

**THE FLAT GALLERY**  
(1993 - 1995)



# **THE FLAT GALLERY**

**A DOCUMENTATION AND CRITICAL EXAMINATION OF AN  
INFORMAL ART ORGANISATION IN DURBAN**

**SIEMON D. ALLEN**

With a foreword by  
**JAY HORSBURGH**



## *Acknowledgements*

The financial assistance of the Centre for Science Development (HSRC, South Africa) and Technikon Natal (South Africa) towards this research is hereby acknowledged.

Opinions expressed and conclusions arrived at are those of the author and are not necessarily to be attributed to the Center for Science Development or Technikon Natal.

I would also like to thank all those who contributed to this document:

Virginia MacKenny, Lola Frost, Thami Jali, Joseph Manana, Etienne de Kock,  
Walker Paterson, Carol Gainer, Greg Streak, Melissa Marrins, Isaac Sikhakhane,  
Marisa Telleria-Diez, Curtis Brown, Paul Chung,  
Terry-Anne Stevenson, James Huckenpahler,  
Jeremy Wafer, Andries Botha, Tony Starkey,  
Jenah McCarthy, Meredith Vie,  
Ledelle Moe, Thomas Dry Barry, Yaj Marrow,  
Bob Allen and Denise Allen.

I would especially like to thank Kendall Buster for editing out the other 97% of the 'stuff'.

First Edition, 1999

'Published' March 1999 by  
***FLAT International***

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This document was produced on an  
*Apple Macintosh G3/233*  
and an *Epson Stylus Colour 800*

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Catalogue under:

1. The FLAT Gallery
2. Alternative Spaces
3. Informal Art Spaces
4. Experimental Art Spaces

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# ***FOREWORD***

***By Jay Horsburgh\****

Perhaps one sometimes forgets that galleries are not castles in the air, that they did not grow like capacious wallflowers from the cities in which one finds them, full of busy activity and in full pollination. One forgets that the gallery is very much a modern shape. Derivative of the implications of contemporary existence, it is built as it were from plies of pressure stripped from the world about it. As such the gallery is an interior space and obeys the laws of all urban interior spaces as much as any other only more so.

And when the gallery is the dimension of a thumbnail, when it is the native realm for those who give it direction, this exacerbation of laws of the interior strains the cannon until it cracks, and it is in the reflections upon such miniature breakings, such as are collected here in this volume, that we are privy to the essential character of interiors. That it should illuminate a little of the world around it is of course the delectable consequence. But in order for us to appreciate exactly how the thumbnail wallflower breaks a little of the worlds facade we must first understand precisely the import of its existence. And not in any general way. We must understand the import of its existence to the individual who resides within it, to those who have something of themselves invested within it. But of course, we can't understand this "something of themselves" without quarrelling over the question of what precisely them selves are. But here we are greeted providentially, for it seems as though the self invested and the vesture of the space are not in any way divested of one another. Each is, in fact, corollary of the other, and by pursuing this line of thought we will perhaps determine the potency of affect that these spaces effect not only within the cities where we live, but within our bodies, our selves.

The splicing of the world's textures into public and private spaces is not only the invention of history, it is probably the first declaration of the self. I posses room, I know a shelter, and the "I" in this sentence is made real beyond the simple declaration "I am", which, correlative of nothing, limps in its own echo. Indeed, it is within the private space that this "I" is, as it were, made substantial. No longer am I, no longer will I figure myself, but that I am here. For language,

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\* Horsburgh's *Introduction* appears here unedited in its original format. All grammar and spelling are as they appear on the photocopied draft which was handed to me by Jenah McCarthy in August of 1997.

with this word “here”, deals it’s person into the world. In itself, existence is characterized by a whiff of impersonality. And to dwell as one’s self within the private sphere implies a far more potent issue than existence: it implies person-ality.

Within the private space, within the dwelling, my person speaks itself, is identical with it’s words; thinking within the dwelling is a complex, individuated affair - thinking with a public most emphatically is not. Now, to dwell within a private space means to evolve person-ality, and to be a person implies a certain amount of interior content. This interior stuff is the content beyond privacy, is the personal matter, and it is more often than not that, whether understood as solace, reflection, meditation, or desire, we experience this interior content as being quite identical with the private dwelling, and we ascribe a battery of handles to this experience of *consubstantiation* with the dwelling, to the degree that we say “home is where the heart is,” or we are “feeling at home,” etc. It is evident that the dwelling contains more than native trinkets, it is actually in certain measure the making of one’s own texture, one’s emotional and spiritual mettle.

What then transpires when the private dwelling is made public? Obviously, in publicizing one’s realm of retreat, one is also publicizing something of one’s solace, reflection, meditation and desire. One is doing more than making a name - one is, in a real sense, making the quality of one’s personhood identical with the flow of publicness beyond one’s privacy. It is beyond the experience of gathering in a neutral zone, it is the demonstration of where the self and the social are plicated upon one another, are wefted into a mutual substance of inspiration and accommodation.

Well then, it is easy to see how this publicizing of personal space is in fact the nursery of art. The very act of revealing an interior content is the infancy of art, and to be an artist is, among other things, to nurse your interior publicly. How demonstrable then is the process of suckling in this nursery that we observe when we enter as a public body into a private dwelling! This intersection will always necessitate a minimal aesthetic sense, and aesthetic sense is, after all, the only sense by which we do not receive the world, but express our sensibility.

This phenomenon is not confined to galleries and showrooms. From the cave paintings of Southern Africa and Western Europe to the post-colonial residences-cum-coffee houses-cum-banking halls of Vancouver and Sydney, the act of making an interior, once-private realm public determines a basic, an all-too-basic beautification. Certainly, the proliferation of such spatial inversions in the late twentieth century will lead to a certain devaluation of the aesthetic sense, a watering down of the quality of selfhood expressed. This is precisely the area in which the ethical retaliation of a space such as the Flat Gallery resides.

Practically speaking, from the outside, what is most important about an interior space is accessibility. The fashion in which a private area is entered is quite as important as what is sought within. This is primarily because experience is a progression of unveilings, and although the revealing is of an object, the object of the revealing is always the revealing itself. The marvelous subterranean labyrinths developed by the cults of Osiris, down which an initiate would be tugged with a head lit up by old grapes, toward a painted statuette of the divine image, was a parody of this revealing. As was, it is speculated, part of the purpose served by certain cave paintings of ten to thirty thousand years ago. And this labyrinthine disorientation in search of a true image is roughly equivalent to how we descend into ourselves through the tortuous and the tortile after a personal or an emotional truth.

To understand, then, the value of revealing an interior space, we must think of it in terms of what everything is thought of today - its point of access, i.e. in terms of what it costs. It is telling that today this exact pageant of disorientation is best demonstrated by the organs of public government: bureaucratic halls, offices of the law, banks, nightclubs, cinemas, etc. This implies, of course, that truth has come to be seen as a matter of governmental, capital-oriented, or simulated experience. And today the whole comedy of access to interiors has become eminently more complicated and eminently more facile in that the global necessity of urban residence has succeeded in opening-up and relativizing the act of entrance. Entering a gallery, just as entering a night-club, becomes as much an issue of cost and accessibility as the essential game within. The idea of pilgrimage, for example, has on a large scale been annexed by travel agencies, to the extent that it has been divided into a progression of revealings-within-comfort. If one seeks the arduous path to the mountain one is no longer trundling with a poemful of tale-telling characters, one is very much on one's own.

So, that the conditions of access today should condition our expectations as to the interior of a place comes as no surprise. And once again, the very proliferation of interiors whether it be in population or structures has rendered their contents slightly bland. This applies equally to the "message" of an interior content, and we have to admit that in at least one sense the story of contemporary art has been a sordid whisper describing the evolution in convenience or lack thereof of message. This evolution, or devolution, is not the intellectual notion everyone seems to pretend it is: it is the real consequence of urbanization, accessibility, cost, and the fungus-like growth of a spongy, identical culture in the shape of the gallery that has driven art in this direction. So something like Dante's villains, the architects of this growth have taken upon them the exhibiting of the less happy motivations in our human psyche, and something like Dante, we the

public come to view the gallery as a tad infernal, abandoning hope of experiential meaning as we enter, and we brace ourselves for the sign that declares “meaning is present”, or vice-versa, and check the time as we hear a sallow confession of public amity, carefully conserving our ticket stubs later not so much out of the hoarding instinct but as the index of an ethical survival.

Similarly, the cafe, the bank, the law office aspires in its creative presentation to a meagre titillation, roughly co-extensive with the comfort-zone. In this respect the growth of interior design as an industry signifies the growth of basically uniform interiors: an interior space planned from without by the juristic person that is the design corporation. More horribly, it indicates a general aspiration to uniformity between private spaces, interior matters, and public areas. In a certain sense, it dissolves the divisions between these things and compels all to liability before the ideas of cost and taste. X has taste, we say, that is cost-effective, and feel a twinge of divination as to X’s interior character, his or her interior *decoration* .

What is obvious is that the situation of today’s galleries should give us several pauses in respect of their practicality, even if this undertakes at the cost of insight. And while considering these issues we suddenly strike upon what is perhaps the true benefit of the small, live-in gallery space: that such a space, ignoring a key component of accessibility, i.e. cost, liberates the liability of the content. This is of course well known, and is universally accepted as the benefit of such spaces. But what do we see beyond this idea of liberated content? Quite simply, *a hope for the interior*. And in this context, make no mistake, that means one thing: a hope for the self. Not only is messaging restored to the greater responsibility of the experience, but this responsibility transcends the aesthetic experience. Indeed, the whole process of entering is no longer the cost-effective one akin to the mental process of justification on moral grounds, but becomes far closer to the intimate act of inspiration. And the responsibility of the experience acquires this intimacy, so that no longer is it a matter worthy or unworthy of trouble, but an interior space crucial in its import, sanctioned by that movement which always lurks beneath intuition, an ethical movement.

The search for the internal truth thus steps out of painted corridors lined with enticing dips and plastic flowers, and becomes a matter for whom preservation is an arduous and ethical choice. If it is at all true that publicizing a private space clarifies the intersection between selfhood, domain, and sociality, then the ethical preservation of the interior becomes the preservation of the uniqueness that the self implies, its difference from uniformity, its singular character, its art. That is the true import of the small, live-in gallery: it is the art of individuality within turn of the millenium capitalist metropoli.

Simon Allen, Ledelle Moe, and Thomas Dry Barry lived in the Flat Gallery. To be sure, there was a steady drift of others, but ultimately it was built about their personalities, their effort, and yes, their courage. For let us not mince talk - to open up one's space is an affirmation of ethical responsibility, and this affirmation is exactly what courage is. Those, like myself, who performed or exhibited here, have them to thank for the freedom of content that derived from their own sense of urgency. What you have in your hands is a document of a few individuals' will to counter the thousandfold obstructions inherent in the making of art in their country, let alone their city. Consequently you are also holding a certain measure of that cities blood, its aspirations, its true interior.

July 1995





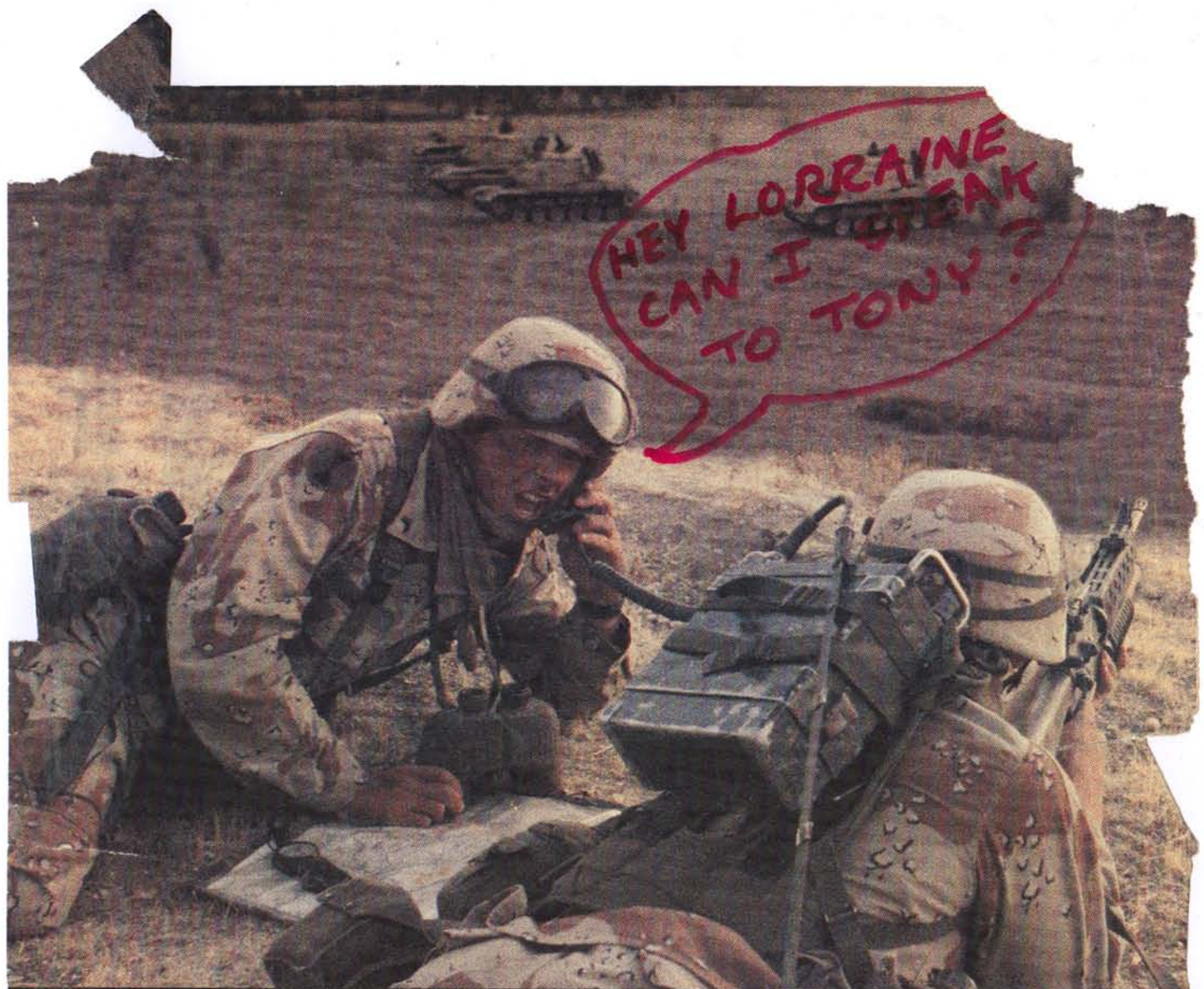
## ***AUTHOR'S NOTE***

In July of 1997, I took a break from my research in the United States and my work on this dissertation to visit the summer exhibitions in Europe. It was a particularly fruitful time to view contemporary art because *Documenta X*, *The Venice Biennale* and *Münster Projects* all coincided that year. At the Venice Biennale, in the Austrian Pavilion, I stumbled upon a rather unusual exhibition that left me with an impression more lasting than anything else I was to see.

Stacked floor to ceiling in an empty gallery room were thick paperback catalogues chronicling the activities of the Wiener Gruppe (Vienna Group), self-named in 1959. This 'artwork', which was described as "50,000 books with 800 pages each" was offered for the viewer's taking and presented with this question:

*How can we show today what avant-garde was then? How can we reconstruct events that are now lost in space and time?*

That the exhibitors had chosen to print and distribute a book documenting the work of the Wiener Gruppe rather than mounting a conventional display of paintings and sculptures seemed appropriate to the spirit of the multi-faceted artistic production of the group. It affirmed for me my own commitment to create a document that would chronicle and contextualize the loose group of artists that came together in Durban from 1993 to 1995 at the FLAT. I was struck with the realization that to document history is to unavoidably invent history, but with that humbling thought returned to my task with a renewed sense of purpose.



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## ***INTRODUCTION***

*But why bother sharing lives? Why not just share studios and chat at the local bar (which we did as well)? Because art shows up in living. If it doesn't show up in living then it's just symbols.*<sup>1</sup>

The FLAT Gallery, housed in an apartment on Mansfield Road in Durban, South Africa was founded in October of 1993 by the apartment occupants: Ledelle Moe, Niël Jonker, Thomas Barry, and myself (Siemon Allen). Born out of a growing dissatisfaction with the limitations of the existing art scene in Durban and the need to take a more proactive approach in creating exhibition opportunities, the FLAT became a site for exhibitions, performances, multi-media 'events', as well as a place for a broad range of creative exchanges. Running parallel<sup>2</sup> to the political developments in South Africa that led to the historical elections of April 1994, the FLAT Gallery boasted 32 exhibitions/events over a period of 16 months, bringing a vital 'alternative' voice to the cultural climate of Durban. Young artists, students, recent graduates, as well as established artists and those working outside of institutions were all given the opportunity to participate and all came to explore their work in ways that might not otherwise have been possible in the limited or more restricted conditions that existed in the region's few established venues.

The FLAT's mission to promote a vibrant interaction amongst creative individuals began as a project to mount exhibitions without censure and to maintain a free space without the traditional selection system. This policy of unrestricted content and open format, however, also fostered a climate for experimentation and so an environment was created that proved to be fertile with potential for collaboration and interaction. It was a phenomenon that appeared and then evolved out of the creative needs of the artists who founded the project and those who later participated. The FLAT became a site for a kind of creative activity that had been unknown or at least unexplored in Durban at that time.

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<sup>1</sup> Bruno Fazzolari, 'Makers and Doers: Towards a Definition of Community', *Artweek*, Vol. 24, April 1993, p.18.

<sup>2</sup> Significantly, the FLAT Gallery was initiated 8 months before the elections and closed 8 months after the elections.

In addition to being a place for highly experimental programs, the FLAT was an alternative space that operated 24 hours a day 7 days a week. Though the ‘lounge’ served as the main gallery, the apartment occupants often gave up their living spaces for special events. The exhibition space doubled as a studio-work site such as the time when a group of young students visiting Durban from a rural area used the space for a day-long impromptu workshop. Openings often led to conversations between artists and viewers that extended well into the night. Without set hours of operation, the FLAT was an informal art space where spontaneity ruled and the lines between the artists’ ‘lives’ and the project’s ‘programmes’ were blurred. What occurred at the FLAT was a breaking down of barriers between art and life - between artists and viewers. In stretching the definition of what exhibition or performance could be, the artists involved with the FLAT gallery discovered that observation and participation could become synonymous.

In this research paper I will begin my examination of the FLAT Gallery by first defining what is meant by an ‘alternative space’ and by looking at the historical development of such spaces both in South Africa and the United States of America.

This will include an investigation into the ideological motivations and socio-political influences behind such spaces as well as an exploration of what is meant by ‘alternative practice’ (which I believe is inseparable from the mission of the ‘alternative space.’) This is by no means a comprehensive survey of alternative spaces in South Africa or the United States, but rather a tracing of the phenomenon with relevant examples.

Through this historical study I will identify important precedents for the FLAT project as well as draw comparisons between the FLAT and other similar venues. I will then examine the particular circumstances that catalyzed the FLAT Gallery in the specific cultural and historical context of Durban, South Africa in 1993 and 1994.

Most importantly, I will construct a chronological documentation of the FLAT Gallery’s programme including interviews and extensive visual and audio archives. With this archival information and with detailed descriptions of each event, exhibition or performance, I will create a ‘geneology’ for the FLAT Gallery by exploring the historical influences and linkages that I believe existed between the FLAT projects and specific examples of artist-motivated projects such as the Cabaret Voltaire and the Situationists.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> In this way I will establish a context for the FLAT Gallery in terms of its structure and its programmes through comparisons with other examples of ‘alternative spaces’ and ‘alternative practices’.

One might very well ask, “What is significant about the FLAT Gallery and why is it important to document so laboriously such a ‘brief’ flurry of activity?” Some of the material in this paper might offer students, recent graduates and emerging artists useful practical information on the various possibilities for working and exhibiting once one has left the ‘comforts’ of faculty guidance, peer support, studio facilities and venues for showing work that the institutional environment provides. Perhaps more importantly, this ‘story’ might inspire those who read it with an affirmation that there rests in the artist the responsibility to actively build a place where his/her development as a creative individual can flourish; that one must not wait for ‘permission’ or for ‘someone’ to offer validation of one’s work; that it is indeed possible here in Durban to “**do something!**”

Additionally, I must also confess that my motivations for producing this paper might arise out of some personal need to look back at the FLAT experience and to revisit that project with the distance of time (and I hoped some degree of objectivity). I have asked myself many times, “Why was the experience so important to my growth as an artist at that time? Why was it so important to those of us who were so deeply involved - Moe, Horsburgh, Barry, Gainer, and all the others who passed through and participated?” The experience pushed something in our artists’ lives that we had not encountered before. It opened us up to a particular kind of dialogue and experimentation that was invaluable in the later development of our work. It gave us the courage to explore our art and to live in a manner that was true to the work and not to the market or the conventional notions around us of what ‘art’ should be. It allowed us to develop something (albeit sometimes crude) which was independent of the institution and so gave us confidence in our abilities to take charge of our creative lives. In spite of the (sometimes valid) accusations that the FLAT operation was “unprofessional” or its programmes “incomprehensible”, I believe that it was a valuable part of our education as young artists and that we were operating within the tradition of other important historical precedents. One might ask, “Was the FLAT Gallery just a series of unprofessional displays and immature pranks or was it ‘serious play’?” In revisiting that brief explosion of creative energy I hope to address that question.



THOMAS BARRY, 'As hy weer kom'. A 'détourned' safety label made sometime at the FLAT, 199?.

## ***ALTERNATIVE PRACTICES***

*Through their very existence, these venues work to alter the boundaries of art and the distribution of power within the art world. As alternative spaces obtain more critical mass, as they continue to be a proving ground for emerging artists and art forms, they will and are altering the structure of the art world, and are providing a path to a conception of art as more reflective of our cultural and social diversity.<sup>1</sup>*

‘Alternative’ is word that can be used as an adjective or as a noun, and in either case according to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, refers to “two things that are mutually exclusive”. As an adjective, it is a term that must be seen as relative; for if a thing is ‘alternative’ it must therefore be alternative to some other thing. Used strictly as a noun it means literally “permission to choose between two things or two possible course of action”. With contemporary usage we now have in our vocabulary a broad range of terms that includes not only ‘alternative spaces’, but also ‘alternative music’, ‘alternative lifestyles’ and ‘alternative medicine’ to name a few. These formal definitions are particularly relevant when we begin to examine the use of the term ‘alternative’ as it is now employed within the language of cultural debate. In artistic practice, it refers to “that which is outside of the mainstream” and significant in the proliferation of these alternative artistic practices is the implicit affirmation that a more diverse group of artists are now giving themselves permission to actively create the possibility for ‘choice’.

In terms of alternative practice, one might say that the ‘alternative’ or ‘radical’ nature of such a practice can be expressed through its **content**, the **form** that the work takes, as well as the **identity of the artist** (the source of the “voice from which the art is spoken”). The ‘alternative’ in alternative art might then be seen as something that is manifest in any or all of these. One could, in fact, locate within a critical investigation into each of these distinct and yet inseparable three aspects, a substantial part of the current cultural debate.

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<sup>1</sup> Collette Chattopadhyay; ‘Their Way - Nonprofit Spaces in Southern California’, *Artweek*, Vol. 23, August 1992, p.16.

The radical nature of some ‘alternative’ work is defined primarily through its ‘message’ or content. Work executed in a conventional format such as easel painting, static figurative sculpture or traditional narrative theater can be regarded as ‘oppositional’, because the issues raised are in and of themselves controversial. This work might deal with forbidden topics that address sexuality and gender, or might express views that are contradictory to those of the dominant political power. In any event, the challenge of the work resides in the radical nature of its message and the narrative power of a voice that communicates an unconventional position, but through the clear and readable language of a conventional art form.

However, alternative practice may also be defined through the form it takes. This work still seeks to provide an alternative voice and sees itself as oppositional in terms of its position, but is created out of a dissatisfaction **also** with what might be regarded as the limitations of the old forms. These shifts in format grow less out of a move towards aesthetic refinement or inventiveness for the sake of novelty, as they are born from a desire to break free from the perceived ‘autonomy’ of these conventional art forms, or a sense that they are ‘exhausted’. Artists engaged with these kinds of artistic practices might employ new genres or seek to merge art with ‘lived experience’ and challenge the viewer through confrontation with an art-form that may not be regarded by the public as ‘art’. Their intention is to break what they regard as a passive viewer’s complacency in front of out-modeled forms by challenging the artwork’s autonomy and by also seeking to expand its language.

On the one side, is the argument that many so called ‘experimental’ or ‘avant-garde’ works are elitist and unnecessarily obscure. From this position one would call for a work to express its radicality and social relevance via a transparent understandable ‘narrative’. Indeed, there is something reasonable in the assertion that a work can only effectively communicate an alternative position and bring about a change in consciousness when that work speaks in a language that can be comprehended by the viewer. Evidence of the complexities that can arise in this debate when a shift in context occurs can be seen in South Africa. Self-referential abstraction, though ‘radical’ within the historical and geographic context of post war Europe and the United States, was later seen as reactionary by many socially conscious South African artists seeking to expose the injustices of apartheid.

There is also merit, however, to the claim that it is impossible to address the pressing issues of the contemporary cultural debate with old forms; that these are aesthetic conventions that are too familiar and too easily commodified; the radicality of the message undermined. This viewpoint also asserts that there is a critical need to break out of the passive contemplation of the



art object (all too easily regarded as a decorative commodity) and push the very definition of what 'art' can be. Articulated here is the position that one must intrude aggressively into 'life' and confront the viewer with what might first be seen as incomprehensible, but will be ultimately liberating. For art to have continued relevance, this stance calls for it to speak through constantly reinvented new forms.

Interestingly, this debate is an old one and by no means resolved. Marxist intellectuals in the 1930's addressed it through the question of 'realism' in art. Lukács supported the concept of Social Realism while Bertolt Brecht offered an art which addressed the realities of its time through innovation. In his essay, *Against Georg Lukács*, Brecht speaks to this very question, within the context of a discussion of the novel, but the theoretical reflections that he offers have broader implications. Lukács criticizes what he sees as the decline of the contemporary novelist, and in Brecht's words, "is courteous" in his "treatment of contemporary novelists, in so far as they follow the example of the classic models of the bourgeois novel, and write in at least a formally realistic manner." One might see this "formally realistic manner" as a kind of narrative that is written in a transparent easily readable style, that communicates its 'social message' through a means that is not radical in form, but in content. Brecht challenges what he sees as Lukács' call for a return to this 'realism', not by proposing an autonomous 'formalism' divorced from 'reality', but by calling for a new definition of 'realism' and 'representation':

As time flows on, and if it did not, it would be a bad prospect for those who do not sit at golden tables. Methods become exhausted; stimuli no longer work. New problems appear and demand new methods. Reality changes; in order to represent it, modes of representation must also change. Nothing comes from nothing; the new comes from the old, but that is why it is new... whether a work is realistic or not cannot be determined merely by checking whether or not it is like existing works, which are said to be realistic, or were realistic in their time. In each case, one must compare the depiction of life in a work of art with life itself that is being depicted...<sup>2</sup>

He addresses this question of how one might engage in 'radical' practice through both the content of the work and the **form** it takes:

One can arouse a sense of outrage at inhuman conditions by many methods - by direct description (emotional or objective), but also narrative and parable, by jokes, by over - and under - emphasis. In the theatre, reality can be represented both in objective and imaginative forms. The actors may

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<sup>2</sup> Bertolt Brecht; 'Popularity and Realism', Charles Harrison and Paul Wood (ed), *Art in Theory 1900 - 1990*, Oxford, Blackwell, 1996 , p.489 - 496. Translation by Stuart Hood from *Adorno, et al*, 1977.

not use make-up or hardly any - and claim to be ‘absolutely natural’ and yet the whole thing can be a swindle; and they can wear masks of grotesque kind and present the truth. It is hardly open to debate that the means must be questioned about the ends they serve.<sup>3</sup>

Finally, Brecht speaks to the question of ‘popularity’ or the readability of new forms in terms of communication:

I am speaking from experience when I say that one need not be afraid to produce daring unusual things for the proletariat so long as they deal with a real situation. There will always be people of culture, connoisseurs of art who will interject: “Ordinary people do not understand that.” But the people will push these persons impatiently aside and come to a direct understanding with artists.<sup>4</sup>

The debate between these two forms of alternative practices is thrown into sharp relief when one considers the work of socially conscious South African artists during the late period of the apartheid regime and the transitional period before and directly after the elections. The articulation of these two distinct modes of radical practice is particularly relevant to any discussions of alternative practice within the visual arts in South Africa, both in terms of the means and the messages employed by the historically significant protest art of the pre-apartheid generation and those employed by the post-apartheid generation.

In a conversation with Technikon Natal lecturer Lola Frost and lecturer from the United States, Kendall Buster, we discussed the relevance of these concepts of ‘alternative practices’ to the FLAT project:

**Buster:** One of the things that I think is interesting with the FLAT, is the shift with what is considered to be ‘avant-garde’. A lot of people might have been suspicious of the forms that the work was taking. It was highly experimental in its format, at least up until the middle. They would do installation, performance, things that were not necessarily as readable or comprehensible. Again the Brecht/Lukács debate where Lukács thought that something had to be readable, that it was transparent, it was communicating. Whereas Brecht would say you are underestimating the people. New ideas require new forms.

