

ZULU FOR MEDICS
Audio Recording (Tape 19A)
May 21 – 30, 1994

It was my habit to visit the Point Road pawn shops to look for any kind of material that could be used in my work, and one day, about a week before the *Volkskas Atelier*, I came across an interesting item. It was a language tape for teaching English speaking medical students how to communicate with Zulu patients. The broad implications of such a simple object intrigued me, and when I expressed interest in buying it, the pawn shop proprietor simply gave to me what he obviously regarded as a useless item.

I was engaged at that time with a number of sound projects that dealt with issues of communication, but was also painfully conscious of my own limited knowledge of the other languages spoken in Natal, most obviously Zulu. To me the tape, in spite of its 'well meaning' intention, spoke not only to class distinction, but the power relations between a physician and a patient, and a white and black South African. This was revealed in the 'probing' authoritarian tone of the doctor as well as the personal nature of the questions.

I had used Zulu in cut-up works for the *Festival of Laughter*, as mentioned earlier, where I took fragments of the language untranslated and experimented with random collage. With this project, however, the identity and function of the original tape was retained in the resultant sound work. The work was built on two distinctly different components that clashed and competed on one level, but combined ultimately to create what some described as a 'disturbing' work.

In a continuation of the experiments with my old 'three stringed' Spanish guitar; I amped the broken instrument by putting a microphone inside it and 'playing'. I did not play guitar, nor did I speak Zulu, but I was intrigued by the idea of creating a disturbing soundtrack for the language tape. I played the guitar while listening to the Zulu tape and then recorded the two together. The chaotic guitar gave the language tape a mood or an edge, which seemed fitting to its subject matter.

To present the work at the *Volkskas*, I used an entire hi-fi system as part of the work, and this behaved like a 'found-object'. This seemed to address the idea of the sound system as being a common household commodity, representing prestige or ownership. To me, the seriousness and

complexities embodied in the tape stood in sharp contrast to the obvious commodity status of the rather ostentatious equipment.

The work was full of contradictions. There was, as with all works that ‘spoke’ through a sampled ‘black voice’, a danger of being misread. Such an appropriation might be seen as a disrespectful careless use of another. But my hope was to address the very awkwardness inherent in the bringing together of two cultures or two languages and the power relations inherent in any exchange.

It was ironic that the tape’s explicit purpose was, in the most literal sense, to promote healing. And yet it was an appropriate metaphor for the problems and pitfalls that faced the South African. Was ‘healing’ possible within the dynamics so clearly illustrated in the tape? Was the white South African ‘doctor’ the authority, the Zulu in need of ‘help’? For me that small souvenir of the best and worst of the colonial missionary spirit spoke volumes.

Many Zulu viewers were drawn to the work because of language, and as with other such works, an interaction occurred across racial lines. It was, indeed, an educational tape, and I was amused by how wooden and simple minded the non-Zulu speaker on the tape must have sounded to a Zulu listener.



SIEMON ALLEN, *Zulu for Medics*, hi-fi sound-system, audio-cassette, 1994

EXTRACTS from ZULU FOR MEDICS.

- English male:** G-14. Where do you work?
English female: You work where?
Zulu male: Usebenza gupi?
English male: G-15. What job or work do you do?
English female: You work, which work?
Zulu male: Usebenza muphi umsebenzi?
English male: G-16. Do you still work?
English female: You still are working?
Zulu male: Usasebenza na?
English male: G-17. I don't work anymore.
English female: I don't still work.
Zulu male: Ungesasebenzi.
English male: I don't work.
Zulu male: Ungesebenzi.
English male: G-18. When did you stop working?
English female: You stopped when to work?
Zulu male: Uyeke nini ugusebenza?
- English male:** G-42. My father is dead.
English female: The father to me he is dead.
Zulu male: Ubaba wami ushonele.
English male: G-43. My mother is alive.
English female: The mother to me she is alive.
Zulu male: Umama wami usaphila.
English male: G-44. My brother is sick.
English female: The brother to me he is sick.
Zulu male: Ubuthi wami uyagula.
English male: G-45. My sister is healthy.
English female: The sister to me she is healthy.
Zulu male: Usisi wami uyaphila.
- English female:** In Zulu the question form is simply a statement said with an interrogative intonation. "Na" emphasizes the question form like the Afrikaans "Né" and it is optional.
- English male:** G-55. Do you smoke?
English female: You do smoke!
Zulu male: Uyabema na!
English male: G-56. Do you drink?
English female: You do drink!
Zulu male: Uyaphuza na!
English male: G-57. What? That is what do you drink?
English female: You drink which alcoholic beverage, beer?
Zulu male: Uphuza bupi utshwala na?
English male: G-58. Do you take medicines?
English female: Do you drink medicines?
Zulu male: Uyayiphuza imiti na?
English male: G-59. Do you see the witchdoctor?
English female: You go is it so to the witchdoctor?
Zulu male: Uyaya yini ezinyangeni zabantu?
English male: G-61. Do you take anything from the witchdoctor?
English female: You take is it so medicines at the witchdoctor?
Zulu male: Uyayithata yini imiti ezinyangeni?

At the time, Lola Frost had spoken to me about this recording in the context of my other work, and mentioned that she was intrigued by it. In a later interview, I asked her to recall what she had thought and said about the piece.

