on my own projects, to be honest. But I think because my work is focused on issues of power and violence my work at the rape crisis centre is teaching me a lot. But Alma Martha is definitely a part of my practice as a collaboration with Molly, and with other artists. But I definitely want to keep my own research projects going. I made a work recently in Basel, which I am very proud of:
ONLY TECHNOLOGY CHANGES. WE ARE LIVING IN REPETITION. POWER
POWER POWER. CASH MONEY. YAH YAH YAH.

9.9 A conversation with Molly Steven of Alma Martha

Date: 15/05/2016

Venue: Johannesburg, South Africa & Paris, France

Via Skype

Present: Robyn Cook, Molly Steven

Robyn Cook (RC): Hi Molly, thanks for chatting to me. Perhaps we could begin with a few general questions. Where did the name Alma Martha come from?

Molly Steven (MS): Back in 2013/14 after I had just graduated, I got together with two of my friends, Jake Singer and Rudi le Hane, and we decided to start a collective, which we called Martha. And then at the end of 2014, I met Juliana who was running a project called Alma Mater. So when we decided to join up and start a new initiative, we threw the names together – hence Alma Martha.

RC: Would it be accurate to say that you started in earnest in 2015?

MS: Yes, I met Juliana at the end of 2014. We spent about 2 months renovating the space that we found. And then officially opened in February.

RC: I see on your website you refer to yourselves as a collective?

MS: Yes. I think it's perhaps the closest definition because I don't consider myself a curator, and facilitator is such a gross word. I'm sure there has to be a better word for the kind of work we do. But really it's an inclusive project where we invite people in, and they become part of us and part of the space for a bit. So it's kind of like a fluctuating membership around Juliana and I. So I think collective is a nicer word because it makes people feel like they are a part of something.

RC: Did you collaborate with Juliana before Alma Martha.

MS: No.

RC: Would you tell me about the decisions that led up to starting the project space, and then closing it?

MS: I suppose when you think of the idea project space, you envision a space. So to us, it wasn't a question of having a space or not having a space. I think we both knew that we needed a space when we started out. Finding it was quite a serendipitous event, it came to us very quickly and fairly easily – and we were fortunate enough not to pay rent for it, and so we did as many shows as we could. But then towards the end of August we had a series of bad break-ins even though we didn't have much of anything

in the space. We didn't have projectors or screens or anything. But they took beer, toilet paper, mirrors, etc. And it didn't really feel like a safe space after that. It also soured our relationship with the landlord who then wanted the space back. It worked out fine because at that point I was preparing to leave for Paris. And not having a space is interesting because you can occupy different spaces.

RC: I understand that completely. The last official space we had in Melville as Sober & Lonely became so administrative that it really drained the life out of the project for us. But it's liberating to realise that having an official space isn't the be all or end all. Would you chat about your McDonald's project? That sounded really interesting in terms of 'space'.

MS: Juliana was in Switzerland over a break, and she had met Randy Tischler who had done a similar project in the Burger King parking area. We thought we could carry on in this vein, especially because of the McDonald's location in the centre of Cape Town – it's such prime property, so in a way it was interesting to access a space that we would never be able to afford otherwise. And it also meant we could access an audience that wouldn't ordinarily come out to the Woodstock space. We worked with Lucienne Bestall, Bert Pauw & Dane Lategan. I think what came out of it was really interesting. Lucy held a kind of a panel discussion a few nights before, where people proposed ideas of what she should do in the space. People just threw out ideas like put a copy of the manifesto in the toilets, or draw pictures or whatever. It resulted in a small publication, which was then available in the space. Burt did a project called 'Society', where he investigated the idea of privilege and access relating to the big car park booms that you drive through when you enter a lot. So he had this boom and he was all suited up. I was over here at the time, though.

RC: Could you tell me a little about how Alma Martha is working with you being in Paris at the moment?

MS: My role mostly now is administration because of the distance. So I generally follow up with people, email, update our website and documentation, etc. I try to pull my weight in any way I can. Juliana and I frequently email, bounce ideas off of each other for different shows. And because I went to school in Cape Town and I've lived there for a big part of my life, I have a great network and can refer her to people.

RC: If you stay in Paris long-term, will Alma Martha continue?

MS: Yes. Even if I don't come back, I think there is scope for us to do a bi-continental project and exchange. There are so many different ways to work because now that we

don't have a space, the project platform is whatever we want it to be. Which is fantastic. And Juliana is really good at doing all the groundwork, so if I'm there or not it doesn't really matter, the project will just develop in a different direction.