**Frost:** My understanding of the FLAT is that it wasn’t Lukácsian. It wasn’t about speaking to any ordinary populous. It wasn’t speaking in large understandable narratives. So it wasn’t socialist in that sense. Quite the opposite, it seemed the more esoteric, the more shocking, the more transgressive, the better. For God sakes, something was happening. We had been in the grip of

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

apartheid or even in the grip of resistance art, laudable, but quite constrained. And what was going on at the FLAT Gallery was the lid coming off.

**Allen:** What I think is the best example of that is Ledelle's animals in the street. It essentially, without permission, invaded the public space, and it was illegal and therefore transgressive. The reason why she was able to do it was that there was at this time this sense of lawlessness - that you could do anything.<sup>5</sup>

In her comprehensive survey of South African Art - *Art and Artists of South Africa* - Esmé Berman talks about the emerging significance of art that addressed social issues internationally and in South Africa by saying:

The role of so-called 'Protest Art' was significant... but this phenomenon was not unique to local art nor was it a sudden development. The occurrence of protest art in the Republic was in step with a worldwide trend and had been presaged in the humanistic tendencies in the sixties, whereby South African artists had begun to examine their identity, to question their commitment to the human situation and to direct their artistic effort toward achieving greater relevance to the South African experience.<sup>6</sup>

She goes on to link alternative practice in art with the addressing of social issues by saying later in her discussion of the 1971 exhibition *Art - South Africa - Today*:

...the most avant-garde selection of entries thus far exhibited... incorporated a wide range of unconventional and provocative art forms. In content, however, the collective entry made a thought provoking statement about South African society.<sup>7</sup>

Of significance is this reference to "unconventional and provocative art forms." This referred primarily to "unorthodox materials" employed in sculpture and the use of photographic techniques with painting, which now seem hardly radical. However, the debate was a serious one at that time, and indeed is perhaps still revisited in the heated arguments that continue between those artists who champion the authenticity of hand-made labor intensive work over the mechanically reproduced or the conceptual gesture.

Not only was the content of South African Art undergoing change in the 1970s: art forms themselves were fundamentally affected by recent technological innovations and new attitudes

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<sup>5</sup> Frost, Buster, Allen; Interview 12, Richmond, Feb 1999.

<sup>6</sup> Esmé Berman; *Art and Artist of South Africa*, Cape Town, Balkema, 1986

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid*, p. 23.

towards existing materials and processes. The earliest demonstration of altering perspectives was the enthusiastic response of artists to the national *Multiple* competition organized by the Southern Transvaal region of the SAAA. Not that the venue was unattended by controversy. It met with resolute resistance from several members of the local art community, for whom the mystique of the artist's touch remained an inviolable taboo... the idea of technological replication was still rejected by some purists as the very antithesis of Fine Art production; and **years were to pass before certain SA connoisseurs could bring themselves to accept technology as a tool not a mortal enemy.**<sup>8</sup>

Again, alternative practice is seen as distinguishing itself through the experimental means employed as well as through the issues that are addressed. Also, the growing social consciousness that Berman refers to as “humanistic” led increasing numbers of South African artists to seek an alternative practice through work that embraced greater social relevance. The so-called ‘Resistance Art’ of the 70s and early 80s reflects this shift and represents an important period in South African art history.

Examples of this work are well documented in Sue Williamson’s book *Resistance Art in South Africa*. The significance of resistance art is voiced in an opening essay where she addresses the critical need for an alternative practice to what was mainstream art at that time.

Before 1976 a trip around South African Art galleries would have given very little clue to the socio-political problems of the country. Strangely divorced from reality landscapes, experiments in abstraction, figure studies and vignettes of township life hung on the walls.<sup>9</sup>

This ‘conventional’ work was indeed blind to the political realities around it and yet the problem in moving beyond this ‘mainstream practice’ was complex. Williamson quotes Breyten Breytenbach in his outraged assessment of the white artist. Here he passionately argues the moral necessity for work that engages in social issues.

The white artist... cannot dare look into himself. He doesn't wish to be bothered with his responsibilities as a member of the ‘chosen’ and dominating group. He withdraws and longs for the tranquility of a little intellectual house on the plain, by a transparent river. The artist who closes his eyes to everyday injustice and inhumanity will without fail see less with his writing and painting eyes too.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid, p. 25.

<sup>9</sup> Sue Williamson; *Resistance Art in South Africa*, New York, St. Martin's Press, 1989

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

Later in her essay Williamson also addresses the difficulties faced by those Black artists who depended on sales for survival and were therefore hemmed in by a need to create uncontroversial marketable work:

The desperate attempt at head burying described by Breytenbach affected Black artists too - although for different reasons. Dependent on sales through art galleries to a White market Black artists tended to produce carefully non-confrontational work. Gathering the courage to challenge the state through their work would take time for Black artists.<sup>11</sup>

Soon however, artists, both Black and White, began to organize through conferences. *The State of Art in South Africa* hosted by the University of Cape Town in 1979 was the first and brought to the debate the problem of inclusiveness and the position artists would take *vis-a-vis* the representation of South Africa abroad:

... the artists pledged to no longer allow their work to be sent overseas to represent South Africa until all state funded institutions were open to black as well as white students. By visual artists, at least, the apartheid regime would no longer be given the cloak of respectability.<sup>12</sup>

A later conference titled *Art Towards Social Development and Change in South Africa* was held in Botswana in 1982 and dealt with the theme of culture and resistance. Williamson marks this change towards an art that engages socially:

The debate had been opened up. In the years to come, there would be a growing realization amongst anti-apartheid forces that cultural resistance was a tool of immense power.<sup>13</sup>

Many artists continued to work with the language of traditional painting, printmaking and sculpture, but employed this language to address topical social issues with an expressive but readable narrative. New forms of work also were beginning to be explored. Mural projects, township art, anonymous laborers paintings and work that was true to the spirit of being art that “must have a function in the community” such as murals, banners, posters and T-shirts were all examples. Fully integrated into the community, these art forms sprang up out of creative necessity, and spoke to the immediacy of social issues. They were an integral part of the South African ‘alternative practice’. Most significant, however, was the fact that the ‘Resistance Art’ was not

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

only an ‘alternative practice’ in terms of message and means, but also through the multi-racial composite of the artists joining the debate.

Within the broad range of works that made up alternative practices in both South Africa and the United States in the 1970s one can observe work that claims an ‘alternative voice’ through each of these means. Certainly the divisions are not hard and fast with many artists moving between the two. Such forms as land art, performance art, and conceptual art in the United States expressed a resistance to ‘mainstream’ practice by way of radical changes in form. Also at this time, artists in both the United States and South Africa employed ‘conventional’ means, such as painting, sculpture and printmaking to address radical social issues. The creation of ‘alternative spaces’ was to play an essential role in the development and articulation of these practices, and a look at the history and development of these venues in both the United States and South Africa is instructive.

## ***ALTERNATIVE SPACES***

In the introduction to the book *Alt. Culture*, a dictionary of contemporary youth terminology, Matthew De Abaitua describes how the term 'alternative' came into common usage in the music industry:

Current use of 'alternative' in the music/youth culture world originated in the late seventies/early eighties when it was used to describe a strain of post punk music cultivated by a growing informal network of college radio stations but ignored by mainstream programmers. The word 'alternative' already had a cultural meaning; commonly associated with the independent oppositional press of the late hippie era this counterculture label also came to denote any lifestyle outside the mainstream.<sup>1</sup>

These 'alternative' stations played 'alternative' music.

A similar linkage exists between alternative art forms and alternative spaces, in that an alternative space is formed out of the critical need to construct a venue, a site for the alternative practice to be expressed. Though an alternative space is not an absolute necessity, its development can be seen as an expression of the same spirit as that of alternative practices.

### ***EARLY ALTERNATIVES***

The term 'alternative space' was first applied specifically to a group of galleries that flourished in the United States in the early 1970s, and indeed the FLAT in many ways resembled these early efforts as well as the re-invented alternatives of the 1990s. These spaces were often described as co-operative, non-profit, transient, flexible and idealistically operated. As was to be the case with their counterparts in other parts of the world, they were run by artists for artists and were free of commercial intent. The particular impetus behind the formation of these alternative spaces often varied from site to site, but consistent in all was a discontent with the marketplace, the commercial galleries, institutions and museums. With this discontent came a critical need for the artists to take

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<sup>1</sup> Matthew De Abaitua, introduction to N. Wice; *Alt.Culture*, 1996, p. 17.

more control over the exhibition of their work; to create a site for creative expression ‘alternative’ to the conventional venues.

In an examination of the non-profit spaces in Southern California, Collette Chattopadhyay lists a number of features that were common to many alternative venues and articulates their common concerns. She writes:

...these non-profit spaces generally differentiated themselves from their commercial cousins by location, audience, organizational structure and theoretical emphasis; relatively free of commercial intent, they presented work that **resisted commodification**, work that **questioned censorship** in the name of commercial interests, work **created by the statistically underrepresented**, work that **enunciated a relationship between art and society**.<sup>2</sup>

Many projects were initiated by artists who had been marginalized from participation in mainstream exhibition venues and who had begun to demand a voice. Inseparable from this influx of new perspectives was the pressing need for artists to engage in political and social concerns and to explore forms of work that might not necessarily be ‘marketable’ or ‘popular’ with the public. Jeffrey Kastner, in an article, *Uncertain Alternatives*, on alternative spaces echoes Chattopadhyay:

[These spaces] exhibited unheralded emerging artists, women artists, and artists of colour; and mounted exhibitions that expressed polemical positions and difficult political and social issues that museums and many commercial galleries shied away from.<sup>3</sup>

The significance that the alternative space played in the United States at this time in allowing ‘alternative’ voices to speak cannot be overemphasized, for alternative venue programming was “diverse not only in form but in subject and cultural perspective” presenting work “created by women, gays, lesbians and minorities who have traditionally been denied a voice within the existing commercial art market.” They also featured “work that addresses problems perceived as social in origin”, for part of the alternative agenda was to “provide a stable environment for the creation of innovative and experimental art that was socially involved”. They provided a “forum for the presentation of work that challenged not only artistic, but social and political boundaries as well.”<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Collette Chattopadhyay; ‘Their Way – Nonprofit spaces in SoCal’, *Artweek*, Vol. 23, Aug 1992, p.16.

<sup>3</sup> Jeffrey Kastner, ‘Uncertain Alternatives’, *ARTnews*, June 1996, p. 120-123.

<sup>4</sup> Collette Chattopadhyay; ‘Their Way – Nonprofit spaces in SoCal’, *Artweek*, Vol. 23, Aug 1992, p.16.



These issues of bringing marginalized voices to the table and opening up a forum for dealing with political subject matter were of course even more critical in South Africa where political repression at home was coupled with the cultural boycott. Artists found themselves caught between the need to create a work of resistance to the apartheid regime while at the same time operating in a climate of cultural isolation brought on by the abhorrent policies of that same regime. Given the political realities of apartheid, efforts by artist groups to facilitate policies of inclusiveness regardless of race and to address political issues in their work were particularly charged with a sense of immediacy and purpose.

In South Africa, one such important project for exhibiting alternative work was the Market Gallery founded in Johannesburg in 1977. It was connected to the already established Market Theater and described by Paul Stopforth:

It is a gallery which functions as a real alternative to the commercial gallery system in South Africa, a space which allows for experimental work to be exhibited or performed that does not have an economic proposition.<sup>5</sup>

And he goes on to add:

Of great value was the fact that the complex was non-racial and functioned as a non-profit organization. A center that would not cater to the white ruling class seemed very important.<sup>6</sup>

The 'alternative' theater in South Africa indeed played an important role in creating an 'alternative' voice in the 1970s. In his essay *The Last Bastion of Freedom under Siege*, Anthony Ackerman writes about the importance of experimental theater in South Africa at that time and in an interesting aside tells how an alternative theater in Cape Town resisted government restrictions by operating as a 'club':

It is doubtful if as much would have been achieved without an infrastructure of alternative theaters. The universities made a significant contribution, but the venues that effectively sustained this work were the Space in Cape Town, which was founded by Brian Astbury in 1972, and the Market Theater in Johannesburg, which was founded by Mannie Manim and Barney Simon in 1976. The Space took advantage of a loophole in the Group Areas Act which made it possible to present controversial work to racially mixed audiences: it operated as a 'club' with membership, and not as a 'public' theater. The Market Theater which has always been open to racially mixed casts and

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<sup>5</sup> Paul Stopforth; *5 Years at The Alternative Gallery – The Market Gallery*, Johannesburg, Market Gallery, 1982, p. 5.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

audiences, was initially the house theater for the Company, founded by Barney Simon in 1974. It is also a receiving theater for topical and socially critical productions from all over the country.<sup>7</sup>

Berman says of the Market Gallery:

At a time when black-white relations were at their lowest ebb following the Soweto riots of 1976, new congenial meeting-grounds for forward looking votaries of the arts in both groups presented themselves in the experimental, or ‘alternative’ theaters that had begun to flourish... in 1977, the launching of the Market Gallery in the complex housing Johannesburg’s dynamic, integrated Market Theater Organization, provided a mutually-acceptable venue for **interracial communication and artistic dialogue**. Before long, the informal gallery had become the fulcrum of the metropolitan avant-garde and the energy center of the socio-political artistic community.<sup>8</sup>

And according to Joyce Ozinsky, the Market Gallery “provided the opportunity for young and unknown artists to show their work, and works that would otherwise be unacceptable because of their political references or experimental nature” and “provided a crucial alternative to commercial galleries and State museums.”<sup>9</sup>

The creation of the Market Gallery at the Market Theater was important not only in terms of the controversial political content of the work and the efforts of artists in apartheid South Africa to bring diverse voices together, but also in the dialogue that was created between two art forms, theater and visual art. It broadened the audience by being “a space which because of its relationship with the theaters involved many more people in viewing the work than an isolated autonomous gallery.”<sup>10</sup> It spoke to the phenomenon that was beginning to occur in the USA and Europe; where boundaries between various art forms were becoming less distinct and where art was being seen as less autonomous and more related to the particular context of its production and presentation.

Ventures similar to the Market in Europe and in the USA regularly present work which is conceived specifically for the site, taking the visual and associative properties of the environment into account in the execution of the work. While this has not occurred to any great extent at the

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<sup>7</sup> Anthony Akerman; ‘The Last Bastion of Freedom Under Siege’, *Culture in Another South Africa*, 1989, p.55.

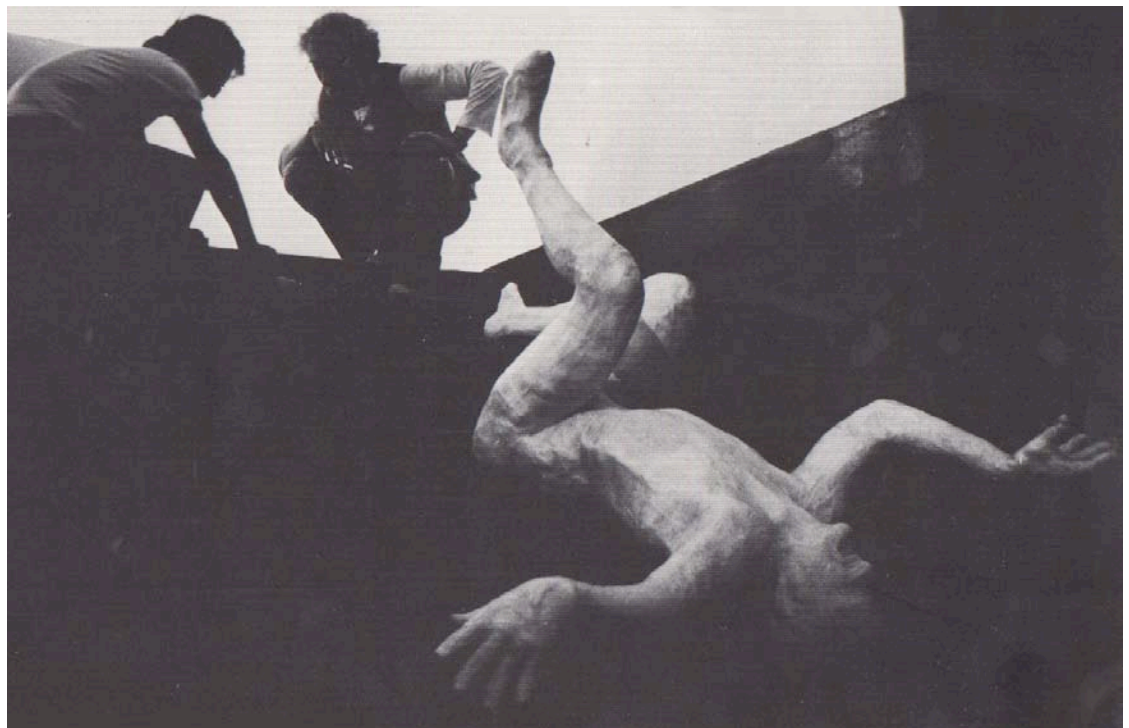
<sup>8</sup> Esme Berman, *Art and Artists of South Africa*, Cape Town, Balkema, 1986, p. 24.

<sup>9</sup> Joyce Ozinsky; *5 Years at The Alternative Gallery – The Market Gallery*, Johannesburg, Market Gallery, 1982, p. 1. Originally from an article in *The Rand Daily Mail*, 1981.

<sup>10</sup> Paul Stopforth; *5 Years at The Alternative Gallery – The Market Gallery*, Johannesburg, Market Gallery, 1982, p. 5.

Market, there is evidence of some indirect influence of the complex's character on certain artists work. Particularly in what is chosen for exhibition.<sup>11</sup>

Stopforth also acknowledges the connections that existed between the Market Theater and the Market Gallery with the American alternative scene by saying “the American cultural optimism of the sixties had introduced valuable ideas concerning the possibilities of various art forms feeding off one another.”<sup>12</sup>



PAUL STOPFORTH,  
*George Botha*, mixed  
media, 1977.\*  
An installation by  
Stopforth at the  
Market Gallery where  
he utilized the  
staircase leading up to  
the gallery space.

Though the Theater and the Gallery would remain somewhat separate in terms of programming, and most of the Gallery exhibitions did not address the issues of site specificity, this idea of art forms feeding one on another to which Stopforth refers can be seen in his *George Botha*. Here, the artist placed the figure on the staircase, invading the viewer's space in a theatrical manner. This linked to parallel developments in explorations of site in other parts of the world, and suggested that the co-existence of the theater and gallery was significant. It marked the fact that the alternative voice of the Market Theater was seen as being also important within the visual

<sup>11</sup> Terence King; *Ibid*, p. 6.

<sup>12</sup> Paul Stopforth; *Ibid*, p. 5.

\* This image is taken from *5 Years at The Alternative Gallery – The Market Gallery*, Johannesburg, Market Gallery, 1982.

arts, and it forecast the potential for a cross fertilization to occur between performing arts and visual arts. This hybridization would be a significant component in many of the alternative art projects that would later develop.

The bringing together of the sculptural and the theatrical could be seen in many of the FLAT performances. These included traditional sculpture projects with live performance elements, works where the process of the creation was presented with as much emphasis as finished display, as well as projects that attempted to break through the imaginary ‘fourth wall’<sup>13</sup> of the traditional theater to directly engage the ‘real world’ and the audience.

Thus, alternative artistic practices at this time, in both South Africa and the United States, were not only significant in terms of the broadening of exhibition opportunities to include new groups or in the bringing of social and political issues to what had become an exhausted aesthetic debate, but also in the possibilities that these practices created for a profound shift to occur in the forms that the work might take. The alternative space provided a site whereby a particular kind of artistic activity was possible. In the United States, this was a trend that tended towards the dematerialization of the art object and the rejection of the standard commercial ‘white cube’. Again, this was intimately linked to the cross-fertilization of theater and art and an attempt to break out of the restraints of work that was considered to be too self-referential, autonomous, or object-like. It was an approach that would foster such movements in the 70s as ‘land art’, ‘conceptual art’, ‘environmental art’, ‘performance art’, site-specific work and installation. Many artists regarded these forms as political and ‘anti-capitalist’ by virtue of the fact that they were deemed unmarketable, and therefore ‘intolerable’ amongst the conservative establishment.

Chattopadhyay echoes this idea when she identifies ‘resistance genres’ as being those that are so by virtue of their controversial content, but also by operating through a form that resists commodification. She specifically highlights performance art as a genre that played an important

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<sup>13</sup> The fourth wall is a term that describes the invisible wall dividing the audience and the stage. In the traditional three sided theater the viewer is clearly separated from the drama as if ‘looking through a window frame’. This could be seen as parallel to the model of a viewer in front of an object. In the same way that installation or site-specific art might seek to engage with the viewer in his/her space, so the dramatic action in experimental theater might seek to intrude beyond this fourth wall. In terms of the ‘progressively radical’ theatrical strategies that an artist or playwright might employ to ‘break the fourth wall’, one might consider these examples: A playwright presents a play in the traditional theatrical manner and the work tells a story using characters with which the audience can identify. It contains no controversial material and it portrays values that one can identify as being consistent with the ‘conventional’ views of the audience. A second playwright may use a conventional narrative format, but the content of this drama touches on issues that challenge the audience and perhaps run counter to the political convention. The third playwright, however, employs devices that rupture a naturalistic dramatic presentation. He/she ‘breaks through the wall’ by invading the viewer’s space, speaking directly beyond the wall or taking the dramatic action out of the theater entirely. The most extreme break might occur in a dramatic presentation that invades the viewer’s space not only physically, but psychologically by presenting itself ‘as reality’, by ‘staging’ events ‘in the world’.

role in the programming of many alternative spaces perhaps because it seems to be particularly resistant to 'mainstream' assimilation:

These venues provided a context for the "immaterial", and illustrated that part of the impetus for the founding of alternative spaces had been the need to support work that emphasized the creative process even if it did so at the expense of the commercially perceived [at that time] product itself. The resistant genres which originally included installation, conceptual, performance... were [born at that time out of a] striving for a significance and meaning that would supercede the interpretation of art as commodity and of artistic process as production..... Its [performance art] continued presence within the alternative milieu undoubtedly is related to both commodity status issues and to the perception of its subject matter as controversial.<sup>14</sup>

Chattopadhyay speaks to performance art as a significant part of the programming for many alternative spaces in the USA in the 70s. However, it is RoseLee Goldberg, writing the first history of this genre in 1979, who first articulates performance art as a genre distinct from theater, and addresses its intimate linkage with other forms of 'alternative practices' throughout art history. Though she distinguishes 'performance art' of the 1970s by saying, "performance has only recently [in the 70s] become accepted as a medium of artistic expression in its own right"<sup>15</sup>; she traces its roots as far back as tribal ritual, and then follows its development through 15<sup>th</sup> century mock naval battles to the Futurists' manifestos. Like Chattopadhyay she emphasizes its radicality in terms of its resistance to commodification:

At that time conceptual art - which insisted on an art of ideas over product, and on an art that could not be bought or sold - was in its heyday and performance was often a demonstration, or an execution of those ideas.<sup>16</sup>

She describes the role of performance as a tool to break with convention and distinguishes it from traditional theater by its open-ended nature:

Live gestures have constantly been used as a weapon against the conventions of established art... Unlike theater, the performer is the artist, seldom a character like an actor, and the content rarely follows a traditional plot or narrative. The performance might be a series of intimate gestures or

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<sup>14</sup> Collette Chattopadhyay; 'Their Way - Nonprofit spaces in SoCal', *Artweek*, Vol. 23, Aug 1992, p. 16.

<sup>15</sup> RoseLee Goldberg; *Performance - Live Art 1909 to the present*, New York, Harry Abrams, 1979, p. 6 - 7.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*

large-scale visual theater, lasting a few minutes or many hours, it might be performed only once or repeated many times...<sup>17</sup>

She addresses the social implications in performance work and its importance in alternative practice by saying that:

the history of performance art in the twentieth century is the history of **permissive, open-ended medium with endless variables, executed by artists impatient with the limitations of more established art forms, and determined to take their art directly to the public.**<sup>18</sup>

As discussed earlier, the alternative theater in South Africa played a particularly vital and culturally active role by bringing together racially diverse viewers and artists, as well as by addressing controversial topics in the work. Though its ‘radicality’ was expressed primarily by way of the content of the presentations and differed from the many examples of ‘performance art’, including the genres in the United States to which Chattopadhyay and Goldberg make reference, the cross-fertilization of theatre and visual arts was still significant. Performance art would later be an important component to the FLAT gallery’s programme, and some of the most experimental and controversial works presented were in this genre. Most of the FLAT performances fell outside of the traditional theatrical model. Though, the gallery hosted a number of evenings of experimental music that were presented within the format of a staged event, more common were evenings of performance art, which included *tableaux vivant* installations, improvisational ‘happenings’, sound art presentations and a ‘faux’ exhibition. This strong element of performance in the FLAT programming is important to note, because it is identified as being a form especially suited for ‘experimental’ work.

Performance art as well as conceptual art, site specific works, and works that were developed out of the creative ‘hybridization’ of genres defined an alternative artistic practice by way of innovative art forms. Alternative practices were also defined at this time by work originating from artists who had been previously excluded as well as work that addressed social and political issues, but both operated with a clear disdain for the dictates of the marketplace or conventional definitions of art.

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

Because these alternative spaces ran counter to commercial interests they required a structure that reflected the spirit of their philosophy. They were able to maintain a certain “freedom” and flexibility by operating with very little of the ‘support’ structures that commercial galleries or museums required. As was to be the case later with the FLAT Gallery, the spaces created in the early 70s in the United States were self funded and run out of lofts owned by the artists or warehouses owned by friends of the artists. They relied heavily on the ad hoc supervision of highly motivated young idealistic volunteer artists for operation as well as programming.

The FLAT programming was created without any advance planning, and exhibitions and events were mounted as interest or opportunity presented itself. Interestingly, this seemingly ‘loose’ curatorial organization for programme scheduling was a characteristic shared by the FLAT with many of these early alternatives in the United States.

GORDON MATTA-CLARK, *Cherry Tree*, 1971.\*  
Matta-Clark installed a tree in the basement of 112 Greene Street (White Columns).



Jeffrey Kastner quotes Bill Arning who describes one of the oldest in New York City, White Columns (which is still in operation), as it was in the early 70s:

White Columns... seemed a blissful free for all... [The space in its earliest days] was a strange and wonderful place. Artists’ work was not reviewed. Slides were not looked at. If you were recommended by someone involved with the space you could just mount a show. A calendar was hung on the wall and you could decide when you wanted a show and for how long.<sup>20</sup>

\* This image is taken from the *ARTnews* article ‘Uncertain Alternatives’ by Jeffrey Kastner, June 1996.

<sup>20</sup> Jeffrey Kastner; ‘Uncertain Alternatives’, *ARTnews*, June 1996, p. 120 – 123. As White Columns and other alternative

This policy of open impromptu programming, a feature of the FLAT Gallery as well as many infant alternative spaces, continued to be a central issue with those alternative projects that were formed in the decades that followed. An open policy for exhibitions brought with it a wonderful ‘anything goes’ spirit but also a giddy lack of quality control. Though this fostered a climate that encouraged a special breed of fearless experimentation that was perhaps essential for the development of new art forms, criticism followed around the question of ‘professional’ standards. Indeed, the FLAT was regarded with skepticism by some established artists and critics in Durban (particularly in the beginning) because it operated with such an open exhibition policy.

As was the case with the curatorial functions and the programming, so too the operation of most alternative spaces was provided not by professionals on payroll budgets but by the initiative and commitment of the artists involved. Often the problem of finding a site for an alternative space would be solved by opening up private studios or lofts to the public or by bartering labor for space. The FLAT was housed in an apartment and operated through the volunteer efforts of the apartment's occupants and the artists who participated in the various programmes.

Southern Exposure in San Francisco was an artist initiative where the artists involved took on the responsibility of reconditioning an abandoned building in lieu of rent. Meredith Tromble reports in a conversation with Robbin Henderson (co-founder of the project):

The space was empty and charred when we first moved in. It belonged to a dancer and had a nice wooden floor, but there had been a very bad fire and so it took so long to get the insurance money that the dancer had moved out, leaving the space empty. When the insurance money came in Project *Artaud* used it to make a down payment on the building and did not repair the space, so we - the twelve of us who founded the gallery - agreed that if we could have it and use it rent free, we'd fix it up.<sup>21</sup>

Indeed a large part of the flexibility and independence that the early alternatives enjoyed was due in large part to the (relatively) low overhead and temporary nature of the sites involved.<sup>22</sup>

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spaces became more ‘established’ and sought after by artists wishing to exhibit the old open policies became unmanageable. And yet as late as the frenetic 80s, the director, Bill Arning, in the original democratic spirit pledged to visit the studio’s of every artist who submitted slides. His marathon studio tours were legion as were his many “discoveries” of unknown artists.

<sup>21</sup> Meredith Tromble; ‘A Conversation with Robbin Henderson, Co-founder, Southern Exposure’, *Artweek*, Vol. 25, June 9, 1994, p. 15.