Allen: I want to talk about something you said to me concerning *Zulu for Medics*.

Frost: I remember getting very excited about it. It seemed to me, on the one level, contained within the tape was already the idea of the grid.

Allen: Yes, G1, G2, G3...

Frost: I liked that classical feature, particularly in relation to your work as I already understood it. Indeed your use of the video-tape, now or then, is an extension of the grid. At the same time the “G1” is already inserted with a social set of meanings. And then, how should I say this, culturally adequate to the moment of transition that we were going through. So my understanding of that work was that a) just in a found-object, you had managed to articulate your own aesthetic concerns, as I understood you were working in then. But in an oral format. It seemed as if you had selected this work, as a correspondence to what I perceived in your visual work. I also remember being quite excited at the clarity of the social implications of it. Here you had this grid, and the same message was being repeated in all three languages, corresponding to this utopian moment. I think it was 1994, and we were all terribly excited about this notion of cultural amalgamation. So that work seemed to me to be poignant in relation to the time we were in and in relation to your own way of working.¹⁵⁹

¹⁵⁹ Frost, Allen; Interview 12, Richmond, Feb 18, 1999

VOLKSKAS ATELIER
NSA Gallery
June 1, 1994

Held at the NSA, as a preliminary exhibition for what was considered then one of South Africa's most 'important' art shows: the *Volkskas*; this was significant in that a large number of people associated with the FLAT participated. These included De Kock, Marrins, Anthony Scullion, Barry, Lene Templehoff, Erlich, Gainer, Mansfield and myself. Out of the 30 exhibiting, 9 were associated or would become associated with the FLAT.

Then NSA President, Mike McMeeken, opened the show and attributed its success and the rejuvenation of young art in Natal to the FLAT.¹⁶⁰ Art critic Carol Brown in her column in *The Daily News* wrote:

The show is distinguished by its wide variety of media including the imaginative and intelligently conceived installation by Piers Mansfield. This installation pays tribute to Kennedy and has a nostalgic air which is achieved by a minimum of objects and dramatic lighting which creates an air of tension. Installations are few and far between in our South African art vocabulary although they are well accepted and part of regular art making in the rest of the world. Siemon Allen's "Zulu for Medics" also falls into this more conceptual framework where art is not wallpaper. Both these art forms have been recently shown at the FLAT Gallery where art as that on the show has been given a new venue. This initiative by a group of young artists has perhaps been a major factor in energizing our local art scene.¹⁶¹

Meijer in her column also mentioned the FLAT:

"The 1994 regional 'Volkskas' is one of the strongest showings we have seen for many years. The exhibition exemplifies the vibrancy and enthusiasm of young artists working in the greater Durban region," McMeekan said. He then singled out the FLAT Gallery, "Much of this enthusiasm for this exhibition is a direct spin-off from the alternative FLAT Gallery, which is a valuable and..."¹⁶²

¹⁶⁰ At this time, McMeekan had also asked us to consider running a small space at the new NSA site on similar lines to the FLAT. By the time the new NSA building was built, the FLAT had disbanded with most of its organizers had already left Durban. Thus the project was never realized.

¹⁶¹ Carol Brown; 'A Chance to See Young Artists' Work'; *The Daily News*, Durban, June 14, 1994

¹⁶² Unfortunately the rest of this article was torn off. Marianne Meijer; 'Invitations Flooding In', *The Daily News*, Durban, June 1994

SUPERMAN / SOUND EFFECTS & GUITAR
Audio Recording (Tape 21)
June 1994

The first five minutes of this recording is a discussion between Barry and myself where we outline future plans to sabotage the FLAT space, if it is ever co-opted by the Technikon. A rumor had been circulating that the Technikon was aiming to buy the property that included the building that housed the FLAT. There is a something of a celebratory atmosphere to the evening and at some point Samkelo Matoti joined in singing and talking.

Later on the same tape is a recording made some time after. Here, Horsburgh can be heard jamming on the guitar, while I sing and make other noises. We began by playing a crude version of REM's *Superman* and then Horsburgh continues to play on the guitar while I create sounds on a record player by manipulating records (including Dylan's *Mr. Tambourine Man*).

The sound was uneven and intercepted the chords played by Horsburgh. Later, I also over-dubbed myself playing a repetitive chord on the guitar onto this recording forming along with other sounds a kind of cacophony. This was a recording that would later form part of my audio installation at the FLAT: *Songs for Nella*.

On the second side, I continued my experiments with guitar and record player. I played a sound effects record, that included among other strange sounds, farm animals, while simultaneously 'attacking' the guitar. I subsequently recorded the result. This sound work was made with a method similar to the one I used to construct *Zulu for Medics*. (which was described earlier.) Near the end of the cassette I began to read from D.H. Lawrence's *Sons & Lovers*, over a recording of train sounds. The train shunting resonated with the book's erotic subject.

SPANISH TRAIN / ENGLISH TRAIN
Audio Recording (Tape 22)
June 1994

Spanish Train is the name of a song by pop singer Chris De Burgh, and on this tape Barry and myself constructed 45 minute parody of the music. We recited the lyrics of the song a number of times, each time taking a more experimental approach and by the end of tape, the 'music' was rendered almost unrecognizable. Some of the things we used in making this tape included the 'automatic machine gun', an Indian music tape, a record player and the De Burgh record itself. This 'irritating' parody, along with *Superman* (Tape 21) and *Zulu for Medics*, was a component in my multi-tape audio installation: *Songs for Nella*.