RC: How do you see the organisational landscape for the arts in Cape Town at the moment? Was part of the reason for starting Alma Martha in response to a lack of space for emerging artists?

MS: Yes, exactly. Cape Town is so set in its ways. There are only really the major art galleries since Blank became a commercial gallery and no longer a project space. So everything felt inaccessible, it was difficult to get into the art market. Starting a project space seemed like a great way to meet people, to help young artists, and to try to create some exciting work. At the time there weren't any other platforms I can think of that were doing that.

RC: So the idea of supporting young artists was central to Alma Martha?

MS: Yes. The artists that worked on the McDonalds project for example had all just graduated.

RC: And what was your connection to them?

MS: They had just graduated from Michaelis. Cape Town is really small, so everyone knows everyone else, and it's easy to keep track of people's work – even if it's from a distance. I didn't know them personally, but they were friends of friends and knew what kind of work they were making.

RC: How does Michaelis help set up young artists for when they graduate?

MS: Well that's why I'm now doing my MBA because I felt like my degree didn't give me the practical skills needed to become an artist. You don't just graduate and walk up to Stevenson and go 'Well I've got a show for you guys'. So your first couple of years is spent being an entrepreneur of sorts, so you have to see your art as a one-man business if you want to go into the commercial world. And even if you don't you have to realise that you need to know how to use your network, how to market yourself, who to market yourself to, and so on. But I think Michaelis brings about a lot of opportunities for graduating students who are coming out of art school to potentially start those relationships with galleries, but they don't come to fruition for a while. I did a show at What if the World, and that was in 2016, and I graduated in 2013. We've been e-mailing back and forth for almost three years. You don't just graduate and go on to do a show. So I think the education system doesn't set you up practically with what to with your degree. And how to sell your skills.

RC: I was unaware that there is an MBA in the Arts. I know that there's a Master's in Arts Administration

MS: I couldn't find a course like this in South Africa, I wouldn't be here otherwise. But I think as I left I saw the Business Graduate School opening something quite similar. There's also an interesting course that Columbia offers that's two years to tie arts practice and business together.

RC: Would you speak a little bit about your own practice and how or if that influences Alma Martha? Or if you see them as two totally separate things?

MS: I think I try not to let my own artistic practice influence Alma Martha because I have to be open-minded, but subconsciously obviously my taste and my aesthetics are obviously going to influence my thinking and my judgement and my selection of people, how I read the work, what I think would work, my opinion in my conversation with the artist, and so on. But if you're trying to provide a platform that's inclusive I don't think you should have a framework of 'this is what I like so you should do it too'.

RC: So is inclusivity a central focus for Alma Martha?

MS: It is for me, I've always felt like a bit of an outsider and always wanted a to feel part of a community of people, to feel connected and that we are all working towards something together. I'm sure you know the feeling of being included in something that is so much bigger than you and your ideas – you can feel and sense the energy.

RC: Sort of a 'scene' then.

MS: Yes, of course, I can't predict how it will evolve.

RC: Which is the exciting thing about ARIs – but it also makes it challenging to write about the projects because the landscape is constantly changing. Spaces closing, evolving, popping up.

MS: I think in South Africa it's a real problem that these spaces come and go so quickly. It's tricky because they come and they are there for six months, and you're 'yeah people are doing stuff' and then they're gone. I feel it does more harm than good.

RC: I see the very nature of ARIs as unstable. But it's an interesting dilemma. I know Simon Gush of the Parking Gallery is very focused on the idea of regularity and consistency as a kind of antidote to the instability of ARIs.

MS: Could you tell me a bit about your thesis? Is it a survey of project spaces in South Africa?

RC: I wanted to incorporate writing about SLICA within a wider organisational landscape. There really isn't any space for experimental kinds of art forms in South

Africa. I wanted to see what solutions artists were proposing. There are a lot of ARI's that work on a more traditional white-cube model like Kalashnikovv. But I wanted to look at project spaces focused on promoting experimental and non-commercial projects through the creation of participative communities. There are only three that I can identify, Keleketla!, SLICA, the Parking Gallery – and now Alma Martha and Dineo Bopape's NGO. So the arena is limited – but that's exciting. Europe is so flooded with artist-run spaces in South Africa there is still space and a need for these kinds of projects.