<sup>22</sup> Many alternative spaces later sought to remain true to this original mission to stay “lean and mean” by launching “gypsy” or guerrilla projects without a set place of operation. Here the ‘alternative space’ was a kind of mobile site. Examples include the Temporary Contemporary in Baltimore which mounted exhibitions in sites around Baltimore that



Though the alternative spaces declared themselves to be concerned not with “the ideas of the marketplace but the marketplace of ideas,”<sup>23</sup> the realities of growth and the efforts to create a sustained project led to concerns with funding sources. Though funded largely by the resident artists, even the FLAT gallery relied in part on support from the Bartel Arts Trust and the Durban Arts organization who each provided grants of R400/month and R300/month respectively.

As the decade ended, for the most part as various ‘alternative spaces’ in the United States began to become more established and to seek funding. Also, they began to rely more and more on grants from all levels of government. Ironically, an ambitious National Endowment for the Arts was established under the conservative Republican presidency of Richard Nixon, and this program called NEA provided a stable supply of government support. With this financial support the 70s alternative spaces flourished and reached a certain degree of stability. Though a more structured operation replaced the ‘free for all’ attitudes of the earlier incarnations, the programming though government sponsored was at that time surprisingly independent, that is, there was a remarkable lack of government interference in programming. (Not until the famous Mapplethorpe and Serrano debates in the mid 80s would the conservative forces in the US congress look towards government funding of the arts as a rallying point.)

By the late 70s and early 80s, the ‘alternative space’ in the United States had become a convention. The crisis these venues faced was complex in nature and ironically a result of their ‘success’. As the alternative spaces grew and budgets swelled they became more structured and their programming less flexible. They began increasingly to resemble the ‘mainstream’ venues they had once critiqued; no longer seen as ‘alternative’. Mark Gisbourne addressed this in an article for *Art Monthly* on the state of these alternative spaces in the 90s:

If alternative spaces no longer operate on the periphery, outside the mainstream, this may be due to the lateral aesthetic conditions implicit in the Post-Modern. For what once appeared clearer is now blurred by the erosion of the boundaries of where inner and outer begin and end.<sup>24</sup>

In a sense, alternative practices by their very nature cannot be static and those of one generation must be re-examined, critiqued and redefined by the next. In the United States, many of the alternative practices of the 70s became the market friendly novelties for the 80s, and many of the alternative spaces of the 70s became the bloated institutions of the 90s. Even so-called radical

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dealt with the specific nature of the ‘host’ site and the Nomadic Site project in Los Angeles. Both of which will be covered in more detail when alternative spaces in the 90’s are discussed in “New Alternatives.”

<sup>23</sup> Collette Chattopadhyay; ‘Their Way’, *Artweek*, Vol. 23, Aug 6, 1992, p.16.

<sup>24</sup> Mark Gisbourne; ‘White Columns’, *Art Monthly*, No. 175, April 1994, p. 12-14.

programming that addressed difficult political issues became within a season or two the conventional fare of major museums.

The alternative spaces of the 70s had emerged from the decade with more stable funding thanks to the NEA and matching grants from local government sources and they remained independent in terms of the content and form of their programming, but a crisis was clearly on the horizon. As Kastner points out in *Uncertain Alternatives*, alternative spaces began to resemble the larger institutions that they had originally seen themselves opposing:

With stability came more infrastructures and bureaucracy slowing down the spaces' ability to move quickly to present the most progressive, avant-garde work at the earliest possible time.<sup>25</sup>

Conversly, “more aggressive political shows on topics such as sexuality, gender, reproductive rights, US foreign policy and multi-culturalism, increased efforts to reach out to the community and project spaces for young artists became familiar aspects of many **contemporary art museums**.” Practices that had been regarded as ‘alternative’ were co-opted to the mainstream. What had been ‘marginal’ found itself in the ‘center’.<sup>26</sup>

The alternative spaces were criticized from the left and the right, both raising questions as to the relevance in terms of audience and programming. When studies on the effectiveness of such venues revealed a 2 - 5% art audience, which was deemed primarily “educated, affluent, and white”<sup>27</sup>, ammunition was given to both sides of the debate. Conservatives in the US congress claimed that the alternative spaces and the alternative programming catered to a politicized ‘in-crowd’ and did not justify public spending. Suspicious artists wondered if publicly funded alternative spaces were no more than artificial stimulations funded by the NEA and administered by professional art bureaucrats. David Trend spoke to this suspicion when he wrote in *Afterimage*:

How can organizations, promoting supposedly ‘radical’, politically critical independent work, be associated with a branch of government? The paradox of government support is that it not only supports these structures but channels them too. A system of monetary rewards has evolved that encourages ‘professionalism’ and aesthetic definitions of what art should be.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Jeffery Kastner; ‘Uncertain Alternatives’, *ARTnews*, June 1996, p. 120 -123

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>27</sup> David Trend; ‘One Hand Clapping’, *Afterimage*, Vol.16, Summer 1988, p. 2. Trend quotes Ruby Lerner here from *Comprehensive Organizational Assistance for Artists’ Organizations*, Washington, DC, NAAO, 1988.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid*.

Ironically the NEA came under extreme fire from the right in the early 90s when Jessie Helms, a conservative US senator from a rural southern district, attacked the NEA's (indirect) sponsorship of the so-called 'immoral' art of Mapplethorpe and Serrano.<sup>29</sup> A conservative mood led to spending cuts and unwanted hostile attention to the programs to be funded. The NEA was torn apart by the struggle, experimenting at one point with an "anti obscenity" pledge requirement for grants. By the 1990s the economic boom of the 80s was over and corporate funding in steep decline. The once well-funded NEA eliminated the 'artists organization' category and individual grants in the face of severe financial constraints and threats of censorship issues.

Others, such as writer, Marcia Tanner, added their voices to the criticism of 'alternative spaces' and accused the non-profits arts organizations of being "stagnant" and "structured on a model now two decades old." She continued:

They are neither light on their feet nor responsive to the changing art market, but rather hamstrung by public policy, funding requirements, and accountability.<sup>30</sup>

Indeed, what had been perceived as radical by one generation became institutionalized by the next, but also what had set itself counter to the marketplace now found itself complicit. With the institutions transforming the notion of 'non-profit' into yet another convention, artist initiatives began to spawn commercial venues.

Spaces in the East Village seemed to embody the casual spirit of the early alternatives when, in the early 1980s, they sprung up in small storefronts in the, then cheap, seedy Lower East side neighborhood of New York City. Many were artists run, but few positioned themselves in opposition to the marketplace. Though many East Village galleries exhibited work that addressed the dynamics of 'commodification', unlike the conceptual art, land art or process based performance art of the 70s, did not through its **form** resist its own commodification. For some, which embraced the marketplace, it was an 'alternative' practice that defined itself through its rejection of what was seen as the naive idealism of the 70s. For others, a radical agenda in terms of content remained but without the same 'radical forms' of the previous generation. Venues like PPOW gallery that exhibited work that dealt with 'in your face' leftist political content, such as Sue Coe's drawings, paintings, and prints, was still a commercial gallery and operated in a modest

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<sup>29</sup> "Defined by Helms, they prohibit NEA... funds from "promoting, disseminating, sponsoring, or producing materials or performances that depict or describe, in a patently offensive way, sexual or excretory activities or organs as well as promoting, disseminating, sponsoring, or producing materials or performances which denigrate the objects or beliefs of the adherents of a particular religion.'" Collette Chattopadhyay; 'Nonprofits' and the Politics of Art', *Artweek*, Vol. 26, Dec 1995, p. 15 – 16.

<sup>30</sup> Marcia Tanner; 'Hard Times for Nonprofit Spaces', *Artweek*, Vol. 24, Jan 7, 1993, p. 14 – 15.

sized space. Here the small, sometimes artist run, commercial galleries, were seen as more ‘cutting edge’ than the now ‘institutionalized’ alternatives. However, the phenomenon of the East Village ‘alternative’ gallery scene was short lived. Those galleries that survived eventually moved to larger spaces in SOHO, to become more established commercial venues. This changing position of the alternative space *vis-a-vis* commerce is articulated by Gisbourne when he writes:

By the mid-80s in the face of the East Village art boom, a decisive shift had taken place. Alternative spaces became increasingly more integrated with the commercial art ‘scene’ and their traditional role as oppositional spaces was brought into question. These venues occupied a not too dissimilar position to the SOHO based galleries to whom they became something of a feeder industry.<sup>31</sup>

This was in part due to the growing acceptance of what had been alternative practices into commercial venues and established museums as well as a result of changing agendas within the once ‘marginalized’ artists’ communities. Many of the East Village galleries, though engaged in ‘experimental’ work, did not necessarily position themselves in a manner that was resistant to the marketplace.

The integration of alternative spaces into the mainstream, the adoption of their approaches by mainstream institutions, the dwindling of audiences and funding crisis prompted many such as Terri Cohn to ask the question:

**What is alternative about alternative spaces in the 90s? To what in fact are they alternatives?**<sup>32</sup>

The implicit question here was, how can the alternative spaces survive, how can they renew themselves? It articulated the realization that for the ‘alternative space’ to sustain itself and be truly ‘alternative’ it must constantly **re-invent** itself. What was to profoundly inform this re-invention was the realization that an ‘alternative space’ could be a temporary site, and even more radically, that it was not necessarily even a building or a geographic ‘space’, but rather a site of activity. This crisis also marked a growing awareness that the nature of any alternative space, like an alternative practice, might be a vibrant, but short life. Reinvention and renewal were indeed the key concepts, but the commitment to spontaneous expression also brought with it an appreciation for impermanence.

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<sup>31</sup> Mark Gisbourne; ‘White Columns’, *Art Monthly*, No.175, April 1994, p. 12 – 14.

<sup>32</sup> Teri Cohn; ‘Collaboration, Community, Commitment: Alternative Spaces in the 90s’, *Artweek*, Vol. 26, Dec 1995, p. 12.

## NEW ALTERNATIVES

*One of the most significant aspects of the alternative scene is the way in which it has continued to reinvent itself...whatever is established as an option to the institutionalization of the museum or the commercial gallery structure eventually becomes “establishment” in some way, and insures-or mandates a new ‘alternatives’. When the first great wave of alternative spaces began to appear during the mid-70s, one heated topic of discussion was whether the word ‘alternative’ modified the organizational structure or the art presented by the space. Today of course, it seems that the word must qualify both. As times change, the terms that define an organization or ideas as ‘alternative’ evolve with it.<sup>33</sup>*

Emerging from the 80s, alternative spaces in the USA were faced with a critical need to change with the climate. Public funding had been cut severely and many of the alternative spaces found themselves top heavy with large staffs, cumbersome long-range programming and expensive spaces to maintain. As they had begun to resemble institutions, so the institutions had begun to offer programming that appropriated their missions.

The cultural and economic climate in which they originally cast themselves no longer exists. Artist’s organizations have watched as elements of their look, missions, and programming have been slowly adopted by larger institutions.<sup>34</sup>

In the same way that an alternative practice, by definition, must continually reinvent itself; its practitioners constantly moving beyond the old art forms and looking critically at the messages they convey, the alternative space to stay vital must also evolve. With the crisis in the late 1980s, the evolution of many alternative spaces in the United States was marked by a shift back to the ‘basics’ of artists’ initiatives. For many, this was a response to the financial realities of scarce funding, but the change also spoke to what had been become a lack of the artists’ direct engagement in the conception and the running of the alternative venues and a need to explore new models for ‘alternative’ practice.

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> Jeffery Kastner; ‘Uncertain Alternatives’, *ARTnews*, June 1996, p. 120 -123

In conversation with Meredith Tromble, Michael Damm, artist and curator/founder of San Francisco's Victoria Room, spoke to the conditions that led to the surge of artists run spaces in the 90s:

... in part a national phenomenon. It emerged in the aftermath of the 1980s collapse of the market and the decline of the non-profits (the alternative spaces of the 70s).<sup>35</sup>

Consistent for most of the so called 'new alternatives' that began operating in the 90s was the rejection of what was seen as the encumbrance of boards, committees, long range programming and most of all expensive real estate. Central to the re-evaluation of the 'alternative' was also the role played by the dynamics of funding. The government and corporate funding that contributed to the growth and perhaps institutionalization of the early alternatives became scarce in the late 80s and many involved in creating 'new alternatives' expressed skepticism of the implicit controls that came with such 'support'.

There was then a need to come full circle back to the beginning. To reconnect to the original spirit, if not the form, of the alternative spaces in the 70s. Four Walls, an alternative space in Brooklyn, New York, began as a series of 'open studios' and evolved into periodic one evening exhibitions. Like many of these 'new alternatives' Four Walls largely rejected the pursuit of grants in order to operate with more flexibility and responsiveness. Mike Ballou, an artist involved with Four Walls spoke to what he saw as the incompatibility of an alternative spirit with long range planning:

We're not into this grant cycle - granting institutions require that you tell them what you are doing for the next two years, and I'm not sure that you can maintain an 'alternative' spirit and do that!<sup>36</sup>

Meredith Tromble echoed the problems that were created through most large scale foundation, corporate and government funding and spoke to some of the 'flexibility' problems that plagued the established alternative spaces:

The advantages of no corporate funding is that it allows for a certain amount of 'flexibility' to deal with the immediacy of the art world in a way that larger institutions cannot (and by implication the established alternative spaces could not.) The very bureaucratic nature of established alternative

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<sup>35</sup> Meredith Tromble; 'A Conversation with Michael Damm, Artist, Curator, Founder of Victoria Room', *Artweek*, Vol. 27, Jan 1996, p. 13 – 14.

<sup>36</sup> Jeffery Kastner; 'Uncertain Alternatives', *ARTnews*, June 1996, p. 120 -123

spaces required programming to be resolved one or two years in advance thus making it difficult for these structures to absorb new and subtle shifts in the artworld.<sup>37</sup>

Many alternative spaces that had been founded in the 70s but had survived into the 90s were challenged to adapt to the changing climate. When in 1997, Washington DC's oldest alternative space - The Washington Project for the Arts (WPA) - was threatened with bankruptcy and closure, its board opted to return to its 70s roots. A new smaller board was formed, drastic cuts were made in staff, and most radical of all, the project vacated its posh permanent space and began again with the all-volunteer remodeling of an abandoned nightclub. The alternative space, that had swollen to be a 'mini museum' with programming two years in advance and a large staff in one of Washington's most expensive real estate neighborhoods, started all over and launched an experimental exhibition of emerging artists. Just a month before the show opened volunteers could be found ripping up beer soaked carpets and scraping layers of black paint from windows. This rebirth affirmed the claim that an alternative space must die or be reinvented in order to remain 'alternative'.<sup>38</sup>

Indeed, many new alternative spaces sought to remain true to the original spirit of 'alternative practice' by staying '**lean and mean**'. This was achieved not only through a return to flexible, more responsive programming but also by rethinking the notion of **space** in 'alternative space'.

Michael Floss, in *San Francisco Web: New Alternatives*, points out that these 'new alternatives' "require a new type of site".<sup>39</sup> As the most pressing constraint for many had been that of maintaining a permanent piece of 'real estate', many of the new venues moved out from under this burden by launching 'gypsy' or guerrilla projects without a set place of operation; the 'alternative space' operating as a kind of mobile site.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Meredith Tromble; 'A Conversation with Michael Damn, Artist, Curator, Founder of Victoria Room', *Artweek*, Vol. 27, Jan 1996, p. 13 – 14.

<sup>38</sup> I participated in this 'renovation project' at the new WPA site in Washington.

<sup>39</sup> Michael Floss; 'San Francisco Web: the New Alternatives', *Artweek*, Vol. 27, Jan 1996, p. 12 – 13.

<sup>40</sup> In Berlin, an explosion of activity occurred after the destruction of the 'Wall', with commercial galleries opening up in the so-called "Mitte" section of the former East Side. Significant were the large number of artists' initiatives such as open studio exhibitions, 'alternative spaces' set in spare rooms of private flats, and guerrilla 'clubs'. These included such venues as weekend long exhibitions with remarkably professional presentation standards as well as performances in obscure alleyway shed rooms or outside of nightclubs. Operating out of small room off an alleyway in the Mitte and found by following a path made by a string of blue lights, an Israeli sculptor and sound artist called Safy opened his studio as a kind of guerrilla night club called "Sniper". The programming ranged from experimental sound mixing to screenings of video and film collage. The entire experience was considered to be part of the work and Safy was quick to assert that "Sniper is not a bar or a nightclub, but an 'art project'". Indeed, it was difficult to determine what was part of the 'performance' and what was not when the doorman barked upon entry, "No dancing, no photographs, and NO GERMAN BEER!"

M. A. Greenstein, in *Edgy in Edge City - Los Angeles*, also addresses this issue of ‘home site’ by saying that for many alternative spaces in the 90s,

**transience** is a survival technique, proving homelessness to be a dominant mode in art and life.<sup>41</sup>

This model is echoed by David DiMichele in the same issue of *Artweek*:

The past year has brought a plethora of fresh, creative approaches to the traditional gallery formula. One has been to operate out of temporary available spaces, so that the galleries are frequently on the move.<sup>42</sup>

These new alternatives spaces did not operate out of art spaces but rather in unconventional venues. Store-front windows, garages, bus stations, restaurants, private dining rooms and lounges all became sites for artists’ exchange and created what Mark van Proyen calls a “secret urban archaeology”.<sup>43</sup> This is significant in that these were sites that engaged with ‘public space’ in a manner that again moved away from the alternative space as a distinct autonomous ‘site’, and in many cases engaged in the issues of ‘context’ in the specific site.

The Temporary Contemporary, as the name suggests, was an alternative space that operated without a permanent space. This project, based in Baltimore mounted exhibitions in sites around the city that dealt with the specific nature of the ‘host’ site. These included public venues such as works in bus stops as well as wall text placed in other art institutions.

One particularly successful and provocative exhibition sponsored by the Temporary Contemporary was created out of the inspired combination of artist Fred Wilson with the conservative Baltimore Historical Society. Wilson, an African American artist, whose work deals with racial stereotypes in popular culture, was given full access the Historical Society’s archival materials. In an effective placement and combination of selected items, Wilson created new meanings via a complex layering of images and objects. A traditional ‘family portrait’ of a slave holding family was re-titled *To bring the slave child in the corner to the center of the narrative*. Shackles and elegant silver-ware were put side by side as were whipping posts and home furnishing, titled *Examples of 19th Century Metalwork* and *Examples of 19th Century Woodwork*. Wilson employed the neutral language of this conservative museum to critique itself. In this case,

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<sup>41</sup> M.A. Greenstein; ‘Edgy in Edge City’, *Artweek*, Vol. 24, April 22, 1993, p. 16 – 17.

<sup>42</sup> David DiMichele; ‘Making Ends Meet’, *Artweek*, Vol. 24, April 22, 1993, p. 14 – 15.

<sup>43</sup> Mark Van Proyen; ‘Taking Up the Challenge: New Alternatives in San Francisco’, *Artweek*, Vol. 25, June 9, 1994, p. 16.



the alternative space was not a neutral site set to house exhibitions, but rather a place specifically chosen with a fully acknowledged cultural significance.<sup>44</sup>

In South Africa, the use of a ‘loaded site’ with a specific context was explored in the *Taking Stock* exhibition at the Johannesburg Stock Exchange in 1997. Curated by Marco Cianfanelli, Luan Nell and Andrea Burgener, as part of the 2<sup>nd</sup> *Johannesburg Biennale Fringe*<sup>45</sup>, the exhibition took place in a functioning business complex on the old unused stock exchange floor. The curators described their intention in this way:

The aim of the show is that the works, both in an individual and a collective capacity, operate more as an **intervention** than as an exhibition.<sup>46</sup>

The site was charged with obvious references to ‘commerce’, but also spoke to the obsolescence of the ‘stage’ of an exchange floor filled with brokers. It had been abandoned and replaced with a ‘virtual’ floor, where traders carried out transactions via computer. As the theme of the Biennale was *Trade Routes*, the curators of this ‘Fringe’ exhibition saw this site as a context that was particularly rich in possibilities:

We are interested in the way in which economic power and other forms of power struggle (such as gender politics and race) are connected. We feel that the JSE site has potential for the negotiation of these issues on many different levels.<sup>47</sup>

The Los Angeles based project called Nomadic Site was another example of an alternative space that continually recreated the ‘site’ for its exhibitions, but with even less attention perhaps to the context of the site. Founded and run by a twenty-eight year old named Charles LaBelle, “talent agent, locations scout, and public relations officer” for the project, the Nomadic Site was described in this way by M.A. Greenstein writing for *Artweek*:

a roving, out of pocket, unofficial not-for-profit entity, that exists everywhere and nowhere. Here today, gone tomorrow, Nomadic site plays in the liminal zone that blurs the distinction between public and private mind.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> Simon Dumenco; ‘Lost & Found’, *Baltimore City Paper*, Baltimore, May 1, 1992. P. 9 – 12.

<sup>45</sup> The Fringe exhibitions were unofficial venues that took place off-site in both the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> *Johannesburg Biennales*. In most cases these exhibitions featured artists that were not included in the main Biennale selections.

<sup>46</sup> Burgener, Cianfanelli, Nell; Proposal for *Taking Stock*, Johannesburg, 1997.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

<sup>48</sup> M.A. Greenstein; ‘Edgy in Edge City’, *Artweek*, Vol. 24, April 22, 1993, p. 16 – 17.

In Durban, two examples of artists' initiatives addressed this notion of the 'nomadic site' in a manner that was appropriate to the South African context. One, the Community Mural Projects (CMP) created 'exhibition sites' all over the city, and another, the Transnet *Art Train*, brought a 'moving gallery' across the region between cities.

Community Mural Projects, although not an 'alternative space' as such, embodied a creative approach to both alternative practices and alternative sites. Running parallel in time to the FLAT, this non-profit organization with a mandate to "cover every wall in Durban with murals", was initially called Dream City Projects. Run by Terry-Anne Stevenson and Ilsa Mikula, CMP proved to be quite successful and soon these murals could be seen on walls all over the country.

The project began when Stevenson and Mikula organized to paint a human-rights mural (now a national monument) on Durban's old city-jail walls; and continued as they obtained funding and sites, organizing groups of artists to work on the murals. Funding came from various art organisations, corporations and the government; and artists through the African Arts Centre,<sup>49</sup> word of mouth, or from institutions like the Technikon. Funding included payment for participating artists. A strong relationship grew between these artists associated with the Community Mural Projects, which included Thami Jali, Joseph Manana, Mandla Blose and Jethro<sup>50</sup>, and the FLAT regulars.<sup>51</sup>

Though each mural was made around a theme, individual interpretations were open-ended and responsive to the community's input. Peta Lee in an article from *The Sunday Tribune* quotes Mikula as saying:

We work in collaboration with about 15 artists. Where possible, we try to involve the locals by asking them what they'd like to see painted on their walls. The object is to promote peace and community awareness.<sup>52</sup>

Indeed this was an important aspect of another one of their projects, the *Warwick Avenue* mural, which was commissioned by the BAT Center for the *Festival of Laughter*. Simon Manana, an artist affiliated with the Essex Road artist space, Tsietsi Matubako, a senior painting-student at the Technikon and Thomas Barry, one of the FLAT co-founders, were among the artists who worked

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<sup>49</sup> Stevenson had previously worked at the African Art Centre for some time.

<sup>50</sup> I never knew Jethro's surname.

<sup>51</sup> Interestingly, Jali and Manana, would later form the Essex Road Gallery in July of 1994. This would begin a very fruitful cultural exchange between the regulars at both galleries; each attending each other's exhibitions. Later, an extensive interview with the Essex Road artists would be published in the 2<sup>nd</sup> issue of *FLAT* Newsletter.

<sup>52</sup> Peta Lee, 'They're Painting Up a Storm', *The Sunday Tribune*, Durban, May 22, 1994.



**FUN RIDE:** Some of the artists who transformed two railway carriages into a colourful mobile exhibition centre.

Picture: SHELLEY KJONSTAD

Top: COMMUNITY MURAL PROJECTS, 'Human Rights Mural', Old Prison Walls, Durban, 1993. CMP Postcard.

Above: TRANSNET ART TRAIN (Community Mural Projects), June 1994. This image is taken from the 'Sunday Tribune' and shows the artists who were involved with the painting, on top of the 'gallery'. These include amongst others Thami Jali (2nd), Trueman Myaka (4th), Ilsa Mikula (5th), Tsietsi Matubako (6th), Mandla Blose (7th), Thomas Barry (8th).

on the mural. Before they began, they approached the local stall-holders around the wall and asked them what kind of mural they would like to see. Mikula recalled:

They said they wanted to see themselves... so that's what we gave them.<sup>53</sup>

In the *BAT Review*, the importance of art in the community is reiterated by Stevenson when she said:

It is often a way of instilling pride and a sense of belonging to the people in the area. By producing the images on a building or community hall, they have previously had no influence over; they finally put their stamp on it through their art.<sup>54</sup>

Another project for 'taking the art out of the gallery' developed when two train carriages were the site for an exhibition. Sponsored by Transnet, and organized by Barry, the 'alternative space' was literally these carriages that were then sent from Durban to the *Grahamstown Arts Festival*. Works were installed in this 'moving gallery', which itself became a 'canvas' for Dream City Projects (Community Mural Projects), who painted the entire exterior of the carriages with a mural. Thus they created a second travelling exhibition outside the carriages, that could be seen as the train moved from Durban to its destination. Artists who painted the mural included Trueman Myaka, Tsietsi Matubako, Blose, Jali, Mikula, Manana, and Barry.

Stevenson and Barry's collaborative efforts continued after the *Grahamstown Arts Festival* with the curated exhibition, *Emerging from the Kingdom*, a Fringe exhibition at the *1<sup>st</sup> Johannesburg Biennale*. The Fringe exhibitions<sup>55</sup> were conceived of as off site 'alternative' venues to the official Biennale. *Emerging from the Kingdom* was one that comprised solely of artists from Kwa-Zulu Natal.

With unconventional venues, a dynamic is created when art is placed in a site that does not necessarily operate as an autonomous safe 'art space'. Here there is potential to engage the public directly. This can be an act which is developed with the full participation of the community, as with the murals projects and the Transnet train. However, it can also be an action that sparks controversy. The utilization of sites such as store-front windows or other public sites may confront an unwilling viewer and draw criticism and even censorship. This is an important aspect not only

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<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

<sup>54</sup> Peter Engblom (ed); *BAT Review*, Durban, 1994.

<sup>55</sup> Mentioned above in the context of the *Taking Stock* exhibition.

of 'new alternative spaces' but also 'new alternative practices'; work that moves out of the gallery and intrudes into the viewer's 'real world' in an aggressive manner. As a strategy in performance work, it blurs the distinction between art and life.

Clint Blagwell, an artist in Richmond (USA) worked independent of any gallery support with a group of collaborators to create performance works at various sites. In working class diners around the city, he and his co-performers staged 'conversations' where they 'discussed' a 'hit job' in voices loud enough to be overheard by other customers. In another work, he staged an event in a posh business district where he was chased, caught and dragged through the streets on a noon workday by well-dressed businessmen. In both 'performances' the stage was in the public but unlike 'street theater', did not set itself apart as 'fiction'. What resulted was an intrusion into the viewer's space both spatially and psychologically.

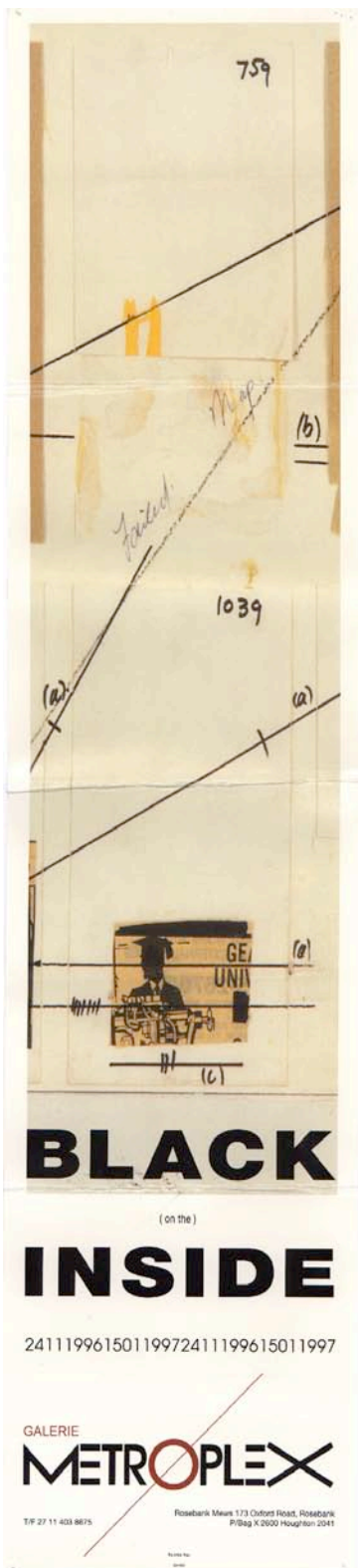
In Nomadic Sites's *Private And Public Pleasures*, a store-front display by five women artists in an old beauty salon in Hollywood, a blatant treatment of sexual issues led ultimately to censorship. Critics of the project voiced objections that were not aimed so much at the content of the work, as to the fact that the installation was in a "very public context" where "people had no choice but to see it". Though they acknowledged the implicit irony in repressing images that were about the repression of women, critics still regarded the display of controversial work in the 'public space' of a window front as offensive. Diane Mark-Walker, in her critique of *The Private and Public Pleasures* exhibition, addressed the need to consider how art functions in a public space:

Ironically it is the very extent to which *Private and Public Pleasures* merges with the surrounding territory that subverts and undermines its power. It would not be patronizing to suggest that these installations are too conceptually based and too rooted in the vocabulary of art world gender discourse to address a non-art world audience meaningfully... I can only conclude that *Pleasures* is a private toy in a public place.<sup>56</sup>

Indeed, as Mark-Walker points out, when alternative practices shift from galleries into public spaces and the 'alternative space' is no longer a gallery space but a kind of 'appropriated site' there becomes a pressing need to explore artforms that engage the public in meaningful ways. She addresses the concern that the shifting of an artwork from the gallery out into the world must be done in a way that is mindful of how it is to engage that world.