On side two of this tape I continued my experiments with reading from D.H. Lawrence's *Sons and Lovers*, while playing a sound effects record of English train sounds. The shunting of the train, again created a provocative soundtrack. My choice of text was random, as I flipped through pulling out phrases here and there. The entire effect of the recording is one of an irrational movie-soundtrack or audio-book.

SIEMON ALLEN
Songs for Nella
June 10, 1994

Nella refers to me. My alter ego, my animas, it is essentially my name in reverse. In 1988, when I was 17, I wrote an article for the school newspaper at Durban High School. The subject of my ‘review’ was a band called *Nella Nomeis* (after myself). I had subversively made up the band and convinced the then editor of the paper that they had released a new album with the hit single *Bang the Toboggan with the Fiddle*. I claimed that they had an album that was “much admired” which also included the hits, *Bathroom Melodies* and *Song of Silence*.¹⁶³

Songs For Nella, was both a homage to my earlier subversive action, as well as a return to a project that I had originally wanted to launch in *SWANS*. The idea was a simple one: to create an exhibition solely around a loud noise. As the FLAT at that time was a very chaotic environment, the insane excess of this work was perhaps a sub-conscious reflection of own my sense of sometimes living in a tempest.



I advertised the event with a poster featuring the famous photo of Luigi Russolo and his Noise Machines, and indeed my interest at that time included study of the Futurists’ *Art of Noises*.

¹⁶³ This idea of subverting or creating information continued to be of interest in my work. I would later attempt this again with ‘Meredith Vie’ articles, written by an ‘invented person’ for the *Mail and Guardian* in 1997.



For the installation/audio event, I set up two rooms of the FLAT and used a total of nine stereos that I had borrowed from friends. Positioned on the wall, they looked like minimal art objects before they were ‘activated’ in the performance. Before viewers arrived, I turned all of the stereos on, so that they played simultaneously to produce a cacophony of sound. Unlike my original proposal for *SWANS*, this installation dealt with sensory overload through the collage of sounds rather than one single sound.

For each of the nine I used the following recordings from the last few weeks:

ROOM A

- CD Player on repeat playing endlessly, the final track *Endless* from the Kraftwerk album *Trans Europe Express*.
- A cassette that I had improvised the previous night of short intermittent burst of 1, 3 or 7 seconds of recordings from various CDs arranged around varying lengths of silence.
- A similar cassette to the one mentioned above.
- A double looped segment of my performance with Elmin from the *Internotional*, which would play continuously.

ROOM B

- The recording I had made with Horsburgh which included the track *Superman*.
- The recording parody of *Spanish Train* that I had made with Barry.
- A raw version of *Zulu for Medics* without my guitar accompaniment.

The installation drew varied, but extreme opinions. Frost and Gainer were skeptical, calling it “pure masturbation”. DJ and playwright, Helge Jansen, on the other hand, declared that he was “very impressed”. Martyn, Mansfield and Steven Matthews were also positive, and said that it was “the best sound experience they’d ever had”. Horsburgh remained quiet the whole evening, and when I later spoke to him he said that he had reservations about the piece. In later conversation with Frost we spoke about her reactions and thoughts about the performance:

Allen: Both you and Carol came to an exhibition of mine called *Songs for Nella*. And both your responses were the same – that is, it was “pure masturbation.” Why did you think that?

Frost: Well, wasn’t it a cacophony?

Allen: It was and it wasn’t.

Frost: Well, how wasn’t it? It sounded like a cacophony to me.

Allen: You know, the funny thing is, when we were talking about the vide-tape pieces earlier today, and their sense of sublimity... That is exactly what this 'noise' piece was for me. It was sublime insofar as it was a woven web of different sounds. They made a massive fabric that was so overpowering that rendered the work unreadable. The sum of them did not make any particular recognizable sound. And the sum of the total was so overpowering that one went down a path of complete exhilaration.

Frost: Well that is very interesting. What that says to me is that I can access the sublime through silence, and maybe we are constructed into that, but logically speaking **it is also possible to consider the sublime as excess**. And I was too horrified by the excess here. Hence I called it masturbation. But look, it may well be that it was masturbation. As an aside, my refusal of the idea of excess, may well have something to do with my own position, because I find that I am actually working with excess at the moment. It may have something to do with the fact that I can work with excess away from South Africa. South Africa was too excessive and I was very aware that I was in a space that I didn't want to be in. And now I look for it, and that might be an interesting aspect of your and my 'exile' from South Africa.

Allen: In terms of my work, I think that the woven video-tape piece was just as excessive as the audio piece. For me, it was an intense journey into 'noise'.

Frost: Ja, I was very excited by your sound works, although at the end, I know they degenerated or they got a bit lost. I was excited, even maybe by the masturbatory one. I mean discursively excited by it.