MS: It's interesting that Kalashnikovv consider themselves an artist-run initiative.

RC: Murray [Turpin] is a practicing artist. But there is a lot of slippage between the idea of project space, a gallery and an ARI. And also that, as with your project the very notion of space is in flux. That's why I was asking specifically about the term 'collective'. Again there's a lot of slippage between the terms and concepts 'curator', 'facilitator', 'artist-run', etc. For example, I'm not sure if you've heard of DIS?

MS: They're a magazine? And curating the Berlin Biennial.

RC: Yes, but they're also not. They've been described as a wormhole, a social network, a community, ground zero for the future, the end game of counter-culture, and a hub of context invention.

MS: That's great that they are doing that. I feel there's so much pressure on having to pin yourself down.

RC: Absolutely. I guess the question I asked you earlier was loaded because I suspected there wasn't an answer or at least an easy answer. Lauren and I are working with two producers at the moment who want to do a documentary with us – and they keep asking 'What are you?' – and I honestly don't know what to say. At the moment we're a library. Chatting to Keleketla! they're in the same position. I think this is really interesting in terms of DIS curating the Biennial and RAQS Collective, who are curating the Shanghai Biennial. There also aren't any clear descriptors for what they do. It's kind of a community of art making. Relational aesthetics goes some way towards framing it, but it isn't enough. I think there's a new discourse that needs to be developed around these kinds of emerging projects. I think the next few years will be very exciting to see the kinds of conversations and theorisation that emerges.

MS: How does Sober & Lonely work? Is it funded?

RC: No, we've been running since 2011, and our whole thing was that we didn't want to be funded so we've just run basically off a zero budget premise. So everything we've

done is super cheap and tacky –in our own homes or borrowed from friends or our of community. We were lucky enough to have landed up in a situation where we were caretaking a big house in Hurlingham while it was being renovated. It was huge; it had five bedrooms and three lounges. but was in a state of disrepair. But we just opened it up to other artists for a residency project/project space for two years. Later on, we did get a bit of funding because of my research – and we opened up a space in Melville. That ran for almost two years as a residency type project. But, as I said earlier, while getting a space always seemed the end goal, but in reality the creativity and energy that drove Sober & Lonely dissipated. It just became highly administrative, and we closed it. Now we have a library in a cupboard. Maybe we'll do something else soon. But that's it for now.

MS: It's great realising you don't need 'a space'.

RC: Absolutely. Could you tell me a little about Alma Martha's funding? Juliana said you've just registered as an NGO?

MS: Yes. We are officially registered.

RC: I think that's really interesting. It opens up a lot of possibilities in terms of funding, and credibility and support. But I also think it can hinder certain things – there are strings attached. So you gain certain things, but you lose certain things.

MS: Yes. It's also that accountability – that you are accountable not just to yourself but have to explain your choices, your budget, and how you use that money

RC: It can be very difficult. I remember the last time we hired a psychic for one of our events, and I had to try and justify it to academic administration who are used to funding science equipment.

MS: That's why I think private funding is better – you can develop a relationship the same as if you were an artist with a collector.

RC: For sure. But I don't think there's much scope for that in South Africa?

MS: True. And funding is an issue – but we have so many other problems so I think baby steps are good.

RC: That's why I also think it's exciting what people are managing to do on super limited budgets. I'm not saying it's ideal – but it also presents interesting creative opportunities.

MS: One thing Juliana and I always try and do is to pay the artist or artists involved. I think it helps set a precedent – not because we have the money, and can afford it – but

that it will help start a foundation for the arts to be treated as an occupation instead of an exploitable resource.

RC: Absolutely. I'm not sure if you've seen it but VANSAs is launching a new norms and standards industry guide, which I think will really help with internships, paid projects, etc. Just going back to the issues of funding, I think some of the problems around it is that it's about 'ticking the box'. A lot of European funders are now combining social justice projects with arts projects. So arts aren't seen as having value in that they are creative projects, now they have to have a kind of social work or community as well, which is problematic on a number of levels. And then going back to what you were saying about the importance of paying artists, I also realise that projects like Alma Martha and Sober & Lonely are creating platforms, which contemporary galleries then benefit from – without having to make any form of investment.