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<sup>56</sup> Diane Mark-Walker; 'Private & Public Pleasures', *Artweek*, Vol. 24, April 22, 1993, p. 17.



An example of a ‘store-front alternative’ that merges with its surroundings in South Africa is Galerie Metroplex. Opened in the mid-90s, it operates out of two storefront windows in a mall in Rosebank, Johannesburg. One exhibition, *TFI: Techno Factory Invention*, a display of selections from founder and curator Warren Seibriz’s rare vinyl collection, is described by Greg Bowes in the *Mail & Guardian* in this way:

This is possibly the most desirable shopfront I’ve ever seen, but seemingly without a shop. It can’t be for the Chinese supermarket next door because the display consists of a stunning array of rare and collectable techno records, and it can’t be for dance music outlet and DJ hangout Acid Dog/Liquid Records, because that’s in a completely different corner of Rosebank’s bustling shopping mecca. Warren Siebriz’s Galerie Metroplex, two windows between two malls, could easily pass for a shopfront.<sup>57</sup>

As it is tucked away in a less traveled corridor at the rear of the shopping centre, Metroplex’s intended relation to ‘public space’ is somewhat obscure. This odd location is perhaps a reflection of its founder’s eccentricities. There is no staff and no office: only a mysterious phone number, fax and private mail-bag address. It is as if Seibriz, notoriously elusive, unlike his American counterparts, took on the project of even eliminating the curator (himself) from public view; thus establishing an uneasy relationship between the project and the audience.

<sup>57</sup> Greg Bowes; ‘Emporio High-Techno’, *Mail & Guardian*, Johannesburg, Jan 10, 1997.



METROPLEX  
MEDIA

DJs who work turntables replace bands as sound sources.  
Left out of the place wars by lack of access to sophisticated equipment, the early 1970's black street musicians, like their graffiti artist contemporaries, re-shaped a form by using what was cheap and available.  
Although Jeff Mills is the greatest living exponent of this form, cycle 33 pays homage to sound and image manipulation - past and present.

Jeff Mills  
cycle 33

231097 231297

Sony

THB 12/10/97 METROPLEX

For Simen Allan with love

An invitation to Metroplex's 'Cycle 33', Oct 1997.

Opposite: A poster for the Neil Goedhals, posthumous exhibition, 'Black (on the) Inside', at Metroplex, Nov 1996.

The strategies of the so called ‘New Alternatives’ not only challenged the notions of what is an alternative gallery exhibition space with projects that operated out of temporary sites or unconventional public spaces, but also questioned the notion of what length an exhibition might run. Though performance artists had always tested the notions of conventional duration (compressing a work to a spontaneous single gesture or stretching it to involve weeks and even months), visual artists, out of necessity, began to question standard exhibition calendars. Many expressed frustration with the standard exhibition run and challenged that convention. Robert Gunderman of Food House in Los Angeles challenged the convention of month long venues by saying:

Its fucked up, this unwritten rule book by which galleries abide, the group of artists they represent, the month long exhibitions. I don't know where it came from but its something we're not interested in adhering to. Its just the same old boring pattern, so we try to mix things up as much as we can by showing film, music, performance.<sup>58</sup>

The one-day exhibition format was a creative way of addressing the need for flexible temporary venues and liberated the organizers from staffing demands. This brought with it interesting possibilities for new sites as well as a ‘performance’ aspect to the exhibition.

Another example of an artist’s initiative without a permanent site that tackled conventional exhibition time frames was the *Movable Feast* in Richmond (USA). Once a month an exhibition was set up for one night with an evening of performances, poetry readings, or other presentations. Marisa Telleria-Diez, an artist from Nicaragua studying at the Virginia Commonwealth University, was an organizer for what began as an effort to facilitate more dialogue between artists and writers and grew into a regular ‘one night exhibition/event’ in the shifting available spaces.

Like the FLAT, many new alternatives ran without set hours of operation. Food House opened three days a week, thus allowing each of its three partners to gallery sit one day a week. Four Walls in Brooklyn mounted one-night exhibitions. In San Francisco’s last surviving Woolworth’s, the day before its demolition, an artist group staged a one-day exhibition. In another project called *One Night Stand*, the site was a seedy hotel room and the exhibition ran for 24-hours.<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> David DiMichele; ‘Making Ends Meet’, *Artweek*, Vol. 24, Jan 7, 1993, p. 15.

<sup>59</sup> Michael Floss; ‘San Francisco’s Web: New Alternatives’, *Artweek*, Vol. 27, Jan 1996, p. 14 – 15.



As was the case with many of the early alternatives, which began as ‘open studio’ events or as an outgrowth/extension of the artist’s own work and living space, alternatives in the 90s in the United States and South Africa included these venues where private life became public display. Venues in South Africa that operated as a kind of ‘outgrowth’ of private space included not only the FLAT, but the FIG gallery in Johannesburg and Essex Road Gallery in Durban.

The First International Gallery (FIG) operated out of a number of sites, including its most recent location, a former corner-store in a residential part of Troyeville; and like the FLAT Gallery in Durban, was one of a number of alternative spaces that appeared in South Africa in the early to mid 90s. In Cape Town spaces like the Planet Contemporary Art Site, operating below a bar in Observatory, and Gallery Mau Mau, situated on the first floor of a downtown office block, blossomed with the ‘post-apartheid appeal’ of the Mother City. Denis Mair in the *Mail & Guardian*, described Mau-Mau as the “newest art site for small revolutions, an establishment that pushes fringe exposure for renegade artists”.<sup>60</sup> The Planet Contemporary, according to Sue Williamson, was the “experimental counterpart in Cape Town to Johannesburg’s FIG Gallery.”<sup>61</sup> By saying this she acknowledges the FIG as possibly one of the more ‘legendary’ alternative art spaces in South Africa.

In one performance at the FIG, the Mud Ensemble presented an experimental, multi-media show, that included live music as well as video and ‘installation’ elements that co-opted the entire gallery - both its public and private spaces. Charl Blignaut, of the *Mail and Guardian* wrote, “The band members subtly act out petty domestic scenes throughout their shows.”<sup>62</sup>

The main exhibition space at the FIG housed the band and the very crowded audience, but in a small back bedroom, singer Marcel van Heerden sat ‘lamenting’ on a bed, while a live feed of this ‘scene’ was shown back in the main room. At one point in the performance, Juliana Venter, lead vocalist for the ensemble, took a shower in the Gallery’s bathroom. As Van Heerden sang in the main space, Thomas Barry<sup>63</sup> filmed her naked, wet body - feeding this image live to the audience. A large window onto the shower had been opened, also making her physically visible to the audience. The performers, indeed, “acted out these scenes” not only in the public space of exhibition rooms of the gallery, but also the private space of the bedroom and bathroom. The audience moved from room to room, or gazed at the monitors. Like voyeurs the viewers watched ‘private acts’ in a space where public and private were blurred.

<sup>60</sup> Denis Mair, ‘Lesson One: Manipulate Mainstream’, *Mail & Guardian*, Johannesburg, Nov 22, 1996.

<sup>61</sup> Sue Williamson, Ashraf Jamal; *Art in South Africa - the Future Present*, Claremont, David Philip, 1996, p. 11.

<sup>62</sup> Charl Blignaut, ‘Stirring up a Muddy Brew’, *Mail & Guardian*, Johannesburg, Aug 23, 1996.

Established in 1994, The Essex Road Gallery in Durban began as a living space before acting also as an exhibition space. According to one of its founders, Thami Jali; his involvement began when he returned from Johannesburg and moved into a commune that was owned by Paul Mikula at 38 Essex Road. Amongst the occupants living there at that time were artists who were involved in the “Dream City” murals including Joseph Manana, Simon Manana, Jethro, Ilsa Mikula and Isaac Sikhakhane. With Jali, the occupants decided to establish an exhibiting space in the lounge much like the FLAT. In an interview for the *FLAT* newsletter, Jali talked about this:

I came back from Johannesburg and got a room in Essex Road commune. I suggested to the artists here that we use this central common space (pointing to the lounge) for something as it wasn't being used.<sup>64</sup>

The house provided not only a place to live, and an exhibition space, but was a supportive environment for artists who were not living in Durban. In that same interview Manana and Jali spoke to this and to the relationship between Essex Road and the FLAT. Kendall Buster, a visiting artist from the United States, also took part in the discussion.

**Manana:** Some years ago if one came to town for an exhibition from the townships and you could not get transport back home then you knew that you could come here and stay overnight.

**Jali:** That is the whole spirit of Essex Road Gallery. The FLAT Gallery also played an important role in a sense because when we went there we thought, “well here it is: a very similar set up!” Straight away we wanted to find some working relationship with the FLAT Gallery. Although, the FLAT was catering for a more or less different target group, but the essence of our ideas overlapped.

**Buster:** How did they overlap? What would you say you guys had in common?

**Allen:** Well the fact that we knew that each other existed is important. We would complement each other, go to each other's exhibitions

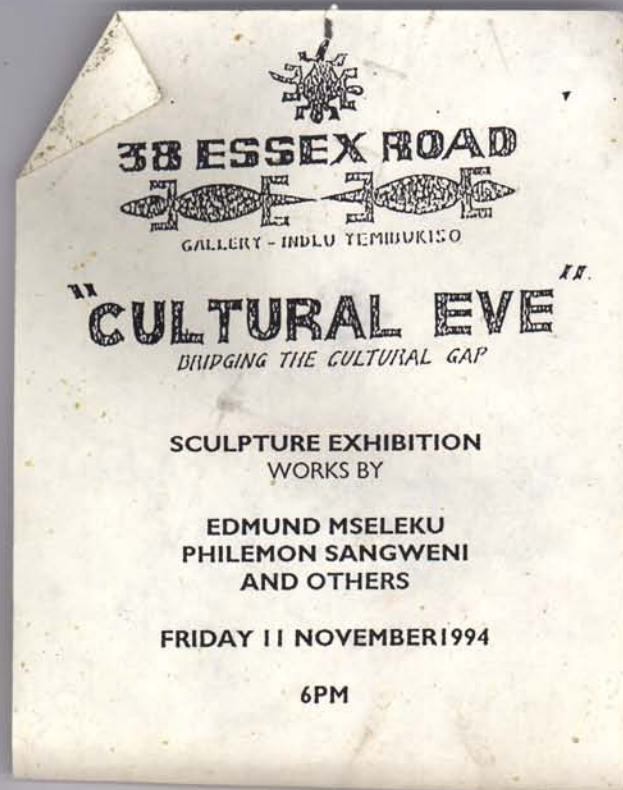
**Jali:** When people came here we wanted them to feel at home - we didn't want to impose our ideas on them. We wanted a forum where people can actually talk about art and things in general to let them know that artists are ordinary people. Because in the townships for instance people think artists are freaks [laughter] or lazy!

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<sup>63</sup> Once the FLAT had disbanded in Durban, Barry moved to Johannesburg and joined the Mud Ensemble as their 'conceptual' coordinator.

<sup>64</sup> Jali, Manana, Sikhakhane, Buster, Allen; 'Essex Road Gallery', *FLAT*, Issue 2, Durban, FLAT, July 1995.

An invitation to an exhibition at Essex Road (Nov 1994) and a newspaper cutting from the 'Sunday Tribune' (July 1995) showing Thami Jali with the 'Essex Road Exhibition' at the NSA Gallery. This was one example of an 'established' gallery supporting artists from another gallery. The NSA itself promoted the fact that it was showing a group of artists from an 'alternative space'.



**Jali:** We saw our exhibitions as an evening of culture, art, music and even alcohol played an important part. People could express themselves in any way – singing, dancing. If they wanted to stay all night, till morning, they could.

**Allen:** The FLAT was pretty much like that sometimes. It turned into complete madness. [Laughter]

**Jali:** And its OK to have something like that. Some of the friendships that started between the two galleries were very good I think. That’s what we need. Even if we were to interpret this as some sort of political statement.<sup>65</sup>

Indeed the ‘political’ nature of many alternative practices can be seen not only through the issues addressed in the work, but also by the way that alternative spaces created sites of exchange across cultural barriers both in South Africa and the United States.

However, artists in both countries in the 90s, also questioned the strategies of the previous generation, which they perceived as a kind of dogmatic ‘political correctness’. As described by Kendall Geers in an essay in *Spring is Rebellious*, many South African artists sought to address ‘political’ concerns through means that were not just “politically correct” statements, but also “avant-garde” critical works in venues inside and outside of the gallery.<sup>66</sup> In one ‘performance’ Geers greeted President Nelson Mandela in Berlin wearing a *Mandela mask*.<sup>67</sup> Artist Minette Vari confronted issues of identity in terms of gender and race by using computer generated ‘self-portraits’ to transform herself into a black woman for a billboard display. Though sponsored by the ‘established’ Pretoria Art Museum, the work mimicked a standard advertisement, and was set up in a public space. In another work, for the exhibition, *Hitch-Hiker*, at the Generator Art Space, an enigmatic androgynous image of Vari ‘as a man’, served as the ‘official’ poster and newspaper advertisement for the exhibition and was therefore in this way disseminated far beyond the gallery.

In these and other works, artists in the 90s in South Africa, not only stretched the definition of ‘performance’, but co-opted ‘public space’ as an alternative venue. They also began to address the difficult questions of race and gender in a visual language that sought to challenge the clichés of activist art and drew fire from both left and right. Sparking enough controversy to

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<sup>65</sup> Ibid.

<sup>66</sup> Kendall Geers; ‘Competition with History: Resistance and the Avant-Garde’, *Spring is Rebellious*, Cape Town, Buchu Books, 1990, p. 43 – 46. More about this collection of essays in the *FLAT File*

<sup>67</sup> In the ‘performance’, Geers wore a *Mandela mask* to meet President Mandela at an opening in Berlin. Shaking his hand, the President greeted him by saying “I recognize you,” and signed the mask. Sue Williamson, Ashraf Jamal; *Art in South Africa - The Future Present*, Claremont, David Philip, 1996, p. 58.

he doesn't have too many ideas. He's...  
 Christmas party season approaching, this will sell. So  
 will tinsel, custard and fruit-flavoured wines. 'Nuff said.

DBROOK

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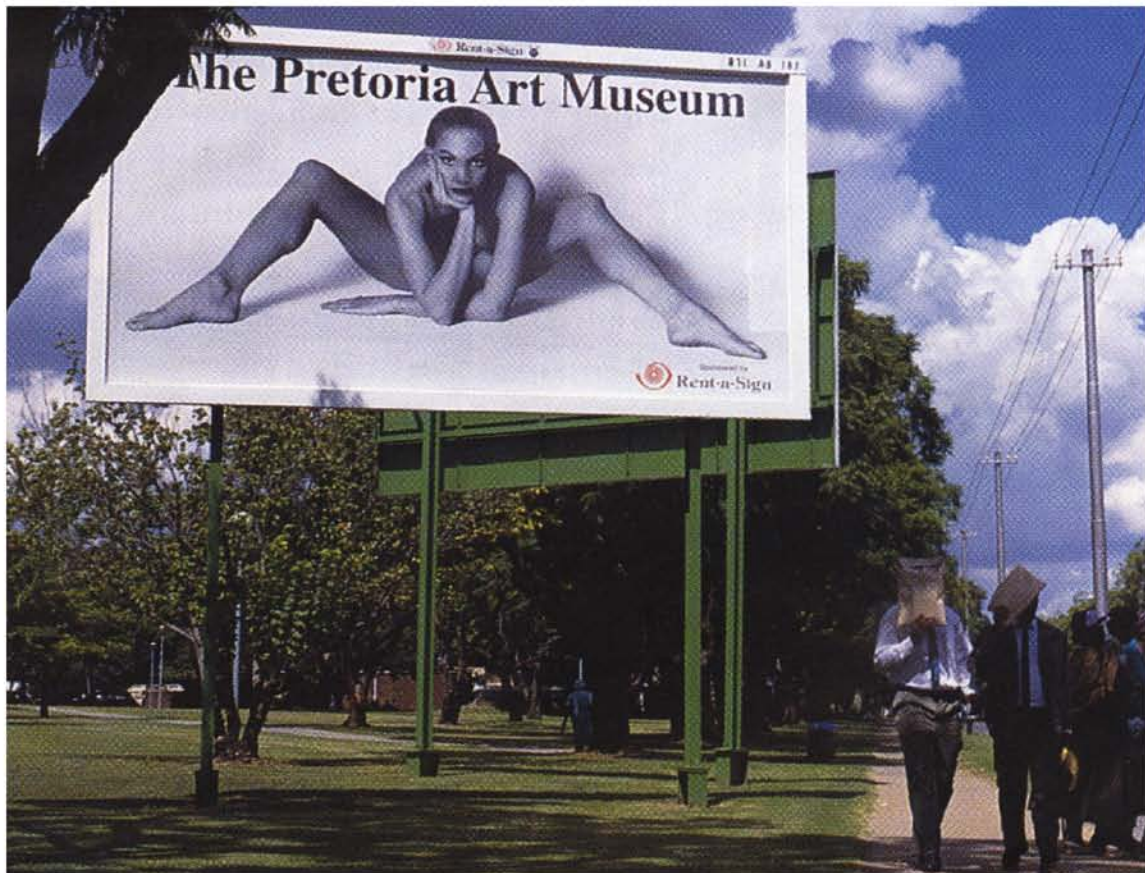
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**HITCH-HIKER**

|                              |                                      |
|------------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| Simon Allen<br>(SA)          | Willem Boshoff<br>(SA)               |
| Eugenio Dittborn<br>(Chile)  | Jimmie Durham<br>(USA/Belgium)       |
| Abric Fourie<br>(SA)         | Kendell Geers<br>(-)                 |
| Kay Massam<br>(SA)           | Stephen Hobbs<br>(SA)                |
| Moshelwa Langa<br>(SA)       | Kim Liberman<br>(SA)                 |
| Pat Muboko<br>(SA)           | Guillaume Naudin<br>(USA/Mocambique) |
| Olu Cimbibe<br>(Nigeria/USA) | Robyn Qili<br>(SA)                   |
| Piet Huisman<br>(SA)         | Tracey Rose<br>(SA)                  |
| 702 Talk Radio<br>(SA)       | Joachim Schoeller<br>(SA)            |
| Minnette VAN<br>(SA)         | Jeremy Wafer<br>(SA)                 |

**GENERATOR ART SPACE**  
 AFRICUS INSTITUTE FOR CONTEMPORARY ART  
**29 NOV '96 THROUGH UNTIL '97**  
 CURATED BY CLIVE KELLNER  
 838 6407  
 ADJACENT TO THE ELECTRIC WORKSHOP - NEWTOWN CULTURAL PRECINCT

Above: MINETTE VARI, 'Hitch-Hiker' advertisement in the Mail & Guardian, 1996.  
 Below: MINETTE VARI, 'Self Portrait I', 1995.  
 (This image is taken from Sue Williamson's 'Art in South Africa - The Future Present', 1996.)



reaffirm the power of art to provoke dialogue around important cultural issues.<sup>68</sup>

In the United States were artists whose independent gallery initiatives offered a resistance to what they perceived as the ‘didactic’ practices of some early alternatives. Michael Bulka, a Chicago based critic writing for the *New Arts Examiner* spoke to this viewpoint which regarded ‘political’ art **itself** as a convention:

Overall, the work [these] galleries show tends to avoid the most popular clichés of empowerment and tokenism. This is partly a result of the galleries’ self-positioning outside the grant system that rewards ideological conformity, with the values of the moment, but also because they simply avoid art with an overtly political message. They choose to present... work that attempts to examine, to enrich the nature of art, not simply to stretch this definition to include political gesture. This is, of course, not to say that these... artists are uninterested in real social problems... Their view tends to be less didactic and more open to interpretation.<sup>69</sup>

Some artists, at this time, even articulated what they regarded as an alternative practice by distancing themselves from what they saw as a convention of ‘political art’, by returning to ‘art for art’s sake’. In language that perhaps sounded almost reactionary to a generation who had struggled just a decade earlier to bring social and political agenda’s to the art debate, these artists as described by Bulka seemed to be re-embracing a modernist agenda:

While the work in the galleries recognizes the influence of larger political and social realities, it is basically art for art’s sake, however unpopular that may be amidst the current appetite for ‘multi-cultural awareness’.<sup>70</sup>

This of course is not to say that ‘politically charged’ alternative practices did not flourish, but their relation to the ‘mainstream’ was less clearly defined. In *Conversations Before the End of Time*, Suzi Gablik describes two collaborative partnerships that give a sense of how wide was the

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<sup>68</sup> Heated debate was ignited when Candice Breitz, a New York based, South African artist, responded to comments made by Geers (*The Star - Tonight*, March 19, 1997) in reference to an exhibition catalogue essay by Okwui Enwezor (*Contemporary Art from South Africa*, Riksstilling, Oslo, Norway). In the article, Geers ‘reports’ on the essay by saying that Enwezor criticizes white artists “who continue to exploit the perceived silence of black Africans by speaking on their behalf, an action that is as patronizing as it is essentially racist.” Indeed, Enwezor, addresses the “resurgent emergence of the black subject as a popular image in all forms of representation in contemporary South Africa” and criticizes the “unreflexive white cultural practitioners unblinkingly intent on representing black subjectivity at the margins of cultural and aesthetic discourse.” Speaking specifically to what he sees as problematic in work by Pipa Skotnes, Penny Siopis, Lien Botha and Breitz among others, he says: “This calls into question what images in a decolonizing South Africa should look like, and who has the right to use which images, and what the authorizing narrative ought to be.” This essay and newspaper review catalyzed a series of correspondences around issues of ‘representation of the Other.’ As the debate enlarged, a call was made for contributions to a publication, *Grey Matters*. More about this in the *Post-FLAT* section.

<sup>69</sup> Michael Bulka, ‘Beyond the Comfort Zone’, *New Art Examiner*, Vol. 20, Dec 1992, p. 16 – 19.

span of politically motivated ‘alternative’ practices and how gray were the definitions of what constituted an ‘alternative venue’. In one project, sponsored by the Whitney Museum for the 1993 Biennale, Guillermo Gomez-Pena and Coco Fusco presented themselves “in cages outside the museum, posed as aboriginal inhabitants.” In another, far from the ‘art world’, ecologically minded artists Rachel Dutton and Rob Olds stopped “consuming to make art” and “took to the woods”, composing a short contract that their work would “never be sold, but given away”.<sup>71</sup> From the invasion (through invitation) of an established museum, to an obscure performance where life and art merge, many artists still sought to address social and political issues within an uneasy relationship to the ‘institution’ and to the conventions of art marketing.

One might still ask the question, “Alternative to **what?**”, and it is pertinent to consider that what is the radical practice of one generation can become for the next a stale convention. Bulka has this critical word for what he sees as the ‘old alternative practices’, but looks towards the new by saying:

The not-for-profit spaces were vital and useful when they were founded, but as they continue to show the same unintentionally seamless work they become increasingly artifacts of their time. **Uncomfortable spaces represent today’s mutations.**<sup>72</sup>

By returning to the ‘artists initiative’ roots of alternative practice, the ‘alternative space’ in the USA emerged into the 90s with renewed purpose. For many, this meant operating with tighter budgets and temporary spaces, but interestingly the necessity of paring down brought with it a reinvigoration of ‘alternative practice’. Alternative spaces and alternative practices were brought ‘closer to the streets’ and with this move were reinvented.

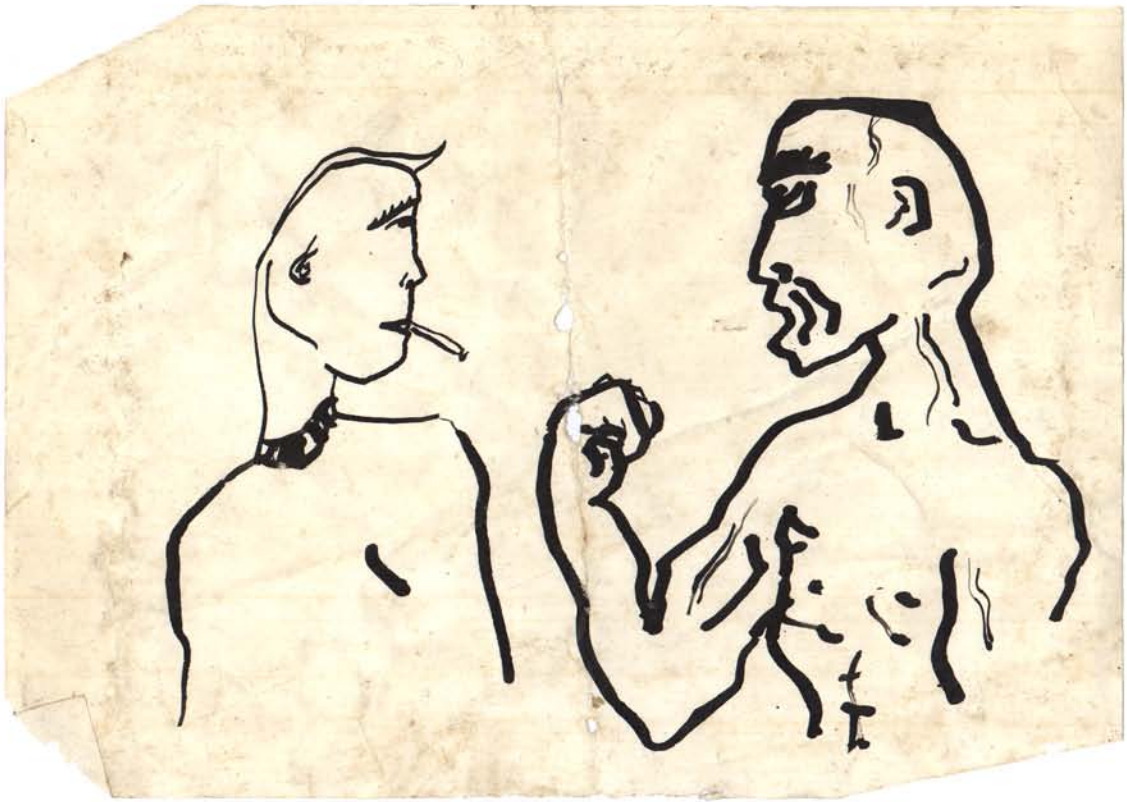
In South Africa, the lack of a strong market and the immediacy felt by artists to express themselves within the politically charged transitional period led to many creative ‘grass roots’ initiatives, as well as explorations into new visual languages. For both, there is relevance to Bulka’s insistence that alternatives remain vital when they are ‘**uncomfortable**’.

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<sup>70</sup> Ibid.

<sup>71</sup> Suzi Gablik; *Conversations Before the End of Time*, London, Thames & Hudson, 1995, p. 56 – 83 and p. 312 – 332.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid.



THOMAS BARRY, Ink on paper, 1993.



## ***THE Pre-FLAT ENVIRONMENT (1988 - 1993)***

*Everything written in the 'objective style' of 1950s social sciences or 'New Criticism' and everything written in the opaque style of post-structural discourses, now risks being read as a kind of political cover-up, hidden complicity, and intrigue on either the right or the left. Interestingly, the one path that still leads in the direction of scholarly objectivity, detachment, and neutrality is exactly the one originally thought to lead away from these classic virtues: that is, **an openly autobiographical style** in which the subjective position of the author, especially on political matters, is presented in a clear and straightforward fashion. At least this enables the reader to review his or her own position to make adjustments necessary for dialogue.<sup>1</sup>*

It is difficult to locate a single specific reason behind the creation of the FLAT Gallery, for like many creative ventures it began with equal parts of accident and design. The circumstances of a dissatisfaction with the existing exhibition opportunities and 'art scene' in Durban, a move by students to seek exhibition venues outside of the institution, an undesignated space ripe for communal use and fresh ideas from outside the area all combined to catalyze what would become the FLAT. However, it is useful to begin with a consideration of the particular cultural environment of Durban at that time.

The Community Arts Workshop (CAW) was an important artist initiative in Durban that had been founded in 1981 by Andries Botha and joined what was then a rise of community art centres around South Africa. As was the case with its counterparts in other parts of the country, the CAW was a site "where artists tried to provide opportunities for training to those denied access to apartheid institutions."<sup>2</sup> The inclusiveness of the CAW was expressed in that it was an

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<sup>1</sup> Dean McCannell in Lucy Lippard's *The Lure of the Local*, New York, New Press, 1997, p. 5.

<sup>2</sup> Elizabeth Rankin; 'Genesis Genesis', *Andries Botha – Standard Bank Young Artist Award Catalogue*, p. 6.