Allen: The FLAT, at that time was total chaos. Using Bakhtin's term, it was a "carnival". It was crazy, maddening – that's how I felt at that time. It was very frustrating. Many people were living there, five or six at a time. It was chaos and the work that was produced out of that was chaotic. It would therefore be appropriate for me to make a cacophonous work like *Songs for Nella* – because that is how I felt at the time.

Frost: Totally.

Allen: It was total chaos within our living environment. It was a carnival.

Frost: In the apartheid era, you could not have enacted that carnival. And I think in the post-apartheid era, you can not enact it either.¹⁶⁴

For me, it was a euphoric experience - a complete assault on the senses. It drove one right out of one's skin, almost to madness. My intellectual interest lay in exploring the chance possibilities of running many tapes, with erratically recorded content, simultaneously. But the work was emphatically experienced through the senses, an exhilarating example of cultural overload through sensory overload.

¹⁶⁴ Frost, Allen; Interview 12, Richmond, Feb 18, 1999.



WALKER PATERSON, carved tree-trunk, wax, 1994

WALKER PATERSON

June 17, 1994

Walker Paterson, then a third-year student at the Technikon, exhibited his sculpture at the FLAT. The poster unveils, for the first time Paterson's exhibiting alias – "Walker"- a name he would continue to use in all his future exhibitions.

The installation consisted of 10 minimal rectangular forms, some hanging, and some standing pedestal-like on the floor. The overall appearance of the installation was austere, but they had been made by Paterson in a manner that spoke tongue-in-cheek to the sculptural conventions of carving. It was as if he had reduced the forest to simple geometry, using a chainsaw to transforming the cylindrical raw logs into rough rectangular blocks. Some of these forms were then hollowed out and filled with coloured wax.

Paterson's methods contradicted not only the convention of box construction, where a rectangular form is typically made with planks, but also the South African genre of figure carving. The work seemed enigmatic, in that it operated through a very understated geometric vocabulary, and yet offered much in the way of material richness through the hand worked wood and the sensuality of the wax cores.

In an interview with Paterson, he talks about this exhibition and his thoughts on the FLAT:

Allen: What were the ideas you were working with in using carefully carved blocks of wood with wax or should I say wax with carefully carved blocks of wood.

Paterson: The exhibition provided me with the motivation to make a body of work in a relatively short space of time. I chose to use wood as a medium because I felt it was necessary to get to grips with my materials. The melting of the wax also allowed for my works to appear laboured.

Allen: Would you say that these works were dealing with extremely personal and private issues?

Paterson: Yes, I don't care to elaborate.

Allen: Did this exhibition allow you to set goals for art-making that were independent of the Technikon?

Paterson: Yes.

Allen: Would you say it is important for young artists to form an independent community separate from 'school' structures?

Paterson: It is vital that there are other structures in place away from the Technikon. It is just unfortunate that it is not always possible for us to set them up in Durban.

Allen: Can you draw ties between this work and your later work dealing with the manipulation of 'thought' houses?

Paterson: The intention is the same so I suppose ties between the two works could be drawn.

Allen: To what extent did the FLAT environment facilitate this exhibition?

Paterson: The work was rough and not pretty, just perfect for the FLAT.

Allen: Do you think that the FLAT provided young artists the confidence to have one-person exhibitions?

Paterson: Yes it did.¹⁶⁵

The opening of this exhibition was also recorded. This show was one of the many attended by those associated with Essex Road Gallery, and on this cassette you can hear the Penny Whistle played by Mandla Blose. It is worth noting that when he noticed that we were recording his music, he told us in jest not to sell any of it, before he would continue playing. On the tape can also be heard voices including Thami Jali, Mandla Blose, Zahed Meer, Barry and myself.



WALKER PATERSON, 1994

¹⁶⁵ Paterson, Allen; Interview 7, Snail-mail, April 1998.



Paterson's opening, 1994. From left to right: Nancy Thomson, unknown person, myself, Thami Jali, Paterson & Mandla Blose.



ZAHED MEER, 'Crowwork', installation of work on paper, 1994

ZAHED MEER

July 1, 1994

The exhibition of Zahed Meer's work marked another distinct shift in the FLAT programming. Up until this point most of the people involved with projects at the FLAT had been affiliated with the Technikon, and at this time, we began to make an effort to include people not associated with the institution. Also, we began to schedule programming with more advance planning.

Meer, who was the nephew of well known activist Fatima Meer, had been living in a commune near the FLAT. He approached the FLAT to see if he could perhaps move in for the duration of the exhibiton, but we had to decline this proposal, as we were already crowded. The fact that Matoti, Barry and myself (occasionally Ntshangase as well), lived there made this impossible. In hindsight, I expect that we would have perhaps accommodated this request had it been framed as a 'performance'. We were not familiar with Meer's work, but acting with our policy "to allow anyone to do anything in the space" agreed to an exhibition.

For the show, he installed a large body of 'naïve' drawings of varied sizes made with crayon, pencil, and koki markers. These were pasted chaotically all over the walls. The images included figures holding hands beneath a primary colored red sun, a rocket and landscapes with houses. There was a surrealist quality to the strange combinations of images, but also a sexual edge to the work as well. For example, on his invitation was a woman with one leg lifted above a lit candle. The poster read in scrawled marks:

CROWORK EXHIBITION
I NEED TO MAKE
MOVIES + PUBLISH
PLEASE SUPPORT
ZAHED MEER

The exhibition was well attended and we made a number of tapes at this opening. Not made with any intention, often a tape deck would be left running in the kitchen or elsewhere during exhibitions taping the conversations of whomever came into that space. That night recorded conversations included Meer, Matoti, Martyn, myself amongst others, and in one such interaction, a friend of Meer's spoke about the building where the FLAT was located.