MS: Absolutely. I think galleries see artist-run, or smaller initiative as incubators where we develop artists for them to use later. I think there are also very few artists who would choose not to work with galleries, which is incredibly brave in South Africa where a gallery is potentially your only source of income. There's no room for you to be a non-commercial artist in South Africa. But another interesting development is the passing of the Artist's rights law, for resale rights in France. Artists now have to benefit from re-sales. So if I make a painting it sells for \$500, and then it becomes incredibly valuable and the buyer sells it on for \$50 000 – I'll get a small percentage. I think it is under discussion for the South African art world.

RC: That's interesting, what do you think about it as a principle?

MS: I think it's good, it will help artists. Why should the collector benefit solely from the increasing value of an artwork? It's not a big amount anyway – it gets capped at a certain point. But the gesture is important, and it also goes some way to regulating the art market where dealers aren't just selling work left, right and centre with no comeback for the actual artist. I think it's an interesting time to be an artist.

RC: Absolutely, I think the next five years are going to see some dramatic shifts. Particularly with the absorption of smaller artist collectives or initiatives into more mainstream frameworks such as the Biennales.

MS: Yes. But another problem with galleries in South Africa is that they are working with near full capacity with the artists they have. They don't have the infrastructure or the space to deal with more artists. So there's no room for emerging artists. Either another gallery is going to emerge, or artists are going to have to access the market in a

different way, which is also interesting. My thesis will explore ideas around the influence of the digital revolution on art sales, in the same way that it has affected the music industry.

So artists will be able to bypass galleries. However, platforms don't make any money off of Internet sales. People don't want to buy artwork online – there's a great difficulty in translating artistic value into digital platforms. So Artsy, for example, doesn't make money off online sales, but in the data they collect.

RC: That's very interesting. Perhaps people seek the legitimisation of buying an artwork that has been hung in a gallery.

MS: I think it's also about democratisation. Luxury brands have the same problem. Luis Vuitton for example. People don't want to spend a small fortune online. But I think emerging artists will crack the market somehow in the next few years.

9.10 A conversation with Rangoato Hlasane and Malose Malahlela of Keleketla!

Date: 17/04/2016

Venue: Keleketla!, King Kong Building, 2nd floor, 6 Verwey Street, Johannesburg

Present: Robyn Cook, Rangoato Hlasane and Malose Malahlela

Robyn Cook (RC): Hi Malose and Ra. The last time we chatted was 2014 when you were just leaving the Drill Hall. So I thought would be great to catch up because I know a lot has changed. Do you maybe want to speak a little bit about the move from the Drill Hall as a starting point?

Malose Malahlela (MM): Before we left, we had our last board meeting at the Drill Hall with all our board members. We were discussing options for spaces. Ra and I already had this spot in mind because of the relationship we have with Guy. Our board suggested other spaces as well – the fashion district for example – because they were still very much in that narrative of being in the inner city. So there was a lot of discussion. But Keleketla! Couldn't have stayed in the same neighbourhood. No matter how much we would have wanted to. The thought of leaving our established audience in this industrial area was unsettling though. But we understood the potential of building a new audience.

Rangoato Hlasane (RH): Something that also became very interesting for us was that we were increasingly doing projects that weren't necessarily based at the Drill Hall. So we've done projects in Cape Town, projects with CHR, working in Newtown as part the Book Fair. We've done things at the Substation and Hillbrow, we've done things at the Constitution Hill, in Braamfontein, at Stevenson's Makhwapheni twice for Skaftien. So these projects have made us think further about what it means to decentralise, and to use that transition to do other kinds of projects while settling into this new space.

RC: So what has been happening since you moved in here?

MM: It's very different this side. It's quiet. Remember the first time we did the 'Thath'i Cover Okestra' rehearsals, and then the owner of the building next door came in with security and was like 'I can't take my phone calls in the office, you guys need to turn it down'. So there are different boundaries. At the Drill Hall, for example, we can sell alcohol without any issues. During the Urban Play project with VANSa the police

came with guns, as if we were selling heavy drugs or something. The speakers were facing right at the police station. Also, there's no immediate foot traffic anymore. So things are a lot quieter. But there was also a lot of intensity at the Drill Hall. After we had left, we heard that one of the studio spaces burned down because one of the artists had an altercation with someone. That just shows a lack of respect, in terms of what the space or the value of the space is.

RC: So what is happening at the Drill Hall now?

MM: Whoever wants to do something can do anything right now. We had been criticised for being gatekeepers of the space – when things should happen and how it should be accessed. Or if things were damaged we'd try and fix them with the little cash that we have. So we were sort of like the in-between, the buffer, with how people reacted to a space.