“alternative space... where anyone may come and work.”<sup>3</sup> The FLAT Gallery would later echo this spirit in its assertion that its mission was “to allow anyone to do anything.”<sup>4</sup>

Though it is beyond the scope of this paper to speak more fully about the Community Arts Workshop, it could in some ways be seen as an ‘alternative space’. Its primary function was not that of an exhibition site, but in terms of being a place for ‘alternative practices’, it was indeed vital. In apartheid South Africa, artistic education was denied to black South Africans, and the CAW provided not only ‘training’, but a cultural centre for the free exchange of ideas. Community art centres were important catalysts in furthering the development of an alternative culture in South Africa, through their proactive approach to education. This could be seen as the offering of an educational system that was ‘alternative’ to, or in opposition to, that of the apartheid educational institutions.

Durban’s Community Arts Workshop not only operated as an educational centre, but at the time also functioned as a site for exhibitions, as well as a weekly nightclub. Run by Helga Jansen, the club, called *Play*, was one of Durban’s earliest outlets for ‘alternative’ and punk music. It is also significant to note that the last exhibition mounted at CAW before its closing in 1988, *Artists for Human Rights*, asserted the commitment of artists to address social conditions.

At that time, a number of exhibition sites were available to artists in Durban. These included the Durban Art Gallery (DAG), the African Art Centre, the Natal Society of Arts (NSA), the Grassroots Gallery, the Elizabeth Gordon Gallery, as well as the University of Durban-Westville (UDW) Art Gallery and the Technikon Natal Art Gallery. Though these venues differed ideologically and represented a diverse range of artists, the environment of Durban itself was generally considered quite conservative. Indeed many local artists, both young and established, black and white, considered Durban to be culturally lacking. In an early funding campaign letter to the public, Mike van Graan, who would be the director of the Bartel Arts Trust (BAT) Center when it opened in 1995, challenged would be donors by speaking to this perception:

Dear friend,

They say Durban is a cultural backwater

They say nothing ever happens in Durban

And that the people of Durban are apathetic in their support of the arts.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>3</sup> Sue Williamson; ‘Andries Botha’, *Resistance Art in South Africa*, New York, St. Martin’s Press, 1989, p. 145.

<sup>4</sup> Moe, Barry, Allen; Funding Proposal Letter to BAT, Durban, Feb 2, 1994.

<sup>5</sup> Mike Van Graan; BAT public letter, Durban, Dec 23, 1994. Though seemingly ‘negative’, Van Graan’s opening remarks in this letter, do go on to say: “Here’s a chance to prove ‘them’ wrong!”

Essex Road Gallery co-founder Thami Jali, in an interview in the second issue of *FLAT*<sup>6</sup>, had this to say:

One thing I have always been concerned about in Durban is the general lack of interest or energy. People are really apathetic. In Johannesburg people get up in the mornings and want to do something. Over the last 15 years I have lived in Johannesburg for a number of long periods and I see things happening. And it is not just white artists exhibiting or organizing something, but people of all racial groups. Here in Durban, people tend to wait for other people to organize exhibitions for them.<sup>7</sup>

We as young artists and students in Durban were fully aware of this “apathy”, and yet, were also aware of the need to combat it through action. For us, it seemed, that any ‘lack’ in an art community lay in the notion that this ‘community’ existed and functioned independently of ones own efforts. Additionally, for many students and young artists there was a mistaken presumption that opportunities would simply ‘be provided’ once one had left the comforts of the institution. A sculpture graduate from Natal Technikon, Greg Streak, spoke to this in an interview in the first issue of *FLAT*:

I don't think that post institutional realities are made clear enough nor are they emphasized enough. Within your study years there is an enormous infrastructure available to you. You become over-dependant on the facilities, the moral support, the collective energies, all of which I think are positive attributes but which can undermine your independence. Some further steps need to be introduced to soften the blow from Technikon into the realities of the ‘big-wide-world’... There are certainly many talented young artists that just disappear because of a sense of alienation, as a result of a lack of support.<sup>8</sup>

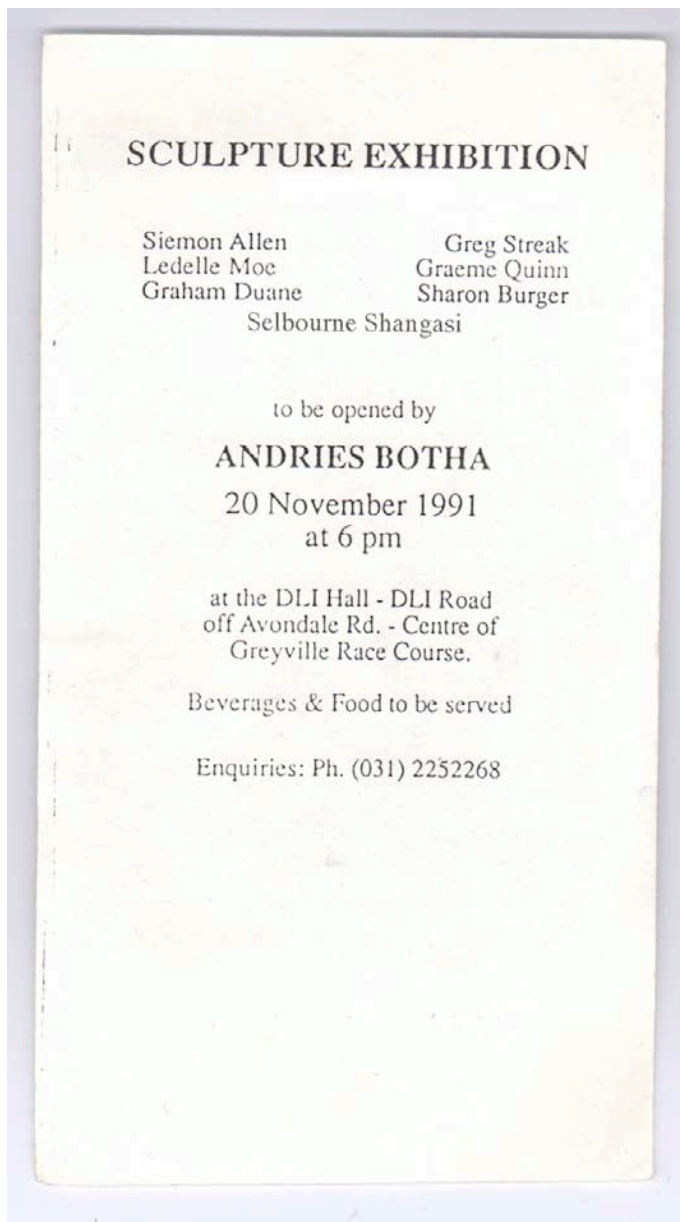
In an effort to combat this perceived apathy and with the realization that as students we needed to take more responsibility for our creative endeavors beyond the institution, many of us made an active commitment to seek-out off-campus (alternative) spaces to exhibit our portfolio and thesis shows. In 1990, Ledelle Moe, Joe Gilson, and myself exhibited our end of term work in the disused Old Library Building on campus before its demolition. The liberating experience of

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<sup>6</sup> *FLAT* was a post-FLAT Gallery, monthly newsletter which was established in 1995 to look critically at contemporary issues within the arts in Durban. One thousand copies of each of the first two issues were printed and distributed. The third issue, although completed, unfortunately never got to the printing stage and hence was never available. See all three issues in the Post-FLAT section of this document.

<sup>7</sup> Jali, Manana, Sikhakhane, Buster, Allen; ‘Essex Road Gallery’, *FLAT*, Issue 2, Durban, FLAT, July 1995.

<sup>8</sup> Streak, Allen; ‘An interview with Greg Streak’, *FLAT*, Issue 1, Durban, FLAT, June 1995.

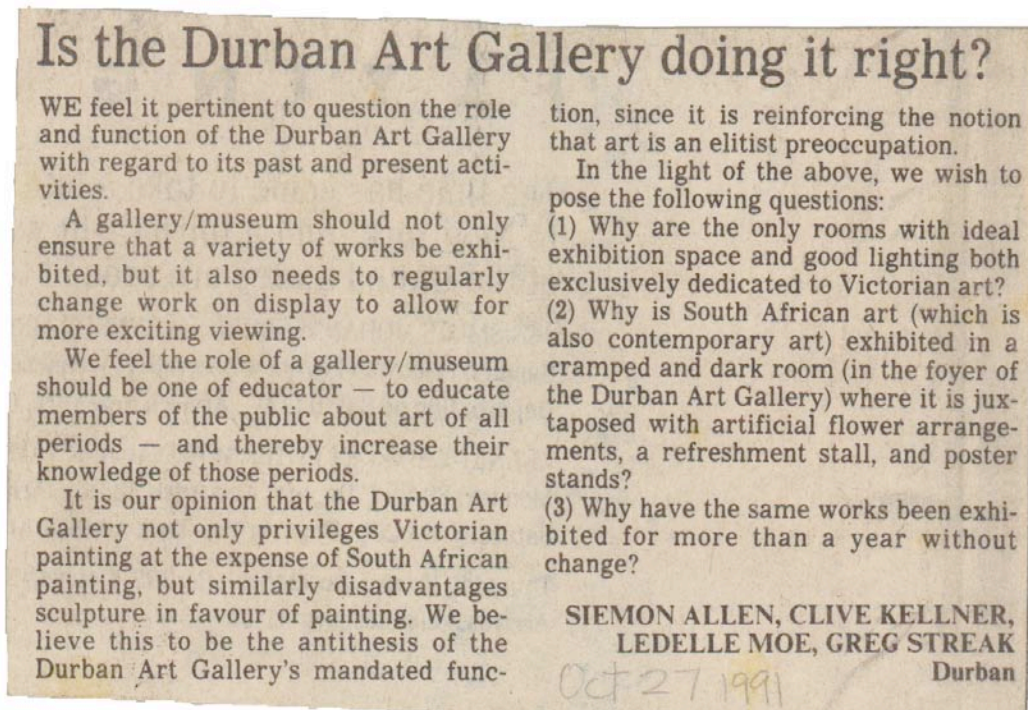


An invitation to an exhibition opened by Andries Botha at the DLI Hall, 1991.

seeing our work outside of the academic environment, and the opportunity this offered for us to investigate more experimental approaches affirmed for us a desire to continue our search for off-campus space. In 1991 Moe and myself exhibited off-campus in an 'abandoned' Electricity Building on Alice Street. This space at that time had just become the home of the Stable Theatre and was the site of much creative and 'alternative' activity. Again that year, a group of 3rd year students from the sculpture department, including Streak, Moe and myself installed a massive exhibition at the Durban Light Infantry (DLI) Hall. "No-one," according to Clive Kellner "had up until that point thought of exhibiting their final shows outside of the confines of the Technikon".<sup>9</sup> The rise of the FLAT was an extension of these endeavors, and indeed the off-campus-exhibition phenomenon that developed in the years to follow at the Technikon could be seen in some sense as a direct outgrowth of such activities.

<sup>9</sup> In conversation with Clive Kellner in Johannesburg, 1997. Kellner was a painting student at the Technikon and had graduated in 1990.

Our initiative to create independent off-campus exhibitions for our student work was not the only example of a growing ‘pro-active’ spirit. In 1991 Kellner, along with Streak, Moe and myself wrote a letter to *The Sunday Tribune* expressing our contempt for what we saw as the unresponsiveness of the Durban Art Gallery to both contemporary art and to younger artists.<sup>10</sup>



Letter to the Editor, *Sunday Tribune*, October 27, 1991.

Though the criticism was directed at the city's primary art institution, it also spoke to a broader sense of frustration with the general conservatism of the region's cultural institutions and represented the germination of a generational split that was blooming in Durban. Vusi Mchunu, director of the BAT centre, in a later interview with Jenah McCarthy located this frustration in what he called a battle between the ‘old guard’ and the ‘young or emerging artists’. In the interview, in her paper, *The Status of Young Artists in Durban - Conflict and Creativity* (1997) Mchunu says:

<sup>10</sup> This letter would not have been possible without the assistance of art critic Dan Cook, who was also an art-history lecturer at the Natal Technikon, and who had similar views on the subject at that time (and knew someone at the newspapers.)

People are scared to lose their positions, to lose face, to lose money, They fool themselves and remain in their cocoons... The old guard, those people are stuck up, rusted old zoo material... they belong in the zoos, to the museums, where we can one day go and laugh and say “that’s what we used to be!” Take to the streets with banners, with pickets and cry “we aren’t being recognized,” BUT say: “We’re doing it!”<sup>11</sup>

This call by Mchunu to “do it” was indeed resonant with the challenge that we as younger artists had felt to “make something happen”. For us, at that time, this was the desire to work in an experimental creative manner, and to be open to the exploration of installation, performance, and other “alternative practices”.

For alternative practices to exist, a space is not always a necessity, but a site can be an important vehicle in providing a common place where things can happen. In 1993, my first year out of the Technikon, I continued to work independently, but maintained contact with fellow students. When Ledelle Moe and Niël Jonker, (fourth and third year sculpture students respectively) invited me to share a large apartment on Mansfield Road near campus, I agreed to a partnership. At the time, I was not in need of a place to live, but welcomed the opportunity to continue the sense of community and support that I had enjoyed at the Technikon. ‘My designated room’ on Mansfield Road was the front room or lounge. As it remained ‘unused’, this room evolved into a kind of communal space. It all began in a very modest way with artists coming over, getting drunk and joking about doing crazy things.

Also, at this time an infusion of new ideas to the area came with the arrival of artists from outside Durban. Thomas Barry (Pretoria), Carol Gainer (Nelspruit), Rhett Martyn (Johannesburg), Niël Jonker (Oudtshoorn), Aliza Levi (Johannesburg) and Etienne de Kock (Pretoria) were artists, who with others would bring to the local art community a wider perspective and prove to be essential participants in the growth of the FLAT phenomenon.

The space that would become the FLAT served as a communal meeting spot for the first four months of our occupancy. It generally remained empty and ‘unused’ and was not a site for exhibition until Adrian Hermanides in October of 1993, approached Moe, Jonker and myself with a proposal. Hermanides, a third year Fine Art student at the Technikon asked if he could present his portfolio for a critique in the space. We agreed to his proposal and he installed his work in

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<sup>11</sup> Jenah McCarthy; *The Status of Young Artists in Durban - Conflict and Creativity* , Paper presented at the S.A.A.A.H. Annual Conference, 1997.

what was then our ‘empty room’.<sup>12</sup> Lecturers came to the site and a critique was staged. Although the space was off-campus, its close proximity to the Technikon was convenient for visits by staff and students. This location would prove to be a contributing factor in the complex mutual exchange that developed between students and lecturers from the Technikon and the FLAT initiative. In a sense, the relationship between the two was uniquely symbiotic, operating in a manner that was at once both oppositional and complementary. The FLAT drew from Technikon for both artists and audience, and the established structure of the institution provided a kind of counterpoint to which the FLAT could ‘play off’. Additionally, the Technikon relied on the FLAT to propagate a healthy experimental environment.<sup>13</sup>

That same week an important conversation began when we at the Mansfield Road apartment met informally with other artists. Nancy Thomson, Lloyd Meintjies, as well as Barry, Gainer, Jonker, Moe, and myself discussed the possibility of using this empty room as a permanent exhibition space. An ad-hoc show, prompted by Meintjies, was ‘performed’ there and then, and over the next few days, discussions and arguments arose concerning the naming of the space. It is my recollection that Thomson coined the simple word – “FLAT” - as it was a flat. Barry, who was not a student at the Technikon and who had not had the opportunity to formally show his work in Durban, opted for an opening the following week.

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<sup>12</sup> Interestingly, an alternative space in Berlin, active in the summer of 1997 was called just that: “...in our Empty Room”. Here, a couple designated an extra room in their flat for ongoing exhibitions. These and other initiatives were an important component in the vibrancy of the former East-Side, ‘Mitte’ art scene.

<sup>13</sup> The 1995 official Fine Art pamphlet sent out to prospective students uses the FLAT Gallery as one of the many examples of what young artists can do once they have graduated from the programme.



THOMAS BARRY, 'What is Your Responce?', 1993.

This guerilla-style project of Barry's took place late one evening near the Warwick Avenue Train Station. Sharon Burger (left to right), Barry, Allen and Moe, photographed here by Rensh Bouwer, are preparing to hang a large banner from the side of the roadway in such a way that it would be visible to the train commuters below.



## ***THE FLAT FILE***

***THOMAS BARRY***

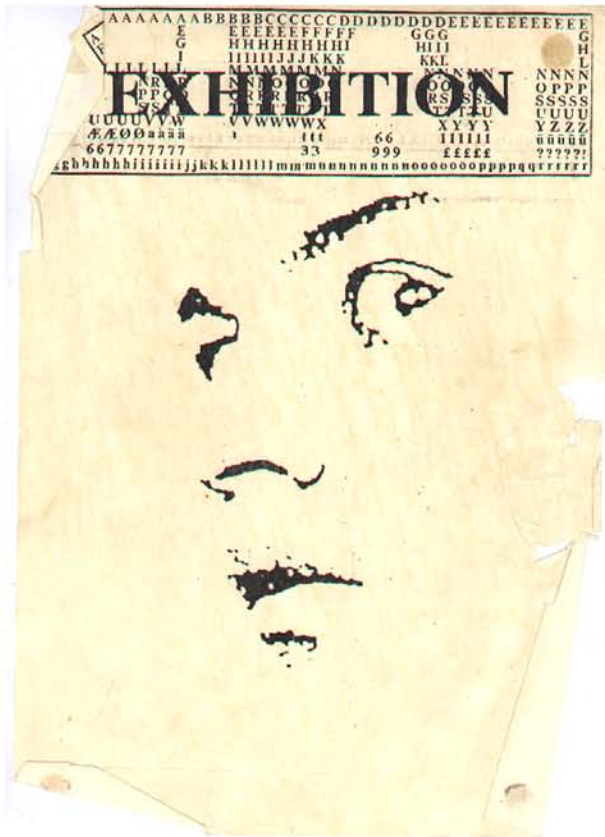
***October 15, 1993***

An exhibition of mixed-media drawings by Thomas Barry was the first official exhibition at the FLAT. Barry, who had studied Fine Art in Pretoria, had come to Durban after an invitation by Andries Botha in 1992. He met and became affiliated with artists and students at the sculpture department through the Technikon Bronze Foundry, where he worked. After Hermanides completed his critique and an interest began to swell to continue exhibitions at the space, Barry expressed his desire to exhibit work that he had recently made in Pretoria. Within a week, an opening date was set, posters were made and distributed, and work was installed. Barry's sister, Hedwig, a Johannesburg-based artist at that time, was by coincidence visiting Durban and agreed to formally open the exhibition. This was the inaugural event for the now 'officially' named FLAT gallery. The show opened, and an alternative space in Durban was born.

Barry exhibited a collection of drawings and matchboxes. However, the presentation of these 2-D and 3-D elements was anything but conventional. Amongst the charcoal drawings were some works executed on large sections of an industrial fabric and some on 'found' roll paper. These hung free-floating, like banners, both horizontally and vertically. One panel, extended across the entire width of the main wall for a total length of about 5 meters, and on another wall hung strips from what had been a continuous drawing on a long roll of paper 20 cm wide.



Barry and Gainer 'installing' his exhibition at the FLAT, 1993.



**EXHIBITION**

021 452 450

6PM

**FRIDAY**

**15 - 22**

**OCTOBER**

**MANSFIELD RD**

**MANOR COURT**

**NO 4**

STAMPA 209257

**FRIDAY 15 OCTOBER**

6PM

**NO 4 MANOR COURT**

**MANSFIELD RD**

**BARRY THOMAS MATTHEWS**

**COMMEMORATIVE EXHIBITION**

**AT THE FLAT**

**"THE EARLY WORKS"**

**15 OCTOBER 1993**

**GALLERY HOURS:**

Mon - Thurs: ~~8:30 - 16:00~~

Friday: ~~8:30 - 12:00~~

**ANYTIME**

Posters for Barry's exhibition, 1993.

THOMAS BARRY  
 Drawing installation  
 1993



Reminiscent of Surrealist work, in particular the *cadavre exquis* (exquisite corpse), the images were created through strange combinations of contradictory elements. Though the result of a single artist's hand and not the multiple efforts of those who produced an *exquisite corpse*, the power of these collage-like images was also in part due to their 'disjointed' effect. The large scale of the drawings provided a vehicle for what appeared to be very spontaneous and direct, notebook-like drawings. Unframed, with the curled edges and the weight of the material evident, this rather casual presentation of these drawings asserted them as 'objects'. Images included an absurd landscape, where monstrous figures cavorted in a scene full of violence and humor. Like shreds of some larger body of work, samples from a visual diary, it was as if the brain had connected directly to the hand to express itself in a language that was obsessive, complex and layered.

Along with the charcoal drawings, were a matchbox collection displayed along the upper skirting-board and a series of playing cards gathered at random from the street. The matchboxes, numbering over 500, were placed end to end to create a frieze around the perimeter of the entire room. Like Duchamp's famous 'ready-mades', the artworks were made by the simple choosing of an ordinary object and the changing of its context. The gesture in making the work began with a gathering and bringing of these items from the world into a gallery space, but their significance was not limited to mere re-contextualization. It was Barry's habit to pick up discarded playing



THOMAS BARRY  
Installation with  
charcoal on fabric and  
found match-boxes.  
1993

cards and matchboxes, and many in this collection showed evidence of markings and notes from their unknown previous owners. There was indeed an almost ‘performative’ component, where these items on display operated like archival evidence of a ‘throw-away’ history.

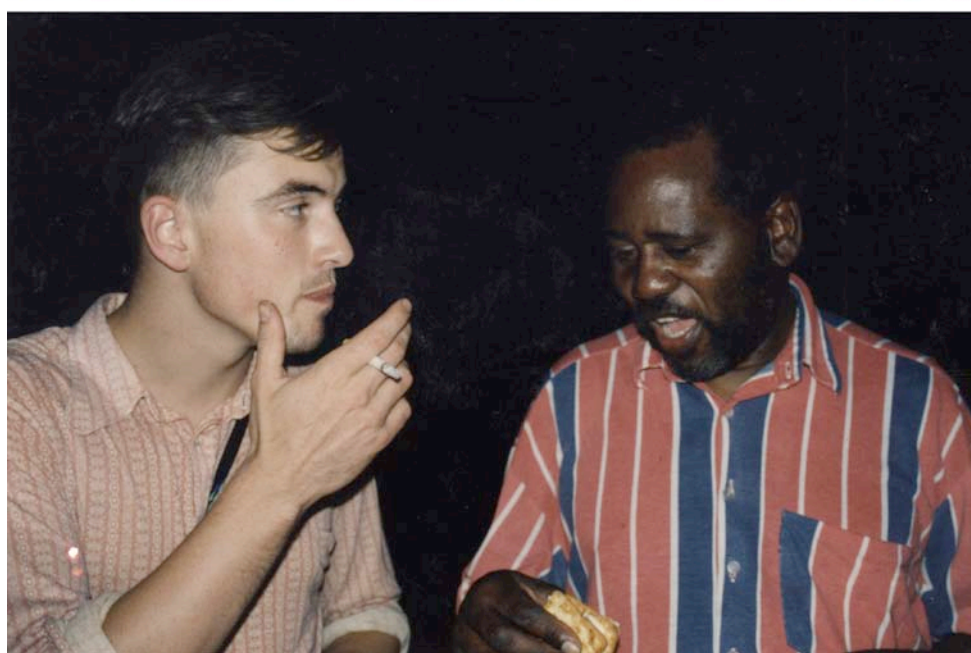
Also on exhibit were photographs documenting an installation of a work by Barry with cohorts near the Warwick Avenue Train Station earlier that year. These images emphasized the performative aspect of the project over mere documentation of the piece. Shot by Rensha Bouwer with harsh flash, the photos capture the guerrilla style, ‘hit-and-run’ character of the work. Indeed this clandestine activity was also recorded by a busload of American tourists who happened to be passing at that time. The images show the hanging of a banner over a concrete overpass in front of the railway station, and as with Barry’s found object collections displayed in the gallery, operated through a strategy of shifting context. In other words, the banner was a ‘found’ object, a Technikon Natal sign complete with name and coat of arms. A kind of ‘intervention’ occurred not only through the alteration of the existing text, which was ‘fudged’ to read, “What is Your Response?”<sup>1</sup>; but also through the shifting of the defaced banner to another public site. Upon what would be a chance encounter outside any expectation of viewing ‘art’, a viewer might be unsure of

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<sup>1</sup> Barry; Interview 10, e-mail, cyberspace, Oct 13, 1998.

the identity or purpose of the displaced banner. The transformation also included a broom attached and a rope ladder hanging down from the bottom.

It is also worth noting that with this first exhibition a precedent began where exhibitors were not required to contribute cash to the general operating costs of the FLAT. This was the sole responsibility of the FLAT occupants. In an effort to offset the expenses, we attempted to sell alcohol at the first opening, but this endeavor proved to be unfruitful. (The 'I-owe-you's' on the list outnumbered the art works!) The rental for the three-room apartment, at this time, was paid for by Moe, Jonker and myself.



Above Left: Moe & Hedwig Barry. Above Right: Barry, Gainer & Ken Godfrey. Bottom: Rhett Martyn & Sam Ntshangase

***JOHANNESBURG ART NOW***  
***Slide presentation***  
***October 21, 1993***

With a precedent set for various student-initiated off-campus exhibitions and an influx of young artists from all over the country, a broader perspective was sought by the small art community in Durban. Frustration was expressed over the lack of an art press and an interest was affirmed in learning more about contemporary artwork outside of Durban. In response, an informal discussion and slide presentation was organized by the FLAT and presented by Carol Gainer and others, focusing on work exhibited in Johannesburg.

It was significant in that many young artists had seen little of contemporary South African artwork from outside the region exhibited in Durban, and also lacked the means to travel to Johannesburg. For many, unfamiliar with the work of such emerging South African artists as Belinda Blignaut, Marc Edwards, Allan Alborough, etc, it was an important affirmation of a growing interest in exploring new art forms. Recently, I discussed the value of such an event with Durban artist and lecturer, Virginia MacKenny, who was present at the slide show.

**Allen:** What I think was interesting here was that it was a bunch of Durban people looking at Johannesburg artists' work.

**MacKenny:** It seemed to be a time when young Durban artists were making connections with Joburg artists. And taking work into their own hands. Previously it had always been lecturers going up, taking slides, coming back and dishing them out. The lecturers do it and the students do nothing.

**Allen:** There seemed to be a certain amount of apathy amongst students in that.

**MacKenny:** Oh absolutely! And, what was nice about that show was that students had got off their butts and had done exactly that. Another thing is that students were making connections with Joburg artists that I had no access to. So I was getting more information. Instead of being passive and apathetic and letting the lecturers do all the work...there is that strong notion at Tech that the lecturers did all the work and the students tagged on...but no, there were individual endeavors happening...other people going out, making conversations and bringing things back.<sup>2</sup>

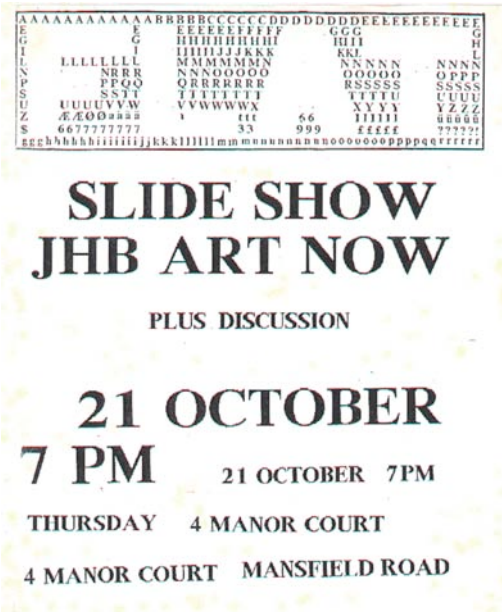
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<sup>2</sup> MacKenny, Moe, Buster, Allen; Interview 9, Washington, Aug 24, 1998.

Additionally, it was a communal effort to address the need to continue one’s art education through self-initiative after university. Though the inclusion of an ‘educational’ component to programming was common to most alternative spaces, which offer ‘walkabouts’ and slide talks, the FLAT slide show was uniquely significant in that it was created spontaneously out of the direct demand of those who participated.

**Allen:** Would you say that the FLAT, in retrospect, performed a social function [typical of institutions like the NSA] but that was not really made available by institutions like the NSA or the DAG [in terms of content anyway]?

**MacKenny:** I wouldn’t even say in retrospect, I would say at the time I was very conscious that it was a very necessary thing. And that within that social interaction, very important things would happen. It seemed to me to be the most lively area of debate that was available.<sup>3</sup>



<sup>3</sup> Ibid.



LEDELLE MOE, Untitled  
concrete & Steel, 1993  
Here Moe took advantage of  
the street below the FLAT.



***CAROL-ANNE GAINER, LEDELLE MOE, JANINA ERLICH***  
***October 29, 1993***

Following the momentum of Barry's opening and the slide presentation, another show was organized within a few days. This was a three-person exhibition of work by Carol Gainer, Ledelle Moe, and Janina Erlich. Most significant, was the manner in which each artist used the exhibition opportunity to take a more experimental approach to her work. Gainer explored mixed-media canvases, in a departure from her paintings that dealt with landscape. Erlich, also a painter, moved into computer generated images. Moe's work in the gallery included a small wall shelf of found objects mixed with modeled wax elements, but it was her concrete animal sculptures and gun on the pavement outside the FLAT, that broke with the limitations of the traditional exhibition space.