Meer's friend: Tell me guys... nice flat, very nice flat. You know this shop underneath. When we were growing up, we lived around the corner, but then it became a white area so we had to move out.

Allen: Are you serious?

Meer's friend: But all...you know growing up, this shop underneath was where we used to come all the time. So it's nice coming here.¹⁶⁶

Meer had a very unique way of conversing with people. During many conversations, he would suddenly break into free-association poetry, as can be seen in this conversation with Matoti:

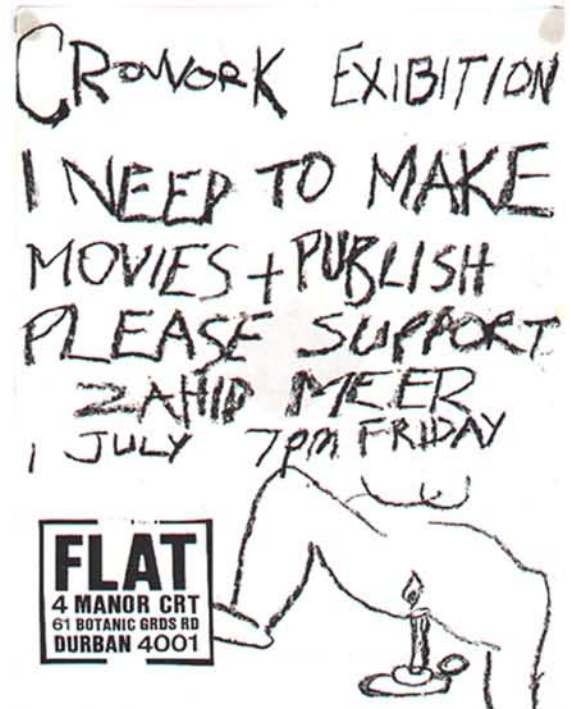
Matoti: You are looking at me like you are going to say something. What do you want to say?

Meer: Ah, OK let me tell you a sad [...]

In communion with a lama,
In sharing words with a sister,
Having a brother,
Coming from a mother,
In arguing with a father,
Don't judge a book by his cover.
Service and substance, substance in space
Wanting to know more is no disgrace
We seek to know
We must know
We have to know
The essence of ourselves
To sort out the levels
Of the heavens and hells [...]¹⁶⁷

¹⁶⁶ 'Zahed Meer's Opening'; *FLAT Recordings*, Tape 28, Durban, FLAT, July 1, 1994.

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid.*



Above: Zahed Meer installing his exhibition, 1994
Below: Meer's poster for the exhibition, 1994

NINA/PAUL/PAUL/NINA
Recording (Tape 30)
July 7, 1994

This tape is a working tape of experiments for other works.

In the days leading up to *Aural Hygiene*, Brendon Bussy brought to the FLAT a CD of Steve Reich's *Early Work*, which consisted of *It's gonna Rain* (1965) and *Come Out* (1966). This made a great impression on Horsburgh, Barry and myself, and its influence was immediately evident in the experimental audio work that would soon follow. From here on, audio works/experiments would include not only recordings and collaged sound, but also composite overdubs, that were abstract, noisy, repetitive and/or ambient.

I was most interested in the way that Reich manipulated found sounds, and I attempted many low-tech experiments with similar techniques at this time. In *It's Gonna Rain* and *Come Out*, Reich created a cyclical 'wash', which he described as a kind of "controlled chaos" by superimposing repeated samples. In many of his works, sampled words were looped until the pattern of interference rendered the meaning of the words unintelligible.

With *Nina/Paul/Paul/Nina* I returned to my explorations of the male/female relationship that I started with my work who Elmin at the *Internotional*. Again, the theme was communication, and the banalities of conventional social exchange.

The idea came to me in a brief second while introducing Samkelo (Paul) Matoti to Nina Saunders, a reporter who was collecting information on the FLAT. I thought about the phrase of short hand introduction - "Nina...Paul, Paul...Nina" and I repeated over and over initially as a joke. Later I thought about what it would be like to be caught in a perpetual introductory phase in a relationship; never getting any closer, mentally or physically. I kept the phrase in my head. Inspired by Reich and my own nightmarish imagined scenario, I decided to record it and to loop it over and over.

This initial experiment lead to a whole day of reworking old FLAT material, particularly my recordings of Elmin and resulted in work that I regarded as being far more psychologically charged than say the earlier *Miracle Filter* experiments, which tended to be more cerebral. These experiments recorded in successive takes became the basis of the next tape - *Especially the fact that I don't have a car*. (Tape 30A).

ESPECIALLY THE FACT THAT I DON'T HAVE A CAR
Recording (Tape 30A)
July 7, 1994

This 45 minute recording, based on a conversation with Elmin began with the sampled and repetitively looped introduction of two people, Nina and Paul. The 'introduction' formally acted as an opening to the artwork, in the same way that two people might be introduced to each other before they commence with a conversation. Hence:

Nina/Paul/Paul/Nina,
Nina/Paul/Paul/Nina,
Nina/Paul/Paul/Nina,
Nina/Paul/Paul/Nina,[etc...]