RC: Do you feel like you have more control over what Keleketla!'s doing now because it's less public now?

RH: Not really. We always had creative control. But I guess at the Drill Hall people could just walk in and propose things. But that speaks to people who use the inner city. The outside audiences always had no idea of the kind of groundedness of who we are. For example, a lot of people know Keleketla! from online spaces, but have never set foot inside you know. And sometimes that gets frustrating because people have views about what it should be, but at the same time couldn't bring their own bodies to the space. That was one of the frustrating things. Here I guess people come to VANSAs projects, or King Kong events. But it presents another misconception because people now ask 'where is the library?' We have always, from the beginning, been about what a library can be in an African city rather than reproducing what libraries traditionally are. Because the city provides those. We have no interest in producing city libraries – they already exist.

RC: Is Keleketla! a registered NPO?

MM: It is now.

RH: We've always had a board – but now we are starting to take care of the administrative stuff as well.

RC: Could you see it as Keleketla! 'growing up'?

MM: We do actually. Because Keleketla! is that boy in the middle that went through different phases – he's definitely moved into a new phase. The actual infrastructure here is great as well. We don't have to stress about hiring sound for example.

RC: Oh that's great that you have access to a sound system.

RH: Yes. We invested in it, so we have everything here ready for events.

MM: It's also a way of surviving while we are still in this transition because people can hire the equipment out for a fee.

RH: Sound has always been central to Keleketla!. We've just finished Volume 4 of 'Thath'i Cover Okestra' for example, a project that started in 2012. The second volume was recorded in Cape Town, and the third one was to mark five years of Keleketla!, which was at the Drill Hall. So that's been an exciting ongoing project. It also challenges what a library can be, because that project is a reading of Kwaito and locating it in several discourses of history.

RC: And then also like archiving it.

RH: Yes, archiving it on our Sound Cloud. So then the library is live. Our next physical library is going to be a South African music history library in this space.

RC: That's really exciting. So it'll contain CD's, vinyl, etc.?

RH: Yes. CD's, cassettes, books and things.

RC: I would imagine that you've accumulated really great material over the years in collaborating with musicians. Is that part of the reason why you are starting the library?

RH: Yes, exactly.

RC: And what else is next?

MM: We're in a good place to start looking at funding and collaboration on different projects because now our finances are sound and so are our numbers. So that's empowering.

RC: Have you got funding at the moment?

RH: No.

MM: Right now we're pushing through. But we have some ideas. Because we now have a proper lease, we can apply for a liquor licence. Which we couldn't do at Drill Hall. And that's exciting – the possibility of existing outside of the frameworks and strings of funders.

RH: Autonomy is very important for us.

MM: Especially given how easily these kinds of projects die. We come from an era before the intense gentrification of Johannesburg. But nowadays, places are just being swallowed up constantly.

RC: Have you found the audience has changed quite a lot since you've been here?

MM: Yes, definitely.

RH: Yes. I mean events like the Feminist Stokvel have brought in a black female audience, who has now got to know us and what we're about. So that's been very exciting. And Panashe Chihumadzi's book launch also exposed us to a totally different audience.

RC: Just going back to the liquor licence. Have you chatted to Patrick [Mudekereza]? Picha runs a bar.

RH: Yes. And the space also has a large music base. I think it's important to think about how people live and what they consume. The art world always tries to separate itself from real life. Like we want to think art can just magically exist without the taint of consumption and consumer behaviours and habits.

RC: Buying food and drink seems to me an honest exchange. There's no manipulation in it.

MM: Yes. There's no branding or brand sponsorship behind it. We aren't selling it to make a profit.

RH: And people drink, so it makes sense.

RC: But at the end of the day financials and a salary are of course important.

MM: They are. But people are more important. When people engage we can work without money because everybody then becomes a participant, partner, and collaborator.

RC: Absolutely. I'm really struggling to pin these kinds of relationships down. It goes beyond artist-run, artist-curator, curator-as-artist. There doesn't really seem to be a vocabulary around these sorts of intense participatory kind of experiences.

RH: I think the problem with vocabulary has to do with the migration of those vocabularies and then their currency when they land, that's what makes it difficult.

MM: It is very interesting. It's very difficult to take something from your head, subtract the emotion, and put it in point form for other people to understand.

RC: I guess in a way Keleketla! is more easily described as a person, with a character and emotions.

RH: Yes.

MM: True.