Gainer's contribution to the exhibition included an experimental reworking of a painting that she had completed previously, as well as relief constructions built with objects attached to painted panels. This involved the exploration of what was for her both new imagery and new processes. Here surfaces were not only 'painted', but also 'constructed' with a wide range of raw materials that included resin-cast dried roses, photocopied text, and perspex sheets.

In the interview with MacKenny we discussed Gainer's work:

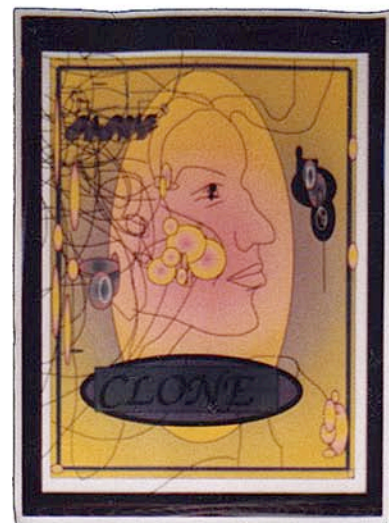
**Allen:** At the FLAT there was the idea that you had to do something different from your normal work. I remember

c a r o l g a i n e r  
 l e d e l l e m o e  
 j a n i n a e r l i c h



FLAT  
 FRIDAY 29 OCTOBER 6:00 PM

Exhibition poster, 1993



JANINA ERLICH, 'Clone', computer generated image, 1993

that for this exhibition that she had reworked one of her old ‘brown’ landscapes with bright red paint – a very aggressive shift I think.

**MacKenny:** I didn’t realise that she was using the resin-casts as early as this.

**Allen:** That was a brand new piece. It was her most recent and it moved directly away from her landscape work.

**MacKenny:** And in retrospect, not so directly though. Despite these early landscape works, the insertion of the Madonna here is the direction in which she then followed. Because from there on, with these roses embodied and so on, the things that she made, and that were attached to the canvas became more personalized. The landscape was out there...but the metaphor for the body was coming through. I remember wondering why she was applying these objects, but now it seems quite logical in terms of the direction that her work since then has taken. The body and the painting being a space in which you could imbed things. She undertook this lengthy process and it was also followed through in her first NSA show. Now I look at the last show she did where the body is absolutely primary, it is not covertly presented but rather overtly presented to the point where she displays herself naked. If you look at these sources I can see connections, though I did not realise that she was doing this so early. I think again for me, looking back at all these people, it is interesting to see that it was not just spurious work.<sup>4</sup>

Moe’s sculptures, removed from the gallery, became activated by being ‘on the street’ and constituted an action that was at that time illegal. Addressing the public in a very direct manner, Moe placed these ‘collapsed carcasses’ on the sidewalk in such a way that a passerby could not help but be confronted. In an interview with Moe she says:

**Moe:** I think we had the luxury of time then, though. I remember sitting on the balcony (for a number of days) and watching people passing by the sculptures on the pavement. And someone at 4am in the morning would trip over the leg and then curse and kick it. The public interaction with those pieces was very interesting.

**Allen:** With the shift in government, the fact that you could just do that - leave the artwork on the pavement - we felt that there was a sense of lawlessness in the country. The police would not come and say: “What the hell is this in the street? Take it away!” There was that sense of freedom, that one could just do anything. If you wanted to exhibit in the street, then you just did it.<sup>5</sup>

Moe later recalled a comment by Art History lecturer Lola Frost, which seemed particularly significant to her own understanding of her use of the vulnerable creatures. Frost had commented that Moe’s previous work had dealt with confrontational images of aggressive

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid.



Above: CAROL GAINER  
mixed-media, 1993  
Below left: CAROL GAINER  
mixed-media, 1993  
Below right: CAROL GAINER  
mixed-media, 1993  
This detail shows the resin cast  
roses and perspex 'windows'.





LEDELLE MOE, 'Untitled', concrete & steel, 1993.

animals, while this piece represented the victimized and defeated. Indeed one had the sense that these animals had been carelessly ‘discarded’. Opposite the prone animal figures across Mansfield Road, Moe situated another sculptural element that also spoke to issues of violence and injury. There she placed an enormous gun constructed from a street lamp pole. MacKenny and Moe discussed the sculpture and the importance of ‘extending’ the work into the street:

**MacKenny:** I like that the outside of the FLAT also became part of its territory. And I think what is interesting is that it made the passer-by aware of something...it was like an intervention.

**Moe:** The weird thing about making things in South Africa at that time, was (for example with the “dead animals”) that rural people that saw it would say: “Oh, what is it? What kind of animal is it? It looks like a bloated sheep, but not really.” And they would automatically go into a very pragmatic, farm kind of analysis... “It looks like it swelled up and died, but how did it die?” They would get into the story of it and believe it. Across the road, on the opposite pavement, was the big gun...

**MacKenny:** Wasn’t that a telephone pole?

**Moe:** Yes, the one night, I was driving around and I came across the fallen over telephone pole. Somehow or other, I managed to get it into the yellow panel van and drove it down to the sculpture department. I welded the gun butt onto it etc. And then Adrian and I took it up to the FLAT on a number of trolleys dragged behind the car. There is such a difference between the freedom we had on that strip – Mansfield Road – and any other road in Durban.

**MacKenny:** As I said, what I find interesting is that the FLAT actually extended its exhibiting space outside of the cube. And in terms of the dead animals, I find them interesting, because you cannot (as the rural people were saying) identify what kind of animal they were. So you begin to have this amorphous identity, which allows for the metaphoric content to get broader. For me the power of these ‘beasts’ is that their sense of abandonment becomes more powerful when they are left on the streets.

**Moe:** I remember writing essays for Lola, about the victim and victor. And that was the first piece that was just complete defeat. It was a collapse.

**MacKenny:** It is like road-kill.

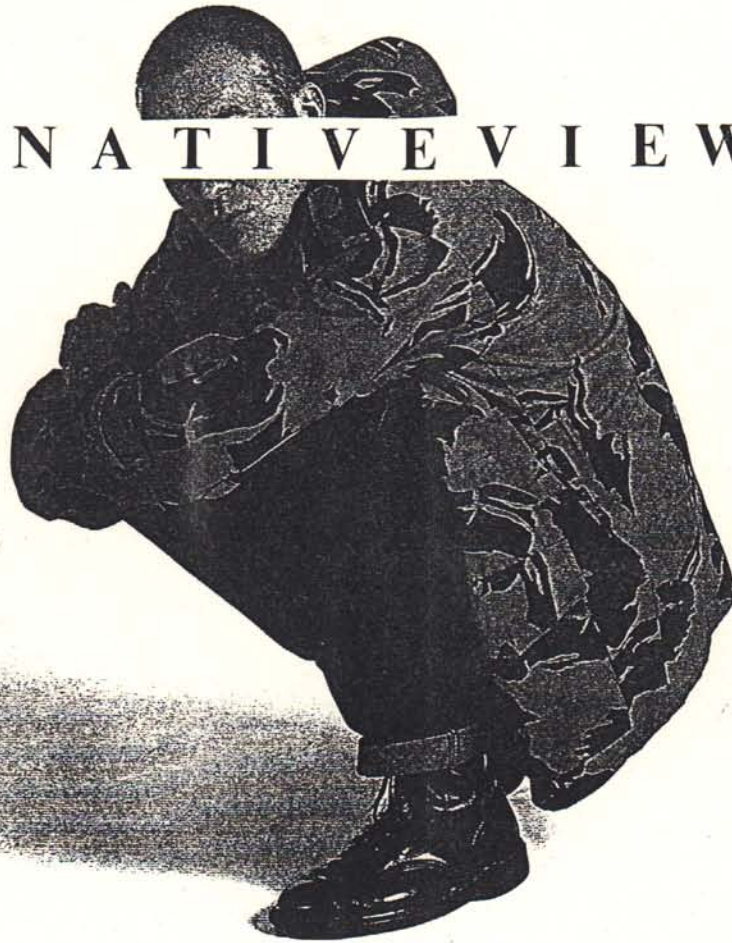
**Moe:** They had died. They were gone.

**MacKenny:** Except it leaves a feeling of before. It always has a before and an after. “Precisely what happened? How did they die”, you know. And because it was in a public site, I mean those photographs are great, precisely because people gather around. This is your gallery audience - anybody! Anybody, who walks the street. No body is going to walk past those things and a) miss them, or b) not pause to think, “What the fuck are these things doing here?”<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

# ALTERNATIVE VIEWING



a minor RetRospeCtive

|           |            |            |            |            |
|-----------|------------|------------|------------|------------|
| AAAAAAAAA | RRRRR      | CCCC       | DDDDDD     | EEEEEEEEEE |
| G         | HHHHHHHH   | IIII       | JJJJ       | KKKKKKKK   |
| L         | LLLLLLLL   | MMMMMM     | NNNN       | OOOO       |
| P         | PPPP       | QQQQQQ     | RRRR       | SSSS       |
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| 123456789 | 0123456789 | 0123456789 | 0123456789 | 0123456789 |

EXHIBITION

4MANORCOURT  
MANSFIELDRD  
DURBAN 4001

TUES 2 NOV 7:30 PM

Exhibition poster, 1993

## ***A MINOR RETROSPECTIVE*** ***November 2, 1993***

Organized by the members of the FLAT, this exhibition was designed to coincide with Kendall Geers' first exhibition in Durban. Geers, then a young artist from Johannesburg, was exhibiting an installation of suspended bricks at the Technikon Art Gallery. Indeed this installation referenced an earlier work in which he attached a newspaper clipping that described incidents of violence in South Africa to an ordinary brick.

In a subversive strategy orchestrated by Gainer, Moe, Barry, and myself, works by Geers were photocopied from various catalogues, mounted on masonite squares and presented minimally on the walls of the FLAT. In this way, we set out to orchestrate a *faux* retrospective of Geers' work.

We printed invitations and put up posters across Durban. When the posters and advertising went out, Geers thought initially that these had originated from the institution that was sponsoring the legitimate exhibition, the Technikon Gallery. He remarked on their quality, thinking that they had been made by Frances van Melsen, the gallery's curator. The situation grew more complex and hilarious when Van Melsen, was told of the dual exhibition at the FLAT. She mistakenly thought that it was Geers who had prepared the other exhibition, and so announced at his opening, that there was more of his work just across the road at the FLAT. Confusion continued over the authenticity of the FLAT exhibition, with some viewers expressing their preference for the Geers exhibition at the FLAT over the one at the Technikon Gallery.

Also, an unintentional, but strangely appropriate occurrence contributed to the absurdity. In an attempt to remedy our dirty floor at the FLAT, we painted it less than three hours before the opening with fresh, black, enamel floor paint. It did not dry for the opening. The crowds came and stuck to the wet painted floor, while viewing work that no one except the FLAT co-conspirators suspected was not Geers' work. Upon visiting the exhibition at the FLAT, interestingly, Geers never denied that the FLAT exhibition was a *faux* exhibition of his work, leaving many viewers with the impression that he had indeed mounted two shows in Durban.



'A Minor Retrospective', photostated images, masonite, black enamel paint, 1993. Melissa Marrins at the 'Geers' installation.



'A Minor Retrospective', 1993. Traces of gallery visitors' footprints on the wet, sticky floor.



Earlier this year, I interviewed Lola Frost, a lecturer in Art History and Theory at the Technikon. She had been to both exhibitions and unknowingly played a key role in expanding this absurdity.

**Allen:** Apparently, you had said to Geers that you thought his installation at the FLAT was much better than the one at the Technikon Gallery?

**Frost:** Yes.

**Allen:** Did you realise that it wasn't his work?

**Frost:** No.

**Allen:** Why did you think the FLAT work was better?

**Frost:** I suppose it was much more poetic. Besides the scale of the images and the transgressive act of walking on the wet floor - it seemed to me, in terms of the criteria I was using then, that it was metaphorically loaded. As we know, Kendell's whole business is to trash that. It is interesting that you, as Durban artists, would have spoken within that poetic frame-work. And of course we have often spoken about that divide between Johannesburg and Durban - the romantic versus the post-modern... if you want to call it that. Which I think that little maneuver was really about.

**Allen:** Another thing that I think is quite significant is that when you told him that the FLAT show was better than the Technikon show, he never denied it. He never said it is not my work. He actually thanked you.

**Frost:** No, he didn't deny it.

**Allen:** Which I think is an interesting shift as well. He accepted the FLAT exhibition and therefor became part of it. In other words he appropriated it.

**Frost:** Which is all part of his cynical agenda.<sup>7</sup>

I also discussed this exhibition with co-conspirator, Carol Gainer, in an e-mail interview. We talked about the importance of the collaborative nature of this project and our move away from 'art on display' to a more 'event' orientated exhibition.

**Allen:** How did this '*faux* exhibition' come about?

**Gainer:** It was an idea of yours to stage a show at the same time as Kendell's show at the Technikon Gallery (hanging bricks)?

**Allen:** Would you say that this was a collaborative event? If so, would you say that it was the first collaboration at the FLAT? Do you think that these 'subversive' collaborative efforts at the FLAT were intrinsic in forming its identity as an experimental space?

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<sup>7</sup> Frost, Allen; Interview 12, Richmond, Feb 18, 1999.

**Gainer:** I do think that this was probably the first “collaboration” we as the FLAT did and this did seem to feed the notion of the FLAT being an experimental space.

**Allen:** Can you describe your role in the event?

**Gainer:** My role was, at the time, a “bridging”, since I had by then formed a friendship with Kendell and had helped him hang his show at Tech and since he was staying with me he was very aware of “his other show”.

**Allen:** To what extent did the chance action of repainting the floor influence the ‘subversive’ meaning of the installation?

**Gainer:** The chance act of painting the floor was very important to the reading of the exhibit. In fact I think that the stickiness of the wet paint and the feeling of it under one’s feet and the sound of it was what actually made the exhibit so strong at the time. It certainly shifted the reading of the exhibit.

**Allen:** Some viewers like Lola Frost commented that they thought Geers’ “FLAT Installation” was more interesting than his “Tech. installation”. Geers the true situationist that he is never denied this fact, and too remarked that he thought that his FLAT work was better than his other piece. Leaving many viewers with the impression that he had indeed mounted two shows in Durban.

**Gainer:** The fact that Lola made the mistake and Kendell said nothing was also extremely important. Kendell was very aware of being a co-conspirator and that was also what gave the whole event a collaborative feel.<sup>8</sup>

In the discussion between Moe, MacKenny; American artist, Kendall Buster and myself, MacKenny had these comments:

**MacKenny:** I remember that show, you had a whole lot of tiny images of his work...

**Allen:** And we had just painted the floor and thus it was very sticky.

**MacKenny:** Yes, so you were kind of stuck to the floor and it made those sucking noises as you moved around the exhibition. I think it was actually a brilliant idea. [Laughter] Kendell’s exhibition at the NSA was a series of hanging bricks, and I think he was using that chevron tape around the pillars. And there were long discussions with Kendell about whether this was art or not. Some people tried to find metaphors in it and Kendell would say: “No, the enemy of the artist is symbol, metaphor, mood, evocation”... and he literally threw any vocabulary that any artist had used out the window.

**Buster:** Funny, I never thought of him as a post-minimalist, truth to materials, kind of guy. Was that a phase he was in?

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<sup>8</sup> Gainer, Allen; Interview 11, e-mail, cyberspace, Nov 15, 1998.



'A Minor Retrospective', photostated images & masonite, 1993.  
The seven images that were on exhibition at the FLAT with a coin for scale.

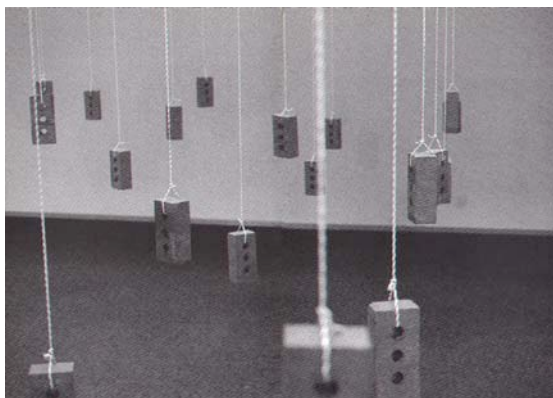
**MacKenny:** No, he even denied that. [Laughter] People were saying, “What about Carl Andre’s bricks?” And he even denied any connection to that.

**Allen:** While he was hanging that show, I remember speaking to him and he said one of his sources for the piece was Ad Reinhardt. Which was kind of strange, but which I thought was quite interesting nonetheless.

**MacKenny:** I never know whether to believe Kendell when he says those kind of things. I think he could be fucking around. When anyone brought up a connection for example when the work was critiqued in a negative way...some people said this thing only works because it is in South Africa, and Carl Andre did this kind of thing in the 60s and so on. I think he acknowledged it as some sort of reference to the brick in South Africa, that it is both a weapon and a building block. I think he acknowledged that as part of the impetus.

**Allen:** He also referenced the idea of hanging bricks from bridge over roadways as a form of terrorism.

**MacKenny:** I think he was placing it within a South African context. But when anyone tried to get on any other level, he just pulled away. What it did was create more discussion about what art was, what you believed in, what you had faith in, than any other art exhibition that had happened at the Technikon. Whether you hated it or loved it, what it really generated was intense discussion and that is what was so important. What I liked about the FLAT show, was precisely that, it threw into relief, exactly the same issues. It is interesting...he is a man who thinks on his feet so in that way he did not deny that the false exhibition was his work. He actually let it play out. But the fact that you had initiated it without asking permission. You had in turn appropriated his images. There was a collaborative anonymity in that no single individual took responsibility. That was very much part of the discussion of the FLAT Gallery as well. You were playing games and in a funny kind of way you almost out-Kendelled Kendell. [Laughter]<sup>9</sup>



KENDALL GEERS

*Hanging Piece*

Bricks suspended on nylon rope  
1993

Installed at the Technikon Natal Art Gallery,  
this was Geers' exhibition that ran  
concurrent with *A Minor Retrospective*  
at the FLAT.

(This image is taken from the book by  
Kendell Geers; *Argot*, Johannesburg,  
Chalkham Hill Press, 1995, p. 14 – 15)

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<sup>9</sup> MacKenny, Moe, Buster, Allen; Interview 9, Washington, Aug 24, 1998.

The performative aspect of this *faux* exhibition (and the small ‘dramas’ that spun out from it) functioned through a collaborative action. However, perhaps more important was the fact that this action was somewhat conspiratorial and challenged the notions of ‘authenticity’ and ‘reality’. The art on the walls was not ‘real’, and the ‘exhibition’ extended beyond the gallery into the world through an intervention that was subtle and subversive. In a sense, our exhibition ‘conversed’ with Geers’ work not only through the obvious ‘plagiarizing’ of his images, but more importantly through the very tactics that we employed. This seemed resonant with Geers’ own efforts to explore not only form and image, but also **context**. The radical nature of his work, in other words, functioned not only through the language **within** the work but also through its ‘behavior’ in the world.

We later came to regard this as the first ‘situationist’ event at the FLAT, and to develop an interest in many of the strategies and concerns articulated by the Situationist movement.<sup>10</sup> Ken Knabb describes in his Situationist anthology the historical details of the movement:

In 1957, a few European avant-garde groups came together to form the Situationist International. Over the next decade the SI developed an increasingly incisive and coherent critique of modern society and of its bureaucratic pseudo-opposition, and its new methods of agitation were influential in leading up to the May 1968 revolt in France. Since then - although the SI itself was dissolved in 1972 - situationist theses and tactics have been taken up by radical currents in dozens of countries all over the world.<sup>11</sup>

In a document for the *Situationist International* #9 (August 1964), the term is defined:

[Situationist] denotes an activity that aims at **making** situations as opposed to passively recognizing them in academic or other separate terms... We replace existential passivity with... **playful affirmation**... Our theories are nothing other than the theory of our real life, of the possibilities experienced or perceived in it.<sup>12</sup>

“Playful affirmation” is a term that perhaps best describes spirit of the FLAT’s *faux* exhibition and the ‘trickster’ tactics. Often employed to bring one’s creative practice into the

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<sup>10</sup> Though, at that time, we were only vaguely aware of the Situationist movement and the term, “situationist”; a more conscious influence was articulated later with the involvement of FLAT participant, Jay Horsburgh. Horsburgh, who would bring to the debate material from a number of important texts, was reading Sadie Plant’s book on the Situationist movement: *The Most Radical Gesture*.

<sup>11</sup> Ken Knabb; *Situationist International – Anthology*, Berkeley, Bureau of Public Secrets, 1981, p. ix.

<sup>12</sup> ‘Now, the S.I.’, Ken Knabb (ed); *Situationist International – Anthology*, p. 138.

world and to provoke the public through methods, these are approaches that seek to ‘infiltrate’ or act directly on the **institution**.

In his biography of Situationist Guy Debord, Len Bracken describes a ‘provocation’ by one of the Lettrists.<sup>13</sup> “On an Easter Sunday in 1950, Michel Mourre slipped onto the altar of Notre Dame Cathedral, dressed as a Dominican monk and delivered this sermon written by the Lettrist poet, Serge Berna, to the thousands of people attending the service:

*Today Easter of the Holy Year here under the insignia of the Basilica of Notre  
Dame de Paris  
I accuse  
the Universal Catholic Church of the deadly diversion of the force of life in  
favor of an empty heaven  
I accuse  
the Catholic Church of a con job  
I accuse  
the Catholic Church of infecting the world with its mortuary morality of  
being the chancre sore of the decaying Western World  
I tell you the truth: God is dead  
We vomit the agonizing tastelessness of your prayers because your prayers are  
the greasy smoke of the Battlefields of our Europe  
Go forth into the tragic and exalted desert of a world where God is dead and  
once again till this earth with your bare hands with your PROUD hands  
with your unpraying hands  
  
Today Easter of the Holy Year  
Here in the Basilica of Notre-Dame de France, we proclaim the death of Jesus  
Christ so that at last Man lives.”<sup>14</sup>*

Though the intention was to create a provocation and a ‘scandal’, one can only wonder how effective such a strategy might had been had he been mistaken for a legitimate monk for the duration of his speech. A performance (or intervention) that does not immediately reveal itself as ‘performance’ offers an opportunity for not only scandal, but also subversion. This was explored through a number of works in *Crapshoot*; launched in 1996 as part of the curatorial training programme at De Appel in Amsterdam. Geers, an artist participant and fellow South African Clive

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<sup>13</sup> The Letterist International, an ‘avant-garde’ movement seen as a precursor to the Situationist International.

<sup>14</sup> Len Bracken; *Guy Debord – Revolutionary*, Venice, Feral House, 1997, p. 10-11.

Kellner, a training curator, were both involved in the project. Indeed, the position of these artists *vis a vis* situationism is consciously acknowledged by Kellner in the *Crapshoot* catalogue essay. He speaks here of Geers:

He was born in May 1968 at the time of the Paris student riots, as if this is not enough, he proclaims a line to the Situationist International... Kendall Geers changed his birth date as an artwork, an act of appropriation involving one of the epochs in recent European history, Guy Debord, the critical avant-garde...so the myth making goes on, a compilation of lies, hearsay, and mis-informed journalism. Partly contrived, but mostly true.<sup>15</sup>

Geers, with a number of artists such as Italian, Maurizio Cattelan, participated in an exhibition that was built around a number of ‘off site’ artist interventions. One such project instigated by Cattelan, but involving most of the participates, included the illegal activity of breaking into the Bloom Gallery. In the ‘performance’, they first stole the entire contents of the gallery (including the art and the office equipment) in an action titled: *Operation Giant Blossum* in April 1996, packed it and then redisplayed it in the De Appel exhibition space. The title card read:

Maurizio Cattelan, “**Another Fucking Readymade**”, April 11 (10:30 a.m.), 1996.  
 Courtesy Bloom Gallery.  
 Contents of Bloom Gallery including Paul de Reus exhibition and office equipment.  
 Situated on second floor of De Appel, following the action “**Operation Giant Blossom**”,  
 April 11 (7:00 - 7:40 a.m.), 1996.<sup>16</sup>

According to Saskia Bos, the head curator at De Appel, the curatorial staff at De Appel was not aware of the project. She spoke in conversation with Otto Berchem about the complexity of the experience and begins by telling about the initial call from her assistant:

She said, “I have to tell your something. They’ve broken into the Bloom Gallery... this is impossible. The police are involved” etc. I had this meeting and I knew I couldn’t do anything, then I went to De Appel and we discussed the whole thing with Cattelan. What I wanted to hear were the content arguments, the real artistic reasons why he did it. He spoke about what I would say was appropriation and the need to make that appropriation in reality, and the need to bring something into another space, from one space to another. I remember asking myself, over and over, why he had not written a letter to ask if he could bring the show from one place to another, why didn’t he involve them consciously, willingly, knowingly. He said, “No, because I had to transgress this line.

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<sup>15</sup> Clive Kellner; ‘Armchair Anarchy’, *The Crap Shooter*, 1<sup>st</sup> Edition, Amsterdam, De Appel, April 1996, p.15.

I have to do something without their consent.” It was the surprise that he was interested in. It was a pretty calm meeting because I wanted it to be calm. The excitement of it was already big enough with the others. So we really discussed, for hours, about “why did you leave the note. ‘Don’t worry. Everything is OK. You will see everything again soon.’ Why didn’t you leave another kind of note?”<sup>17</sup>

Indeed, the importance of an action done without ‘permission’ is articulated here. Kellner, in discussing Geers speaks to this:

The institution provides the frame or context for these gestures, as radical as they may be. It is the institution which appears to grant permission to the gesture. Partly this is hugely problematic, as there is nothing worse than being given ‘permission’ to break or destroy some fascinating object.<sup>18</sup>

Also, for *Crapshoot*, Geers ‘constructed’ an installation that marked a return to the use of the brick. The ‘sculpture’, an empty gallery room with a broken window and a brick on the floor was ‘constructed’ by the artist throwing a brick through the De Appel gallery window. Saskia Bos on Geers’ *Title Withheld (Brick)* 1996 at De Appel says:

I think Kendell Geers’ brick through the window is the strongest of the ‘broken works’. It relates to the street, it’s a clear message, in one room, it’s absolutely an icon for hate, or aggression towards an institution.<sup>19</sup>

This work is in fact a remake of an earlier work, *Title Withheld (Brick)* 1994, at the Market Gallery in Johannesburg and is also mentioned by Hazel Friedman in her critique of the show in the *STAR Tonight*.

Geers obsesses about South Africa’s pathology of violence, demonstrated by throwing a brick through the window of the Market Gallery – a throwback to a previous work bought by the Johannesburg Art Gallery – and incorporating the brick, the gaping hole and shards of glass into the artwork.<sup>20</sup>

Both the Market and the De Appel works, are examples of ‘simulated violence’. And indeed the ‘simulated experience’ is an effective strategy employed to question both the viewer’s

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<sup>16</sup> *The Crap Shooter*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition, Amsterdam, De Appel, May 1996, p. 15.

<sup>17</sup> Otto Berchem; ‘Saskia Bos – a chit chat with O.B.’, *The Crap Shooter*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition, p. 16.

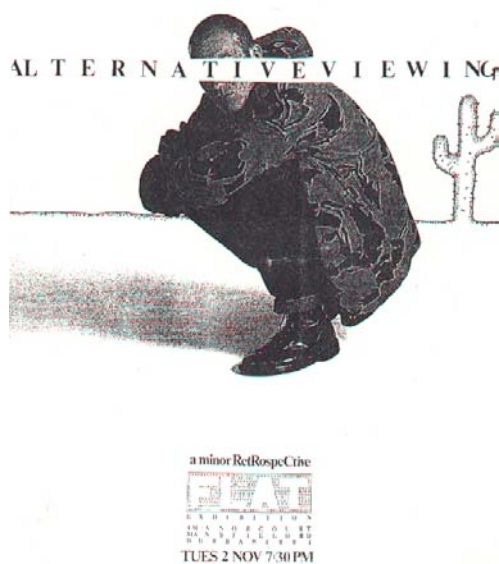
<sup>18</sup> Clive Kellner; ‘Archchair Anarchy’, *The Crap Shooter*, 1<sup>st</sup> Edition, p. 15.

<sup>19</sup> Otto Berchem; ‘Saskia Bos – a chit chat with O.B.’, *The Crap Shooter*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition, p. 16.

<sup>20</sup> Hazel Friedman; ‘Legends In Their Own Minds’, *The Star Tonight*, Johannesburg, August 22, 1994.



notion of 'reality' and the institution's role as a neutral 'white cube'. The viewer enters the exhibition and encounters a situation that is not as it appears. Whether that encounter is with what first seems to be an act of vandalism against that institution, as at De Appel, or an exhibition that creates confusion over authorship, as in the FLAT, the question is still asked, "Is this a reality or a simulation?"



A variation on the exhibition poster, 1993



Top Left: NIEL JONKER, the carpet heart, 1993. Top Right: NIEL JONKER, the tar flag, 1993.  
Bottom Left: NIEL JONKER, the plaster kidney, 1993. Bottom Right: NIEL JONKER, the rubber wig, 1993.

**NIËL JONKER**  
***November 23, 1993***

Niël Jonker, one of the founding members of the FLAT, mounted an exhibition of mixed media sculpture which included an impressive number of individual objects crafted with a variety of techniques. Using materials that ranged from cast road tar to kitsch carpeting, Jonker created a rich personal vocabulary of enigmatic three-dimensional visual symbols. Shirts cast in sand inside a lead covered suitcase, a rubber wig, a wax eye with images imprinted and a tar flag were but a few of the free standing and relief works that made up the exhibition.