The two people never seem to move beyond this initial 'interaction'. As the tape continues the over recording causes a breakdown in the quality of the sound, and this 'clouds' the two peoples' never-ending introduction. The tension is accentuated by repetitive accompaniment on guitar, as well as tape manipulation. As the audio deteriorates, one loses any sense of the original words and the 'music' shifts into a 'meditative' drone. At times, isolated phrases, caught up in the dense recording process, come through audibly:

I'm talking to you over a microphone.

As the first section comes to an end, a chance left over 'sound-bite' of Nirvana's *Come as you are*, fills the speakers. Although unintentional, this song became a powerful and suggestive ending to the introduction. The lyrics, in some way seemed to represent the male entity in a conversation between male and female, which throughout the rest of the tape is entirely absent.

Come as you are, as you were, as I want you to be.
As a friend, as a friend...
Take your time, hurry up, the choice is yours, don't be late.
Take a rest as a friend, as I know...

Suddenly, the song stops and the silence is broken with Elmin's words:

So whenever I need it, I can escape into it.
I never even physically have to move or change... change venue.
Just change the state of mind and soul.
Just change the state of mind and soul.
It's really convenient.
It's really convenient.
It's really convenient.
It's really convenient, [etc...]

Then begins her melancholic phrase - "It's really convenient". I looped it so that it's repeated for a number of minutes, and again the repetition as well as the tone of her voice, created a trance-like effect. At some point, a loop of the phrase "Just change the state of mind and soul" was layered in to further reinforce this 'trance-like state'.

In using the phrase "It's really convenient", I wanted to suggest to the listener, the question - "What is convenient?" There is no rational answer, but in some sense it becomes an irrational clue. As the looped section ends, Elmin can be heard saying:

... get so bad that I want to escape from my body
and I just start scratching my body trying to break through it.
And eventually it just exhausts me so much that I...
that I just become numb and fall asleep.

Next, I edited out the male side of the conversation used in *Songs for Nella*. With only the female side of the conversation left, the effect is created that Elmin is talking to herself. Tension was added to the proverbial 'small-talk' through a guitar accompaniment. The tape noise created from endless over recording began to sound like the ocean.

Hello. How are you? Ja, ja, I'm alive. I'm talking to you over a microphone. Joke. Joke. I.m well,
ja. And you? Me too...
Hello. How are you? Ja, ja, I'm alive. I'm talking to you over a microphone. Joke. Joke. I.m well,
ja. And you? Me too...
Hello. How are you? Ja, ja, I'm alive. I'm talking to you over a microphone. Joke. Joke. I.m well,
ja. And you? Me too... [etc.]

Isolated phrases such as, "I'm talking to you over a microphone", moved progressively back into their original form as the tape developed. The introduction *Nina/Paul/Paul/Nina* was

then reintroduced, as if to suggest that one was caught in some looped verbal nightmare. Indeed, the repetitive nature of the language here was intended as a critique of repetitive conversation.

In *Conversation*, Elmin had spoken about how she dealt with people who asked her how she was and were not really expecting an honest answer. Rather than the usual: “Ja, I’m fine,” she would say instead “No, I’m not well...” When this caused a ‘splice’ or rupture in the banal flow of general conversation, she observed that it often led to the quick insertion of the oldest small talk convention - the weather. In this way, the looped phrases are broken with Elmin’s ‘verbal rupture’:

I’m not so well!
 I’m not so well!
 I’m not so well!
 Oh, nice weather today.

The ‘crescendo’ to the work then followed. An amalgam of all the previous recordings, this cacophonous and disturbing finale faded to a minute of silence before the final post-script, the ‘revealing stage’, took place. As this entire lengthy tape was built from a short conversation with phrases that had been fractured and multiplied, their meaning was illusive. Partially illuminated throughout the work, it was only here at the end, that the phrases would be recontextualized and restored to their original meaning.

Fused with Elmin’s voice was melancholic music from Hitchcock’s *Psycho*.¹⁶⁸ My aim was to use this ‘sound track’ in a cinematic fashion, and to build tension towards an ultimate ‘resolution’. Here the ‘meaning’ of Elmin’s words, as well as the title of the work are revealed.

Ja, I do. You see I... I... I understand completely what you are saying and I used to be like that when I was a little girl. I had this special place where I’d go um... this plant growing in our garden. I guess its not a plant, its more like a eh... don’t know what you call it in English. Struik [shrub.] It’s... It’s like um... a small little tree, you know, and it grows really dense and people use it for um... to put around their homes. Anyway but this place it was really dense and very green and made the most amazing tunnels inside. And it had these beautiful yellow flowers growing on it and if you crawl inside of it its like crawling into a new world. And no one knew you could actually crawl underneath this um... this plant or tree or hedge or whatever. So I could crawl in there and no one would know I was there. I was all by myself. It was like my secret place and I think that’s, that’s more or less like the place you are... It’s where I can be alone and could be myself. But now, now I’m really lucky. I can actually be by myself while I’m here, while I’m now in the room with

¹⁶⁸ Interestingly, it was not taken from the infamous shower scene.

you, while I'm in the room with a lot of people. Can be totally on my own and I've actually perfected it where I can even make them believe that I'm with them but I'm not - where I'm in my own world by myself; in my little space and they actually not even aware of it. I think it took me 22 years to perfect that. It works really works well for me. So whenever I need it, I can escape into it. I never even physically have to move or change... change venue. Just change the state of mind and soul. It's really convenient. **Especially the fact that I don't have a car...**¹⁶⁹

¹⁶⁹ Allen; 'Especially the Fact that I Don't Have a Car'; *FLAT Recordings*, Tape 30 A, Durban, FLAT, July 7, 1994.