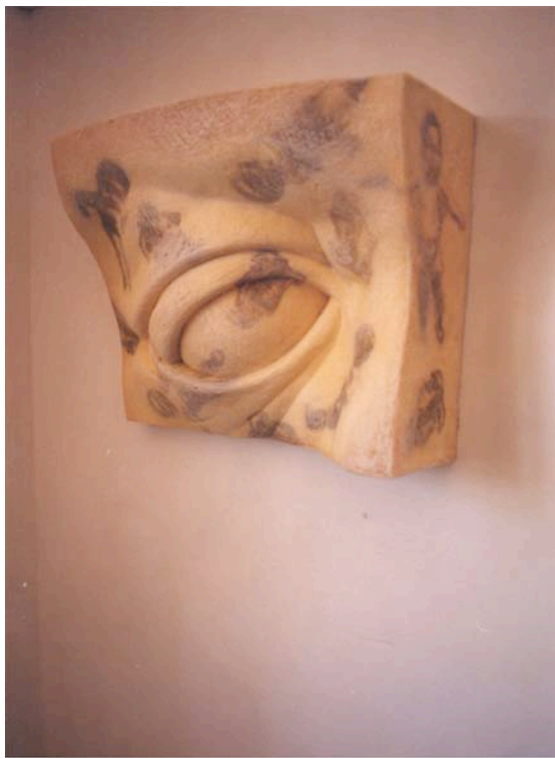
Casting was an important process in Jonker's work, and for these he used industrial materials to transform and re-present both hand modeled and found objects. The original reference remained recognizable and so was strongly linked to the source. The viewer could immediately recognize the loaded images - heart, eye, flag, suitcase, shirt etc... However, in choosing such evocative sensual materials to 'render' these familiar objects, Jonker opened up the possibilities of how material can also operate as poetic metaphor.

Notable in this presentation of works, also, was one that demonstrated a slight departure from the crafted sculptures that seemed to reference his more personal symbols and pointed to a self-conscious reference to kitsch 'art objects' of the region. Here he transformed a found copper-clad curio mounting plate by fabricating a wax 'horn' that transformed into a tongue and rudely penetrated the viewer's space. Usually adorned with an animal's horn such as a rhino, these 'African curios' are familiar items in gift shops in South Africa and speak more to what is colonial than what is 'African'. With this 'copper-based curio horn', Jonker commented on how socio-political content is inscribed in even seemingly 'innocent' South African popular culture; how gift shop souvenirs reflect the lingering colonial past. There is something distinctly ironic about the inauthenticity of a stuffed animal trophy that has been 'bought'. Through its displacement into a Fine Art context, its obvious reference is shifted and its covert meaning exposed.

Later that year, Jonker extended his explorations of transformation through casting, in an event that proved to be even more politically charged and potentially controversial. One evening, with Adrian Hermanides, Jonker set out to take a plaster cast from the boot of the memorial statue of Louis Botha in the local park. When police come to question why such activity would be taking place in the middle of the night, the artists told the officers that they were from the parks

department and were fixing the bronze statue in their overtime. The police believed the tale and as the story goes even offered to assist with bringing water. Jonker then made a wax boot cast from the mold made that evening. In a continued 'dialogue' with this same monument, Piers Mansfield returned to the statue some months later and painted that same boot pink.

The making of the 'curio' and the 'interaction' with the Botha statue were significant in that they operated through a change in context and spoke to images that were strongly associated with the colonial past. In a sense, Jonker's curio and the interaction with the Botha statue were examples of ways in which we sought to offer a critical voice by using (and subverting) the very language of the thing being critiqued - in this case the collectable commodity and the heroic statuary. But were these just pranks? Were these acts readable enough to be communicative and therefore politically meaningful? These same questions would be asked; these same strategies revisited by many of us at the FLAT in the years to come.



Left: NIEL JONKER, the wax eye, 1993. Right: NIEL JONKER, the horn/tounge curio, 1993.

***CLINTON DE MENEZES***  
***November 26, 1993***

A recent graduate from the Natal Technikon, De Menezes exhibited collage works. These included both a series of eight identically sized panels presented on the walls, a relief construction and a bench-like structure. On the bench, images were layered onto the top surface and a book created from bound drawings lay in shallow trays attached to its sides.

Using a very iconographic presentation of these images, his vocabulary included, landscape, spirals, circles, fire, and the human hand. 'Mandala-like', these referenced spirituality, the earth and self-transformation. A recurrent and significant image was that of the 'heroic' horse and rider with a broken sword.

Of interest was the fact that the sources for many of these collage images were taken from popular culture - advertisements to be then transformed into meaningful icons. The horse and rider image, here representing the hero with the broken sword, was originally a label from an alcohol bottle or cigarette packet. One work, addressing the notion of 'communication', was a collaged panel construction with a small shelf holding a working telephone. Circular symbols taken from the emergency page of the South African telephone book were features on the panel. Here an interesting linkage was created between those symbols associated with spirituality and contemplation and those with crisis.

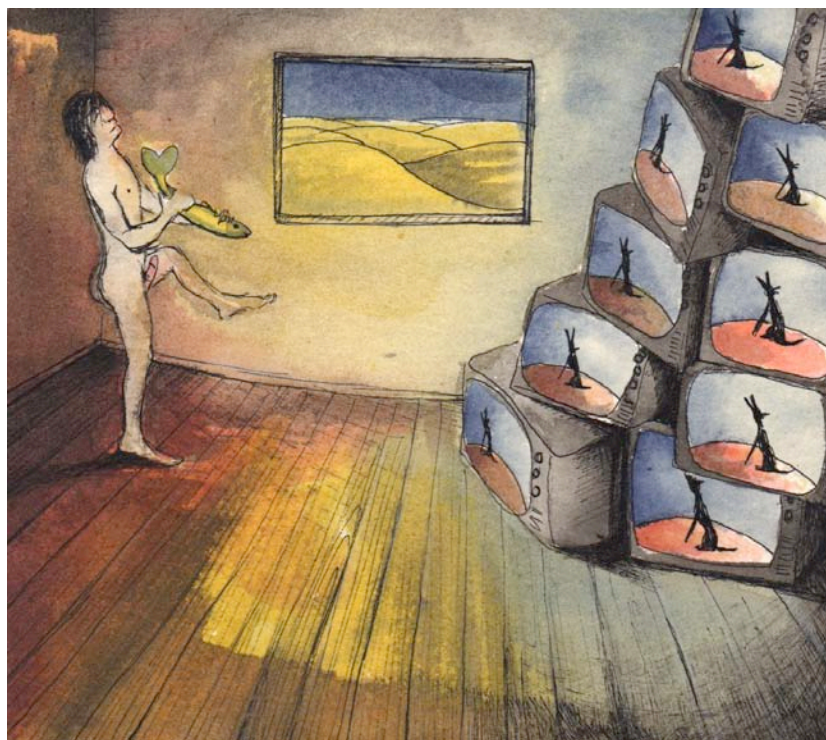


CLINTON DE  
MENEZES  
1993

**ANDREW STRODE**  
***Cars, Flowers and Cities - A Collection of Short Stories***  
***December 2, 1993***

In this exhibition, a student for the Natal Technikon presented a large collection of miniature watercolors. The show was titled *Cars, Flowers and Cities - A Collection of Short Stories* and they were indeed detailed narratives that dealt with these and other themes. Private satires of the oppressiveness of the 'big city', the pervasiveness of the media, and the loneliness of a masturbatory life style, the drawings were at once both theatrical and internally psychological. Like scenes from dreams, each operated like a window into a single moment of a complex tale. In one, a small naked figure, his erect penis echoed by the curved fish he holds, stands poised in front of a stack of televisions.

Also on exhibition was an abstract experimental video, where the artist shot a film through the lens of a glass bottle. The footage showed a distorted image of a casual walk around the environs of Durban.



ANDREW STRODE  
Pen & ink, watercolours on paper.  
1993

**MELISSA MARRINS, TARYN FOX**  
**December 5, 1993**

This show along with the Strode exhibition marked a rise in the FLAT Gallery's popularity amongst younger students. Motivated by an interest to present portfolios for Technikon critiques, these two artists both addressed the subject of the female figure, but with approaches that were vastly different one from the other.

Fox's presentation was a straightforward exhibition of paintings strongly grounded in the academic figure tradition taught at the Technikon. Marrins, on the other hand, had started to break away from painting to also explore assemblage. She showed both paintings and an installation that used the figure to satirically address issues of Catholicism and 'beauty'.

These iconoclastic works, paintings framed to reference shrines, included images of Mary with the words "Mary, Mary, Quite Contrary" and collaged images of Jesus and Mary where Jesus asks Mary: "Your place or mine?" One included a self-portrait of Marrins where she inserted herself alongside Mary and Venus, referencing familiar Italian Renaissance images by way of an almost 'pop art' language. Though controversial in their conflation of 'sacred' themes with sexuality, Marrins claimed that she was not out to deliberately shock the viewer. Indeed her stated intention was more one of healing through the provocation of some 'recognition' in the viewer. In a 1995 interview for the *FLAT* newsletter Marrins and I spoke about the 'controversial' nature of her work:

**Allen:** Some people find your work shocking, do you think it is? If so, do you think that the shock element provides a 'tool' for people to question their own taste?

**Marrins:** This is an issue that I cannot understand. I do not find my work 'shocking', nor do I deliberately attempt to shock people. If I need to convey a particular feeling (and yes I deal with 'uncomfortable' feelings) then I will choose an image that for me adequately conveys that emotional state. Perhaps the 'shock' element lies in my juxtaposition of elements - a rotten penis with syphilis next to a portrait of Jesus for example. I can only surmise that the 'shock' people feel comes out of an uncomfortable realization that they can relate on some level to my imagery. This is obvious. If they did not recognize some kind of understanding or manifestation of the image within

themselves then they would not be shocked. I am not here to make things easy for the viewer. I would like them to re-assess their realities through questioning mine.<sup>21</sup>

The use of the ‘grotesque’ and the act of ‘transgressing a taboo’, such as combining the sacred and the profane, were indeed strategies that Marrins employed both in this early exhibition and in projects that were to follow.<sup>22</sup> Russian Linguist Mikhail Bakhtin wrote extensively about the phenomenon of the ‘carnival’ and the use of the profane for serious intent. “Colloquial oaths and profanities”, for example, were for Bakhtin “a codified form of verbal protest, a repudiation of officialdom.” Interestingly, the nature of these ‘profanities’ often involved the use of religious imagery. In his seminal book on the work of Bakhtin, Michael Gardiner speaks to this notion:

In thematic terms, these oaths often involved the symbolic rending of the body, particularly the Lord’s body, and references to the bodily relics of saints and holy persons, and to diseases (especially venereal afflictions) and organs of the lower material stratum were commonplace.<sup>23</sup>

Bakhtin’s definitions of the ‘grotesque’ and ‘profane’ are relevant to Marrins’ work, not only in terms of the use of religious imagery, but in terms of her stated purpose. Certainly, such references could be employed in the spirit of cheap irony or ‘shock-effect’. For Marrins, there was an emphatic assertion that some ‘greater meaning’ might be uncovered. Gardiner goes on to say:

The term ‘grotesque’ itself usually conjures up notions of distortion or deformity, usually for the purposes of caricature or irony. For Bakhtin, however, the tendency towards extreme exaggeration in the grotesque is not simply a satirical device, which would fail to explain the ambivalence and unexpected richness and complexity of such images and their connection to seemingly disparate events and phenomena. When infused with grotesque imagery, objects transcend their own ‘natural’ boundaries and become fused or linked with other things. From this is derived their pregnant and two-sided nature, the quality of ‘unfinished becoming’ which is anathema to officialdom. Not surprisingly, Bakhtin asserts that this hyperbole and anamorphosis is positive and affirmative.<sup>24</sup>

Perhaps the central work in the exhibition was an installation constructed with sheet rubber suspended from the ceiling and supported by hand-made coils that seemed to reference

<sup>21</sup> Marrins, Allen; Interview 3, *FLAT Newsletter*, Issue 3, Durban, FLAT, July 1995.

<sup>22</sup> See *FLAT Newsletter 3* where Marrins discusses her 1995 installations at Mount Edgecombe, p. 299. Also see *Sub/Merge:SoNic CaLcuLAS(so)O*, her performance at the FLAT with Jay Horsburgh, p. 157.

<sup>23</sup> Michael Gardiner; *The Dialogics of Critique – M.M. Bakhtin & The Theory of Ideology*, London, Routledge, 1992, p.50.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 47.





MELISSA MARRINS, "Your Place or Mine?", mixed-media, 1993



MELISSA MARRINS, 'Mary, Mary Quite Contrary', mixed-media, 1993

feces. On its crumpled surface was a portrait of Mary and on the floor below, making a shrine-like circle were crumpled up bits of paper. In that same FLAT interview, she articulated what became her growing interest in installation:

On a personal level I find that I am fired by the challenge to transform and give new meaning to a space... in other words, the space is my canvas.<sup>25</sup>

Recently, the exhibition was discussed with Moe, MacKenny and Buster. A conversation ensued that addressed the 'dialogue' (perhaps unintentionally) that was created between Marrins and Fox's work:

**Buster:** But what an interesting context, putting her work with Melissa's. All of a sudden, what is academic neutral painting is not neutral anymore. The fact that the female nude was considered for how long as a neutral... "its just about colour and form..." It seems very loaded to put a female nude, academic study next to Melissa's work. Wow has the context shifted! The male nude, the same thing...

**MacKenny:** Yes, but I don't think that they were really conscious of that. I think the observation is a valid one and if it had been explored more then it probably would have had more... And these certainly came across as academic studies, except for the fragmented one. Actually if you look at Melissa's suitcase... maybe they were more conscious of it than one realizes. I don't know.

**Moe:** Maybe if they were here now they would see the connections that were maybe not apparent before.

**MacKenny:** That is very often the case. You only make the connections much later.<sup>26</sup>

We also talked about the significance of the exhibition in terms of Marrins later work:

**MacKenny:** She was quite, to put it mildly, irreverent... "Mary, Mary quite contrary". I mean that could have been the title of the show.

**Buster:** Virginia, do you think that in her content, there are things that are consistent, even though she changed her format?

**MacKenny:** Yes, I think that the whole show from Melissa's point of view was highly 'Catholic'. You have the icon and then you ridicule it. But at the same time, the skin is a flagellation...of St. Bartholomew...the flayed thing...

**Buster:** That's the first thing I thought...

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<sup>25</sup> Marrins, Allen; Interview 3, *FLAT* Newsletter, Issue 3, Durban, FLAT, July 1995.

<sup>26</sup> MacKenny, Moe, Buster, Allen; Interview 9, Washington, August 1998.

**MacKenny:** Whether it was conscious or not, I think Melissa was pretty sussed at what she was doing. And I think she would make those connections. She made a suit later out of rubber latex with hair on it and she called it “Hersuit”. It was a wonderful pun between her suit, hairy, flagellation and hair-shirt. All of those things.

**Buster:** And identity is such a consistent theme in her work. Is this her painting with her in the middle between ‘Mary’ and Botticelli’s ‘Venus’? I find that interesting that she is the same woman that took on the role of the “Hippie Chick” at the NSA. That she took those personas on for a while, that she would ‘paint’ herself thus... That she would explore where she would fit into these different images of woman. ‘Madonna’ or the ‘whore’, Venus or both?

**Moe:** I think it is a good example of how different her format was. If Melissa had to describe in that painting, the same thing about five times... Struggling with trying to make the format illusionistic, and the damn paint won’t mix to make the flesh colour... to a very time orientated performance thing where you stick something on you. The content is the same in both.

**MacKenny:** This ‘hanging’ notion is quite interesting, because it comes up in her other work. I know that she always battled with painting. She always found difficulty in expressing the things she wanted to say with paint, and so I think at one point she just threw her hand up in the air and found another way of doing it. I don’t think that painting was the way she wanted to work.<sup>27</sup>



MELISSA  
MARRINS  
Installation with  
rubber-latex, paper,  
resin, steel chain  
1993

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

## ***ARTWORKS IN PAPER/PAPERWORKS IN ART December 8, 1993***

A large group exhibition of paper sculpture from “the newly introduced papermaking programme at Technikon Natal”, featured paper works that were produced with an approach that was essentially experimental. As was evident from the variety of works on display, students were not limited to papermaking, but rather experimented with this ‘new’ medium to create sculptural works. Most of the art produced were objects or conceptual statements using paper as the material.

In one piece, for example, Walker Paterson interpreted the ‘paper theme’ through the use of a ‘readymade’. Paterson exhibited a found ‘paper’ object - a 5 litre cardboard wine-box - in a rather tongue-in-cheek work that made reference both to the spirit of the FLAT openings and a play on words. An inside joke for papermakers; in papermaking terminology, a thick sheet is referred to as ‘wine box cardboard.’ It was an ‘art object’ which required and indeed received much audience participation! In recent correspondence with Paterson we discussed the exhibition:

**Allen:** Could you talk about your motives for making the “Wine Box” for this exhibition?

**Paterson:** a) The Wine Box piece allowed people to come together over a glass of wine and discuss ideas. b) The piece was made of paper, which qualified it for the exhibition. c) When one makes a thick sheet of paper it is referred to as ‘wine box cardboard’ [in the papermaking process]. And d) It saved me from buying wine for the opening of the exhibition, the only reason why people would attend in the first place.

**Allen:** What is important about this ‘conceptual’ work when compared with the other ‘made’ work on this show, with specific reference to the papermaking department?

**Paterson:** The “Wine Box” was not about labour intensive work which paper-making is. I felt there was a lot of work on the show that spoke about labour intensive work and I did not want to add to it. That is why the two accompanying pieces remained in their raw state.<sup>28</sup>

Others artists who participated in the exhibition included Laura Faranacci, Suzanne Bothma-Hale, Christel Van Vollenhoven, George Holloway and Sam Cross. The image used for the poster of the exhibition showed Bothma-Hale’s sculpture made with wattle and paper.

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<sup>28</sup> Paterson, Allen; Interview 7, snail-mail, April 1998.



This show also marked the first time that the FLAT received art press from a Durban newspaper, and a prominent Durban artist and lecturer at the Technikon, John Roome, was invited to open an exhibition. The column by Marianne Meijer, which appeared in the *Tonight* section, of *The Daily News* read:

An exhibition of new paper work will go on show at the FLAT Gallery on Wednesday next week, at 6pm. The exhibition, which marks the fusion between the newly-introduced papermaking programme at Technikon Natal and the rising alternative art culture at the recently opened FLAT Gallery, will officially be opened by the only award winner at the Natal Arts Trust Biennale, John Roome. The FLAT Gallery, 4 Manor Court, Mansfield Road, is a non-profit, non-commercial exhibition space, where the prime aim is to promote a vibrant interaction among creative people. It is available for any innovative art event.<sup>29</sup>

This modest blurb was important in that the aims of the FLAT were here recorded in print with the public acknowledgement of the FLAT's goal: "to promote a vibrant interaction among creative people," and the declaration that "it is available for any innovative art event." For us this was milestone as it articulated in a public forum our policy of allowing anyone to do anything in the space. Moreover, in Durban, the primary source of art information released in the newspapers was at that time originating almost exclusively from the Durban Art Gallery and the NSA. As these were the two powerful, stalwart organisations, it was significant to us that we too were able to get press attention. It not only announced to the general public the fact that we existed, but also legitimized the FLAT for those with suspicions that our project was not just another elaborate student party. This recognition of our seriousness also affirmed the existence of the gallery for us.

In the months to come Marianne Meijer continued to support our efforts, consistently covering the FLAT gallery in her weekly column and coming to many of the exhibitions. Ironically, Meijer was considered by many of the younger Durban artists to be part of the 'establishment' and yet she was the first to support us in such early days.

In that same conversation with Paterson, we discussed the significance of Durban's first papermaking exhibition and the press coverage it received:

**Simon:** What do you think the significance is of John Roome opening this exhibition (in terms of legitimizing the gallery in the eyes of the 'art public' and/or the more 'established' artists)?

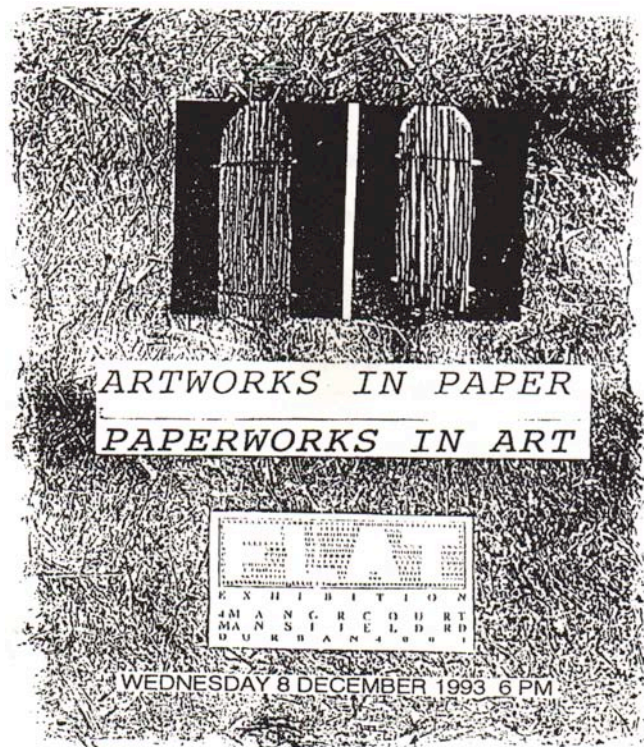
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<sup>29</sup> Marianne Meijer; *The Daily News Tonight*, Durban, December 3, 1993.

**Walker:** I found it quite surprising that John agreed to open the exhibition. I do however have my suspicions that John was more interested in legitimizing the use of paper as a fine art medium rather than a craft orientated one. It did however as you stated have the desired effect, it was published in Marianne's [Meijer] column.

**Simon:** Could you comment on the importance of this show to the newly formed papermaking department (this was its first year as a department with students) and to FLAT.

**Walker:** Both were relatively new additions to the Durban scene. It was also the first ever paper-making exhibition to be held in Durban.<sup>30</sup>



Exhibition poster, 1993

<sup>30</sup> Paterson, Allen; Interview 7, snail-mail, April 1998.



***THE FIRST TIME***  
***Audio Recording (Tape 1)***  
***December 1993***

This marks the first in a series of audio recordings. During the course of the FLAT, we began to tape our conversations. These became both a document of our ‘brainstorming sessions’ and raw material for later sound work. Barry, Vaughn<sup>31</sup> and myself messed around with an antique gramophone by playing the ‘non-playing’ side of a one-sided 33 RPM Schubert record (a shrill sound/noise) at 78 RPM. We also discussed possible ideas for recording music:

**Vaughn:** They should release a Butthole Surfers album on the old 78-speed format.

**Barry:** No fuck! We should do that.

**Vaughn:** You know PIL released a limited edition single with the hole misplaced on the record.<sup>32</sup>

***I’M RITE, I’M RONG***  
***Audio Recordings (Tapes 2 - 4)***  
***December 31, 1993***

These are recordings of conversations on New Years Eve, and featured voices that included Barry, Vaughn, Moonlight<sup>33</sup>, and myself. Vaughn was our downstairs neighbour who had become involved with the FLAT and was a key participant in the first sound recordings. Moonlight, a grounds-keeper at the Natal Technikon, had recently become a frequent visitor to the FLAT, when he and Barry became friends. The recordings on this particular evening captured what was not

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<sup>31</sup> Vaughn and Tracy were our downstairs neighbors and would frequent the FLAT often. I unfortunately cannot recall their surnames.

<sup>32</sup> ‘The First Time’; *FLAT Recordings*, Tape 1, Durban, FLAT, Dec 1993.

<sup>33</sup> I never knew Moonlight’s surname either.

uncommon under these circumstances. We four men, Vaughn, Moonlight, Thomas and myself, were drinking and talking about ‘women’.

Significant in the production of these tapes was the fact that they revealed not only the problematic nature of recording another’s voice and in particular a Black man’s voice, but also the use of such material in one’s own work. Though several hours of tapes were made, it was a particular set of phrases spoken by Moonlight that asserted themselves as highlights from the tape and were later used by me to create a looped sound work.

The phrases that were extracted are from some point in the evening when Moonlight revealed his thoughts on prostitution. He said:

[Sic] Now we are here in Sud Africa to talk da truth. Nobody getsuffishus. We are going to talk our aims... what dey we are concentrated... eh...

Black Ladies, just stopping to sell your body!

White Ladies, just stopping to sell your body!

Indian Ladies, just stopping to sell your body!

Eh... Coloured Ladies, just stopping to sell your body!

We are not allowed to selling dat. Accept da spirit of God!<sup>34</sup>

There were not only complexities inherent in the circumstances that led to Moonlight’s comments, but also in the later appropriation of his voice for a sound work. Though innocent in and of itself (the recording was not done in secret), this drunken exchange among four men was fraught with subtle dynamics. There was perhaps some suspect ‘encouragement’ that led to Moonlight’s declaration, and indeed, in South Africa, there is no exchange between black and white which is not charged with an undercurrent of racial self-consciousness. That these issues of race and gender were both so directly addressed in this ‘party atmosphere’ seemed also significant.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Moonlight; ‘New Years Eve’, *FLAT Recordings*, Tape 2, Durban, FLAT, December 31, 1993.

<sup>35</sup> See the essay *A Black Voice* (1997) where I address these issues more thoroughly, p. 307.



Barry & Moonlight, 1993



The Ostrich-Egg Beading workshop organized by Sam Ntshangase and Niel Jonker, 1994

## ***OSTRICH-EGG BEADING WORKSHOP*** ***January 1994***

At this time weaver, Sam Ntshangase, formed a small business with Niël Jonker, hence the FLAT became the site for a kind of 'workshop/commercial venture'. Jonker was one of the FLAT occupants and the son of an ostrich farmer from Oudtshoorn. Ntshangase was a teacher and weaver who we had originally met through Andries Botha in 1991, when he conducted weaving workshops at the Natal Technikon.

A prolific art-school teacher, instructing in three schools at the same time, Ntshangase had come not only to teach, but also to study art at the Technikon in 1992. With no permanent residence in Durban central, Ntshangase would often stay over at the FLAT, and so in a sense, became a semi-permanent flat-mate. Often he would come in after a full days work at the Technikon, sleep for a few hours and then leave at 3 am to drive to one of his schools down the South Coast. Well connected in the Zulu Royalty, he seemed to know everyone in both political and artistic circles, and these included a number of weavers in Kwa-Zulu Natal.

According to the business plan developed by Jonker and Ntshangase, Jonker would get box-loads of empty ostrich eggs from his father in Oudtshoorn, and Ntshangase would then find beadings to decorate these eggs. These would then be marketed either through international export or local shops. They approached the FLAT Gallery about using the space to make the eggs, and when all agreed, the production of these crafted items began. Three women came with their children one day to work and used the FLAT space rent-free for a weekend. As a result of these events, the FLAT operated not only as a residence and an exhibition/performance space, but also became a temporary community workshop site. It was our policy that anyone could use the space for anything, and so this included non-exhibition activities.

## ***FUNDING PROPOSAL sent to BAT February 2, 1994***

Moe, Barry and myself continued to direct the FLAT Gallery. In early 1994 Jonker moved out and I moved into his space to live. Moe and I decided, at that time, to divide the R 800 rent between us so that we might continue to designate the living room as the gallery. In order to alleviate the burden of the rent for the third room, we realized that we needed to find another source of funding. This led to a request to the Bartel Arts Trust.

The Bartel Arts Trust (BAT) was at that time a newly formed arts trust made possible by Hugo Bartel to support arts in Durban. Its trustees were Paul Mikula and Dick Breytenbach, and the director at that time was Mike Van Graan. The BAT centre had not yet been built, and so in an effort to support art in Durban, the trust funded many small arts endeavors.

In our proposal requesting funds, we articulated our primary aims for the gallery. This is the first time that we had formally declared these aims in a written format:

The FLAT Gallery has no selection system and there is no restriction on content of work - anyone can exhibit anything!

AIMS.

\* To create a vibrant space where artists (students and professionals) can exhibit, experiment and interact in an either non-formal or formal context by means of debate, informative talks, experimental work, group and solo exhibitions.

\* It is a neutral space which can operate on a professional yet not commercial level allowing both practicing artists to experiment with new ideas and students the opportunity to experience the gallery system.

\* In future we wish to develop greater communication with other artists, organisations and galleries in the R.S.A. and thus hope to establish a system where artists can have traveling exhibitions in various parts of the country etc.

\*All work on exhibition has been and will be documented.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Moe, Barry, Allen; Letter to BAT, Feb 2, 1994.

**FLAT**  
**4 MANOR CRT**  
**61 BOTANIC GRDS RD**  
**DURBAN 4001**

2 February 1994.

The Bartle Trust.

Dear Sirs,

RE: PROPOSAL FOR FUNDING.

The FLAT Gallery was initiated in October 1993 as an alternative art space and operated till the end of the year with fortnightly exhibitions. After the January break the FLAT Gallery will resume again with an exhibition of work by a young local artist David Southam on Friday the 4th of February 1994.

Response to the exhibitions and the concept of the FLAT has been enthusiastic both from the viewing public and from artists needing to exhibit.