BRENDON BUSSY & OTHERS
The Listening Chamber – Aural Hygiene
Audio Performance and Recording (Tape 31)
July 8, 1994

This audio-visual performance, *Aural Hygiene*, was conceived by Brendon Bussy, a viola player and graduate of Pietermaritzburg University. Bussy approached the FLAT to present some experiments with sound in the gallery.¹⁷⁰ He and I planned the sound evening with the idea of working together to create a complex layering of sound. In a sense, we were revisiting techniques from the influential “early work” of Steve Reich. *Nina/Paul/Paul/Nina* was in many ways my preparation for this collaborative performance.

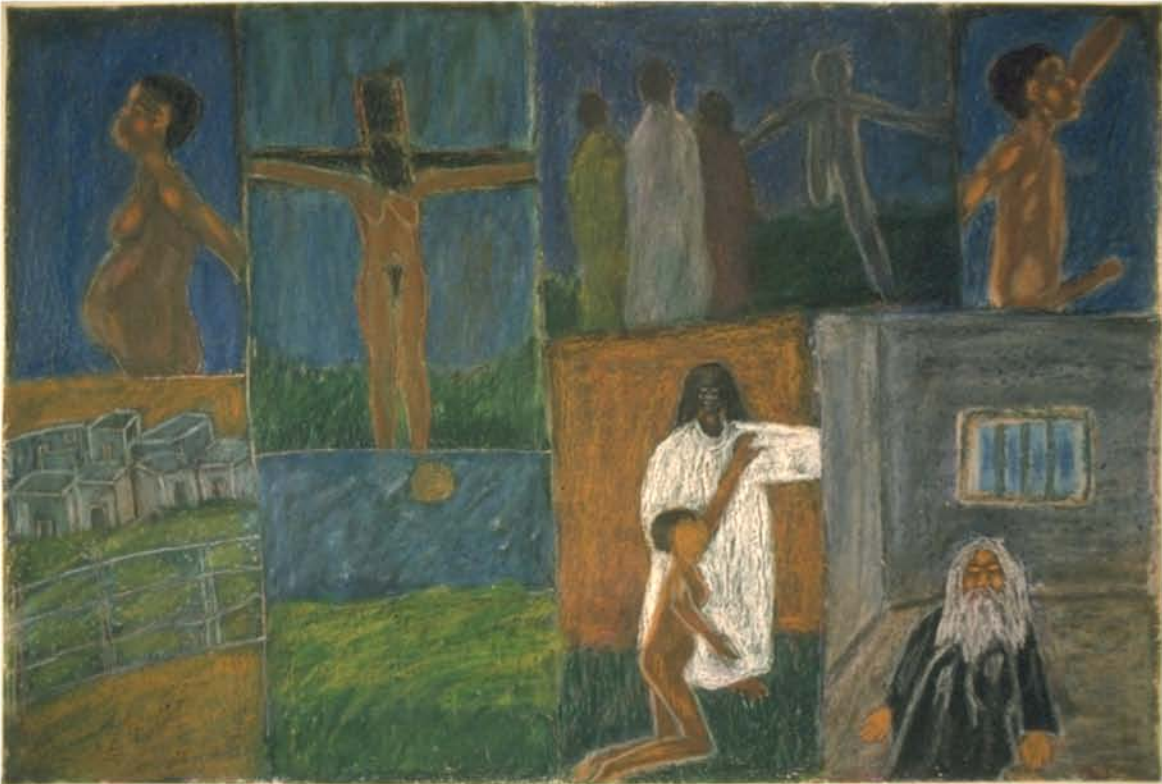
Bussy played his viola and I played the ‘The Miracle Filter’ (my tape-deck), ‘jamming’ with our two respective ‘instruments’. He first played a repetitive ‘tune’ live, which I sampled and then re-played on another tape-deck, while he still played live in the room. We then recorded those together and replayed that. This process continued until an excessive amount of layers had nullified the original sound into a cacophonous drone.

Although the evening began with the audience passively watching, at some point in the performance, the noise evoked a remarkable outburst that arose from the viewers - most notably Marytn, who launched into expressive free form verbal jargon. Whereas at the *Internotional*, we had self-consciously ‘asked’ viewers to perform, here they seemed to respond spontaneously to the barrage of chaotic energized ‘noise’.

After Bussy and I finished, others joined in to experiment with the process. Horsburgh repetitively recorded the phrase “Silver Chameleons” and played it back on a loop into the room as he then dueled with his own recorded voice saying “Duel Squids”.¹⁷¹ Tione Scholtz, Matoti and Paterson also appear on this recording and this process was used in the creation of work for our performance at Jam& Co: *Quasi-Stellar Objects*. This was also the first time I played *Especially the fact that I don’t have a car* to an audience.

¹⁷⁰ Bussy’s had come to us with an earlier proposal to have a book sale in the gallery and we rejected it. This sharply contradicted our policy of “allowing anyone to do anything in the space”, and indeed I later saw this as a mistake. We had received some criticism at that time that exhibitions at the FLAT lacked any quality-control, and perhaps this had led to the decision to block Bussy’s proposal. In retrospect, it was the single most regrettable decision I made in FLAT programming.

¹⁷¹ ‘Aural Hygiene’; *FLAT recordings*, Tape 31, Durban, FLAT, July 8, 1994.



THOKOZANI MTHIYANE, pastel on paper, 1994

THOKOZANI MTHIYANE, GRISELDA HUNT
Crude Nothingness (Doodle Exhibition)
July 18, 1994

Crude Nothingness (Doodle exhibition) brought together artist and poet Thokozani Mthiyane, and dancer, Griselda Hunt. Significantly, these two were established artists in Durban, and were not associated with the Technikon. As put forth in the proposal, Mthiyane's contribution was to be a showing of drawings and poetry, and Hunt's a dance performance in the gallery. The poster for the exhibition read:

Crude Nothingness Doodle Exhibition
 By Thokozani Mthiyane
 Supplemented by Griselda's Dance¹⁷²

Mthiyane's presented pastel and oil crayon drawings, collaged images, as well as a number of panels with his poetry hand lettered in French and English. The installation itself was collage-like with images and texts of varied sizes placed in uneven patterns along the walls.

Many of the drawings depicted images of township violence. In one, two policemen give chase with guns while in another are haunting depictions of beatings and hangings. On another, a bare breasted woman seems to lead a mass of followers, suggesting both the allegoric "liberty" and the news images of the matriarchs who had defiantly faced the South African military in just such a manner. He writes of despair, but also hope in his poem *Blues for Mama Africa*:

Bright Days are Dead
 The Sunshine, the green and black
 Pale shadows of grief encompass us
 Life is never affable
 When the tree of a nation stands
 Rootless on blood soaked soil
 There are mirages of love
 In the kingdom of hate...
 The raven's laughter over cries of a dove

¹⁷² Thokozani Mthiyane; Poster for the Exhibition, Durban, FLAT, July 15, 1994.



une les voix
des colombes
aux hommes
l'indompté
l'ouvre
sur la Guerre

I should be
a white shadow against
a black background
a wailing of a forgotten memory
on an empty street
My eyes held still by
the summer
who walks the lonely streets
at the edge of the night
who brings the color
of the end of the world
We are gathered
in the circle
of spiritual struggle
What have we done to our
beautiful bodies?
These useless thoughts lead us
to nowhere, distant —
back to the sea





Handwritten text on a poster, possibly a poem or a list of names. The text is difficult to read due to the lighting and angle.

Les arbres
chantent
leur esperance
Et chuchotent
leur peur
Quand l'hairie
d'hiver
blémit le vent.

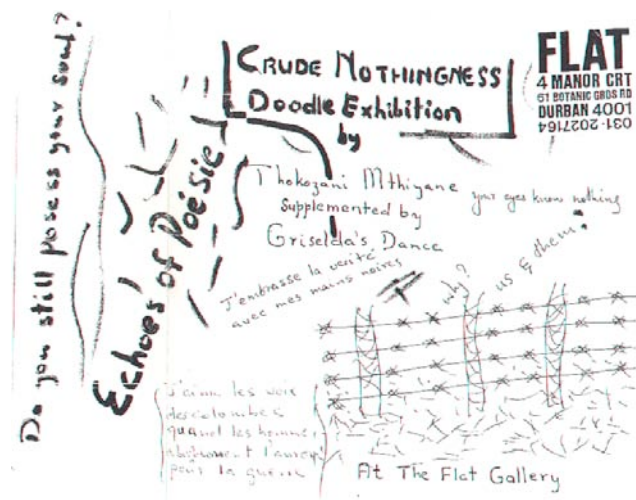
And in two other poems:

Our eyes see not beyond the city walls
Our brains suffocate in the airless smog
The essence of life is blurred
In an existence of hope and the void
Laughter and screeching cars
The echoes of rotting souls
We are manufactured faces with eyes of [...]

I behold her
A white phantom against a black background
A swing of a fugitive monkey on an empty tree
Her eyes hold the key to the universal liberation
Who soothes the [...] of the dying
Who knows the colour of the road of our [...]
We are confined
In the circle
Of spiritual slaughter
What have we done to our [...] hostess
These random thoughts lead us to nowhere different -
Dust is our heir

What might be seen as two distinct genres came together in this exhibition. Before the audience was allowed to enter, Mthiyane placed lit candles around the perimeter of the floor. He then ‘prepared’ Hunt for her dance by carefully painting her partially naked body as she sat in

chair at the center of the room. Hunt then moved to a space where the candles separated her from the audience and lay still on her back. The viewers were then ushered in by Mthiyane and stood within this inscribed space of light, as Hunt performed her dance.



Exhibition poster, 1994





Samkelo Matoti at the FLAT, 1994