At present the FLAT Gallery is being funded by young practising artists and students. It is a NON PROFIT PROJECT WITH NO GALLERY FEE CHARGED TO THE EXHIBITOR. We wish to maintain this policy of a free space in order not to hinder the exhibitor in any way. This policy also allows for a much wider viewing of artists and subsequently many more exhibitions.

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In future we wish to develop greater communication with other artists, organisations and galleries in the R.S.A. and thus hope to establish a system where artists can have travelling exhibitions in various parts of the country etc.

All work on exhibition has been and will be documented.

This proposal signed by Moe, Barry and myself, also included a list of artists who had up until that point exhibited at the gallery. This was a total of 16 people in 4 months. Also submitted was a breakdown of costs for a proposed average of 4 exhibitions per month:

|  |  |
|--|--|
| Rental                                     | R 400  |
| Phone a/c inclusive Rental & Metered calls | R 100  |
| Invitations (printing and postage)         | R 400  |
| Documentation                              | R 200  |
| Gallery Maintenance (lighting, paint)      | R 100  |
| <b>TOTAL</b>                               | <b>R 1200 / month for one year</b> <sup>37</sup> |

On the fourth of February, a week after we had sent our proposal into BAT we received a letter from Jennifer Whitehead acknowledging that the BAT had agreed to sponsor us and pledged R400 a month towards our operating expenses until further notice. Their only clause in the agreement was:

We ask that you acknowledge BAT's contribution by displaying the information in some manner in the gallery where the public will see it. Please include all of us on your mailing list - addresses as per attached sheet.<sup>38</sup>



The names on the list included Paul Mikula, Dick Breytenbach, Whitehead, and Van Graan.

With these funds from BAT, Moe and I were relieved of the financial burden of covering the entire rent and our part was then R200 each a month for our accommodation. We made a poster thanking BAT for their sponsorship and this “thank you” sign remained in the gallery at all times.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> Jennifer Whitehead; Letter to FLAT, Feb 9, 1994.



**DAVID SOUTHAM**  
**February 4, 1994**

David Southam, a third year student at the Technikon, decided, like Marrins, Strode and Fox before him, to have an exhibition at the FLAT. This process of exhibiting off-campus, initiated back in 1990 was by now common practice among younger students.

David Southam's show included painted and printed works with graphic symbols. A press release was sent to Marianne Meijer and she came to the exhibition and covered the show in her *Art Beat* column. The article included a photograph of Southam and his work, with Moe, Barry and myself. (The three primary FLAT gallery organizers at that time.) It read:

The gallery aims to create a platform for more experimental art; such as performance, installation, and video; **media the more established galleries may shy away from.**<sup>39</sup>

As was noted in this writing, we continued to be defined as an alternative space in contrast to the more established spaces in Durban, such as the Durban Art Gallery (DAG) and the Natal Society for the Arts (NSA).



Press cutting from Marianne Meijer's *Art Beat* column in *The Daily News*, 1994

<sup>39</sup> Marianne Meijer; *Art Beat*, *The Daily News - Tonight*, Durban, Feb 11, 1994.

***FUNDING PROPOSAL sent to DURBAN ARTS  
February 9, 1994***

Jeff Chandler, who was then president of the NSA, approached us at this time about applying to Durban Arts for money. Durban Arts was a well established organization that funded a broad range of cultural events. Chandler, who was a strong supporter of our endeavor, helped us prepare this letter for Noel Fairhurst (then director of Durban Arts):

The Flat Gallery was initiated in October 1993 as an alternative exhibition space. A non-profit-making venture, its aim is to create a vibrant space where students and professional artists can exhibit, experiment and interact.

The cost involved in exhibiting has become prohibitive. This not only precludes young or disadvantaged artists from the art public, but also from having any exposure and experience of the gallery system. There simply does not exist a support structure of any significance for the visual arts.

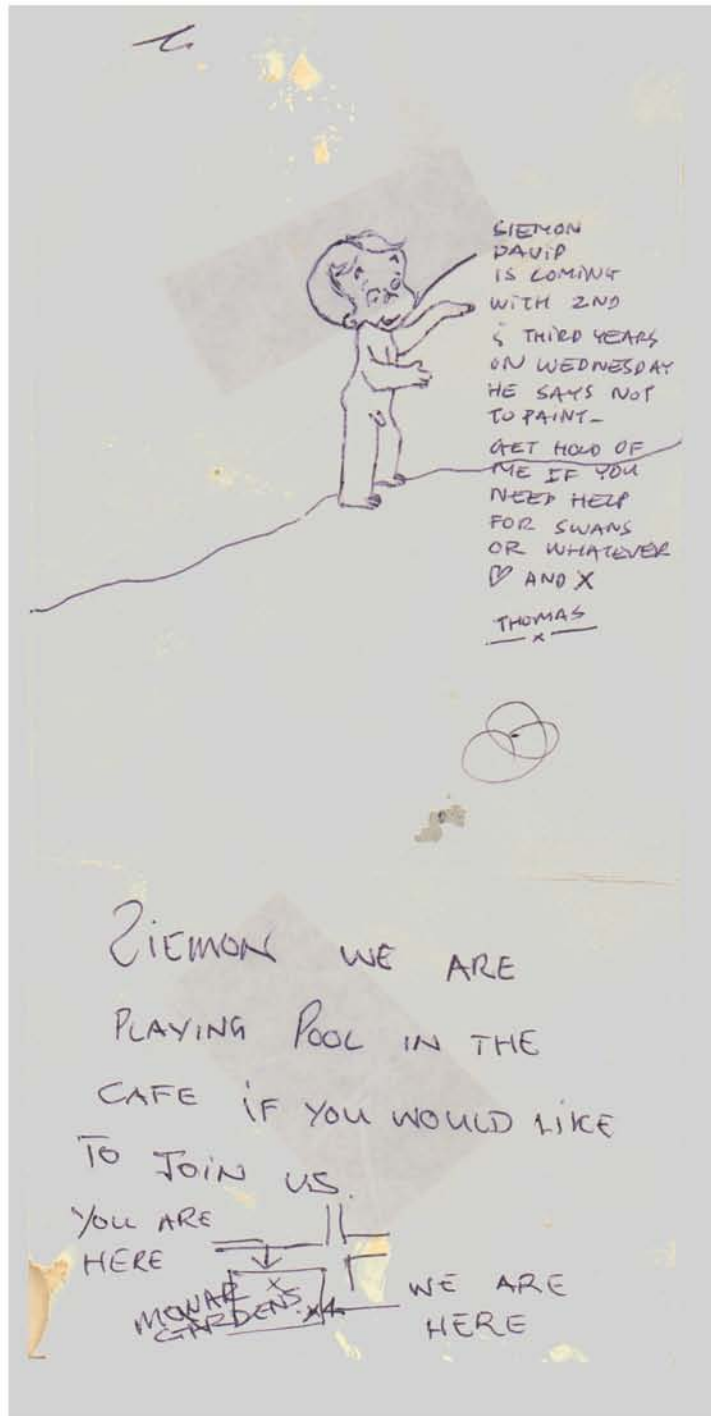
Our venture is by all accounts a modest one, but it does offer the opportunity for an artist to exhibit at no cost to themselves, other than expenses for the opening night and invitations. Last year the gallery hosted twelve exhibitions, including one by the noted critic and artist, Kendell Geers.

The rental costs of the gallery are born by the managing committee, who are co-signers of this proposal. Our request for funding entails the working cost of exhibitions, publicity and basic material needs for the presentation of art works:<sup>40</sup>

Here we asked for much less than in our BAT proposal: R790 a month, and received from the Durban Arts R300 a month for the period of one year. The letter was signed Moe, Barry and Allen.

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<sup>40</sup> Moe, Barry, Allen; Letter to Durban Arts, Feb 9, 1994.



A FLAT internal memorandum, 1994

**S  
W  
A  
N  
S**

**FRI 11 FEB 7:00PM**

**FLAT**

**4 MANOR CRT  
MANSFIELD RD**

S  
W  
A  
N  
S

## **SWANS** ***February 11, 1994***

From the first exhibition in October 1993 until February 1994, we had managed to mount a constant variety of events at the FLAT. With these precedents set and funding from outside sources, we felt an acute need to keep the momentum going. Our principle policy at the FLAT was to allow “anyone to do anything in the space”, and so testing this premise I decided at that time to orchestrate a minimal audio event.

My basic idea was to install large speakers in the gallery, publicize the event, and subject the audience to the loudest, most disturbing music that I could find; in this case, the aggressive band *Swans*. (Hence the title of the exhibition.) Though others in the FLAT, particularly Barry, were opposed to this plan, posters were made and displayed, none the less.

However, about three days before the event a disagreement occurred between Barry and I over the logistics of the evening, and this friction catalyzed a decision to orchestrate our first group event. This conflict in the group was in retrospect positive, for it created the energy for us to explore a new genre of art: performance art (or ‘happenings’). In an e-mail conversation with Barry he described the motivations for *SWANS* in this way:

**Allen:** How did *SWANS* come about?

**Barry:** We came back from the NSA after hanging an exhibition. I picked up a joker card at the gate of the Botanic Gardens. It started raining. I think we were a bit depressed about the show we’d just hung, and:

A: we hadn’t had a show for a while,

B: we wanted to maintain the record breaking amount/run of shows we’d notched up,

C: it was an idea,

D: none of the above.

**Allen:** How did it then develop from there?

**Barry:** We talked about it, then we did it, wait its coming to me... I think it was something like this: “We don’t have anything for next week yet, ohmygod, lets just play music... Let’s just play *SWANS* until everyone leaves. We can’t just play music so let’s have a restaurant. We can just photocopy some food. We can make menus. Then people order, but they don’t know what they’re

getting... I can't write... Jay can write. Yes, good... Well, we can use body parts and play the music very loud... OK... Good let's get to work.<sup>41</sup>

Our collaboration began when we agreed to all work together on a performance for that evening using the working title of *SWANS* as our theme. It was determined that we would build this performance around the original *Swans* noise music. We decided that it would be a multi-faceted event, in which we would each be doing different things around our individual interpretations of the central theme of 'swans'.

A unifying idea, however, developed and this was the notion of converting the 'swan' into a consumable food. This then evolved into the idea to make the FLAT space into a *faux*-restaurant for the evening. Tables and chairs were laid out, with the plan that the audience would enter the space like restaurant patrons and sit down at set tables while the noise played on. In a subtle reference to the common practice of providing refreshment at openings, here 'waiters' served wine to the 'customers'. A 'menu' (the only surviving document of the event) was created by Jay Horsburgh and Barry.

The text for the menu, provided by Horsburgh, was laced with Barry's drawings and diagrams. Formatted to resemble a menu, the content addressed what was more poetic than edible, an example of poetry created through the process of 'cut-ups'. The cover read:

...once having dissected a bird, long (remember) its nautical confirmation: the ease with which every-thing about a ship is mimicked, with the thoracic cage in the form of a hull and the assemblage of the ribs upon the keel, the stem or the ships bow of the breastbone, the scapular girdle where the wing's oar slips in, and the pelvic girdle where the poop erects itself...<sup>42</sup>

Horsburgh, who had just returned from Canada, where he had been living for the last seven years; was introduced to us by his neighbor, Melissa Marrins. Though only twenty years old at the time, he was very well informed about many historical avant-garde movements, and engaged in reading a number of literary texts. He became an active participant in the gallery at this stage. The texts that he brought to our attention on the Dadaists, the Situationists and the writings of the Beat poets among others, proved to be highly influential in the continuing evolution of the FLAT project.

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<sup>41</sup> Barry, Allen; Interview 10, e-mail, cyberspace, Nov 2, 1998.

<sup>42</sup> Horsburgh; *SWANS Menu*, Durban, FLAT, Feb 11, 1994.

Horsburgh, who saw himself as both a writer and an actor, had a particular interest in the work and the literary strategies of William Burroughs. With Barry, he re-visited the surrealist technique of automatic writing and worked with another experimental writing process known as ‘cut-ups’.

Burroughs, in an essay titled, *The Cut-up Method of Brion Gysin* speaks not only about the cut-up method, but also its historical precedents with the Surrealists. He describes what may be seen as its birth in performance:

At a Surrealist rally in the 1920s, Tristan Tzara, the man from nowhere, proposed to create a poem on the spot by pulling words out of a hat. A riot ensued and wrecked the theater. Andre Breton expelled Tzara from the movement and ground the ‘cut-ups’ on the Freudian couch.<sup>43</sup>

He goes on to follow the historical development for the ‘cut-up’, and to assert that this seemingly random method results not in ‘nonsense’, but rather in some new ‘meaning’. He writes about Brion Gysin, an artist working in the late 50s:

In the summer of 1959, Brion Gysin, painter and writer, cut newspaper articles into sections and rearranged the sections at random. ‘Minutes to Go’ resulted from this initial cut up experiment. ‘Minutes to Go’ contains unedited unchanged cut-ups emerging a quite coherent meaningful prose.<sup>44</sup>

The connection between collage and cut-ups is here noted, and this is important when one considers the use of ‘cut-up’ as a process that can operate across media. At the FLAT, artists had for sometime engaged in various practices that employed collage of **visual** images. Marrins had in her work, for example brought Madonna and Venus together with her own contemporary image. De Menezes had cut up found logos and signs from an ordinary phone book. In both, images were isolated and recombined to create new meanings.

But it was the introduction of the ‘cut-up’ as a literary tool that brought even more radical possibilities to the FLAT. This was important not only in the ‘literary’ works such as the *SWANS Menu*, but in the application to later sound material. Many of the sampled sound works that were to follow were created with variations on this basic ‘cut-up’ technique.

Burroughs addresses the connection between collage and ‘cut-ups’:

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<sup>43</sup> William Burroughs; ‘The Cut-up Method of Brion Gyson’, *Burroughs, Gysin & Throbbing Gristle*, RESEARCH, # 4/5, San Francisco, Vale & Juno, 1983.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*



# Menu For SWANS



(...once having dissected a bird, long (remember) its nautical confirmation: the ease with which everything about a ship is mimicked, with the thoracic cage in the form of a hull and the assemblage of the ribs upon the keel, the stem or the ship's bow of the breastbone, the scapular girdle where the wing's oar slips in, and the pelvic girdle where the poop erects itself...)

breakFAST

The spell recited over a certain object, subjected to the cause-to-be-split ritual, and left in a hidden part of the forest to lie there

SWANS FIRST MEAL:

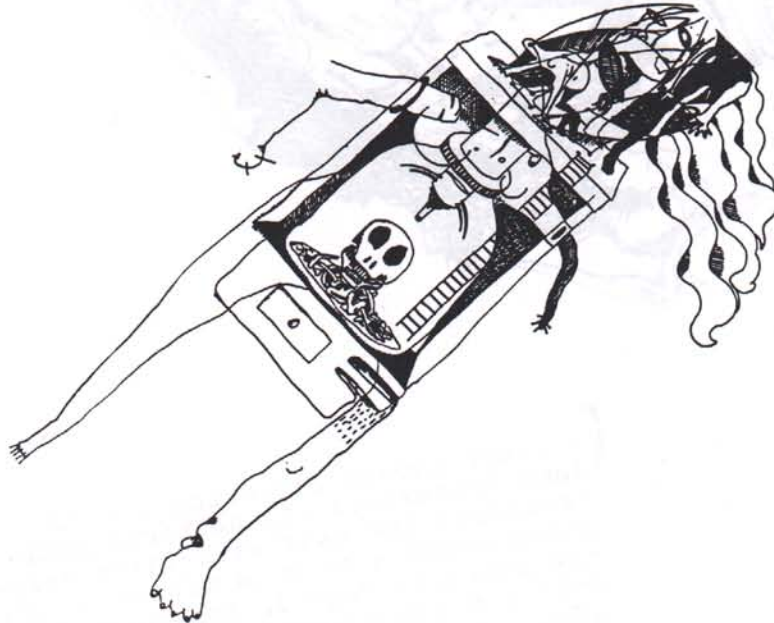
Nothing remains of it now but the crypt, into which Theodore has probably taken you, for Gilbert burned all the rest

this pleasant opener is perfect for the fatigued or dietary. while very cheap, it seems so weightless to us that, when seen against the sun, it looks as if it will burst into flames

SWANS SECOND:

And even before my brain, lingering in cogitation over when things happened and what they had looked like, had reassembled the circumstances sufficiently to identify the room, it, my body, would recall in succession the style of the bed, the position of the doors...whether there was a assage outside, what I had in my mind when I went to sleep and what I found when I awoke

an excellent choice for all, affordable, and it carries secretly within it the bloods hottest fever



SWANS THIRD:

There is still the memory of the day to come, the memory of atrocious adventures in a fog fit for a changed man

the chefs choice. served with the finest white wine and garnished with the delicate muscles of swans

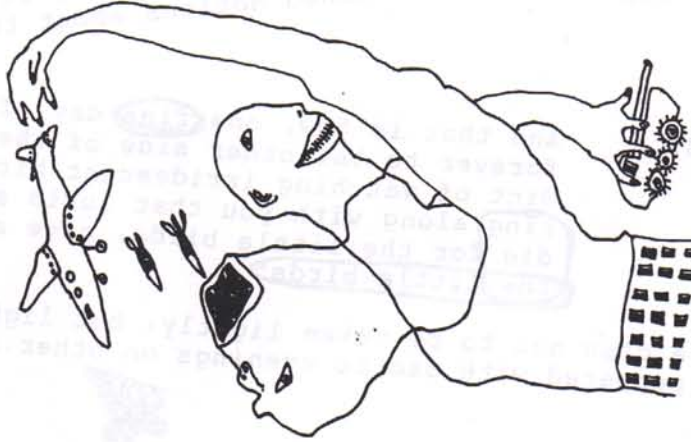
LUNCH

A supernatural sanction for enforcing repayment of a gift

SWANS FOURTH:

..who, in her curiosity to know what <sup>the</sup> marker indicated had begun to read the clinical account of these pains, and was violently sobbing now thAT it was a question of a prototype patient with whom she was unacquainted

swans noontime speciality. highly recommended for the discerning pallette



SWANS FIFTH MEAL:

Its memory, the composite memory of its ribs, its knees, its shoulder blades, offered it a whole series of rooms in which it had at one time or another slept, while unseen rooms whirled around it in the dark.

a true lunch known to be more nocturnal to humankind than is the great night of clear dreaming wherein the dreams logic operates

SWANS SIXTH:



He is so perfectly alone that he is excepted from the whole. He watches the spines of books becoming rounded. He listens to the music that shines his shoes. At noon, sometimes he smiles twelve times. Onto all his sensations he slips the handcuffs of a smile

a large meal, price negotiable, served with a brevity of wings

DINN?ER  
A bond of souls, because the thing itself has a soul....This food, these goods give a magical hold over you...Finally, the thing given is not inert.

SWANS SEVENTH:

But still, what a silly exam! I would have got through it if I had to, if it were not for that little history question. How lucky I was not a candidate.

a wonderful introduction to a romantic evening. lovers, you'll love it. a little more expensive, it manages to defy all the established notions about thermo-dynamics

SWANS EIGHTH EATS:

And that is how, one fine day, I crossed over forever to the other side of the rainbow by dint of watching iridescent birds...I reuse to sing along with you that lurid song: "We die for the little birds, give a feast to the little birds"

a dish not to be taken lightly, but lightly peppered with exotic evenings on other shores

SWANS LAST MEAL:

This desert is a fake. The shadows I dig let colours show through like so many useless secrets. I will, they say, see is hear. Silence as far as as I will, they see is the keyboard that starts with these Twenty fingers that are not "consummate", as one well statured patron described this remarkable dish. bought at a high but not uncommon price, you'll soar to immense summits of satisfaction, knowing that you've left in your airy path the scandal of terrestrial seasons that know combustion but no grace. a must.



FIN.

The cut up method brings to writers the collage, which has been used by painters for fifty years. You cannot will spontaneity. But you can introduce the unpredictable, spontaneous factor with a pair of scissors.<sup>45</sup>

The power of the 'cut-up', however, goes beyond its assertion as a new process and even its claim to be a tool for accessing new meanings. There was implicit in its methodology (or lack of one) something that seemed resonant with the spirit of the FLAT. Indeed, for Tzara, this process speaks to the idea of 'anti-mastery' and hints at some almost political egalitarianism; an art for everyone as Burroughs points out.

Tzara said. "Poetry is for everyone." Cut-ups are for everyone. Anybody can make cut-ups. It is experimental in the sense of being 'something to do'. Right here write now. Not something to talk and argue about.<sup>46</sup>

For the *SWANS* performance, Barry, Moe and I dressed as waiters in tuxedos and offered the audience/diners the 'cut-up' menu. When each made a selection, we then brought them photostatted, cut-out body parts. These 'starters' included hearts, lungs, and kidneys, etc. The chef's specialty was a concoction made up of a plate of chains (posing as pasta) and a show-room dummy dressed like a cooked pig. The disturbing sounds of *Swans* created an audio equivalent to the implicit violence of this 'cannibalistic' event. Later in the evening, in keeping with the disjointed unpredictable nature of the evening *Moonlight* in an impromptu participatory act changed the 'sound track'. Barry recalled:

*Moonlight* arrived late in the running with a jazz cassette and insisted on playing it, the evening had acquired somewhat aggressive overtones, and I think this helped to dissipate the energy in quite a positive way, but this could be a substance induced delusion.<sup>47</sup>

Meanwhile, Horsburgh and Yvette De Bruin, an artist visiting from Pretoria, sat in opposite corners of the room facing each other. Jay, half-naked, had combed peanut butter through his hair, while De Bruin was dressed as a nurse. Above Horsburgh's head hung a Vermeer painting and a hot bulb. The heat from the bulb made the peanut butter burn and smell. De Bruin, in contrast, was cooled by a small fan that steadily blew air. Each sat silent and still for the entire

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<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

<sup>47</sup> Barry, Allen; Interview 10, e-mail, cyberspace, Nov 2, 1998.

‘performance’. It was as if scenes from different plays had been ‘cut-up’ and collaged; presented simultaneously in order that they might collide and therefore create a new narrative.

All at the same time, wine was consumed, viewers were served (with ‘images’), two performers engaged in some private acts unmindful of the audience, and a deafening music roared. In an assault on the senses, these combined to create a kind of ‘total’ experience.

In the book, *Total Art - Environments, Happenings and Performance*, Adrian Henri discusses the importance of Richard Wagner’s idea of *Gesamtkunstwerk*, or ‘total art work’

Such a work like one of Wagner’s music-dramas, sets out to dominate, even overwhelm, flooding the spectator/hearer with sensory impressions of different kinds. It is not meant as information but as an experience.<sup>48</sup>

Writing about the redefinition of ‘theatricality’ in installation and the happenings/performances of the 1960’s, Nicholas de Oliveira, Nicola Oxley and Michael Petry also make reference to Richard Wagner’s notion of *Gesamtkunstwerk*. They point to the connection between these contemporary art forms and his ideal of some creative synthesis of poetry and music. However, though they locate the roots of contemporary installation/performance within the, “visual and dynamic framework of the operatic stage” articulated by Wagner; they seem to regard his conception as incomplete and the term “theatrical” as inadequate. Instead they employ the term “carnival”, a notion explored in some depth by the Russian Linguist Mikhail Bakhtin.

Linguist, Julia Kristeva in the context of an essay on Bakhtin, spoke to this conception of the ‘theatrical’ that spills out of the stage. And defines the carnival as:

a spectacle, but without a stage; a game, but also a daily undertaking...The scene of the carnival, where there is no stage, no ‘theater, is thus both stage and life, game and dream, discourse and spectacle.<sup>49</sup>

Indeed, the multi-faceted aspect of the *SWANS* event, with several actions going on at once, was not unlike a three-ring circus. Though operating as a total sensory event, the idea of the ‘carnival’ perhaps provided a more appropriate model than the ‘staged’ opera, in which to describe such examples of performances that operated outside the domains of conventional theater.

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<sup>48</sup> Adrian Henri; *Total Art - Environments, Happenings and Performance*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1974.

<sup>49</sup> Oxley, Perry, de Olivera; *Installation Art*, London, Thames & Hudson, 1994. p. 8.

Bakhtin's description of the carnival and his explorations of the 'carnavalesque' define an essential aspect as being what he called 'the material bodily principle' which he says is connected to 'grotesque realism'. Michael Gardiner in his seminal book on Bakhtin elaborates by saying:

This can be characterized as the incorporation of images depicting the material functions of the human body (eating drinking, defecation, copulation) into cultural or artistic texts.<sup>50</sup>

The *SWANS* performance, with its multi levels of experience, spoke to the intentions of 'total theater'. Divergent as were the themes explored, all were unified in the locus of 'the body': The sounds and smells, the consumption of wine and 'food', the effects of heat and cool, the visceral and the assaultive.

Meijer in her *Art Beat* column described the event as "a graphic expose of the consumption of art, food and prosthetics."<sup>51</sup> While Therese Owen, writing for the *Weekly Mail*, addressed the way in which the FLAT sought to engage with its viewers in a manner that was not passive; and captured the pandemonium of the evening:

There is a world going on underground, or in the studio flat belonging to Ledelle Moe to be more precise. Ledelle Moe together with fellow artists and best friends Siemon Allen and Thomas Barry have been holding some interesting and at times bizarre exhibits and there are no restrictions or boundaries in the gallery. People drink red wine, examine the art - which sometimes examines them - and generally a good time is had by all. The FLAT Gallery has become popular amongst the younger art crowd and is definitely working as an alternative to the more established galleries.<sup>52</sup>

The production of *SWANS* affirmed what would become now at the FLAT, a move away from the conventional presentation of sculpture or painting. The wall between viewer and performers fell, and it was in some ways indicative of our efforts to also collapse the barriers between our lives and our art. In the work that followed soon after this watershed event we continued to explore 'life as art' and to question the formal restriction of making studio-based work.

In conversation with Barry and then with Moe, each recalled the events:

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<sup>50</sup> Michael Gardiner; *The Dialogics of Critique - Bakhtin and the Theory of Ideology*, London, Routledge, 1992. p. 47.

<sup>51</sup> Marianne Miejer; Art Beat, *The Daily News Tonight*, Durban, Feb 18, 1994.

<sup>52</sup> Therese Owen; *The Weekly Mail*, Johannesburg, Feb 18, 1994.

**Allen:** What do you remember about the *SWANS* performance?

**Barry:** The playing of *Swans* only (except for Moonlight's cassette). Yvette in a green dress with a green wig. We (J S T) ran the restaurant (I think we even got tables from Sculpture) dishing up the photocopies randomly based on what people ordered, there was also the legs and a long chain billed spaghetti, and some vegetables. Do you have a copy of the menu? You'll find some answers in there.

**Allen:** Can you talk about the menu you and Jay compiled?

**Barry:** Some of the images came out of my red book. I can't remember exactly, maybe under hypnosis, possibly also a book Jay was reading at the time & some of his writing.<sup>53</sup>

**Moe:** *SWANS* was this impromptu evening. The name came from an album that Siemon played at the event, the entire evening. It was this hectic, grinding music. Between Jay, Thomas, myself and Siemon we organised this funky old pool table with some weird-arse, looking mannequin. It was some sort of a dinner-party environment where people would sit down as though they were going to have dinner at this strange table.

**Allen:** Well, we converted the FLAT into a *faux*-restaurant.

**Moe:** So say you are looking at the FLAT, there was this table with a number of chairs. Everyone [the audience] was seated and there was this noise going on. And in the right hand corner was Jay on a chair. And in the left hand corner opposite Jay was Thomas' friend from Pretoria, Yvette, in a nurses outfit. There was a dialogue between the two of them. And Jay had combed peanut butter into his hair in this stylized kind of...style. So we put a light on him which started baking the peanut butter making it smell. Right next to him was a picture of a Vermeer painting, of the woman pouring the milk. He was wearing the white like chef outfit. Yvette was in a nurse's outfit with a fan blowing on her. What it meant, nobody really knew....

**Allen:** They were like ornaments in the exhibition. They just sat there quietly while everybody engaged... It was like a participatory event where the whole FLAT was arranged like a restaurant. You would sit down and get a menu and you would be served wine like in a restaurant (or at an opening). You were then asked what you would like to choose from the menu, which was designed by Jay and Thomas... Somebody would choose for example number three and we would bring out prosthetics and weird stuff. Stuff that looked like food - photocopies of food. It was a really crazy event. The whole time there was this incredible noise [*Swans*]. Everyone got really drunk... We were all dressed up in tuxedos as waiters....

**Moe:** That was another thing, we really got dressed up for it. I think that night Thomas wore a dress for the event.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> Barry, Allen; Interview 10, e-mail, cyberspace, Nov 2, 1998.

<sup>54</sup> MacKenny, Moe, Buster, Allen; Interview 9, Washington, Aug 24, 1998.



***THE MIRACLE FILTER***  
***Audio Recordings (Tapes 6 - 11)***  
***February – April 1994***

The FLAT recordings until now had all been straightforward unaltered audio-cassettes documenting social interactions at the gallery. There was little, if no manipulation of either the tape (physically) or the content being recorded, until the recording of the *Miracle Filter* series.

**Horsburgh:** [Peter Styversant] founded New York in 1653. King-size, rich choice tobaccos, and the miracle filter, make Peter Styvesant the international passport to smoking pleasure.<sup>55</sup>

“Miracle Filter”, was a phrase taken from a box of *Peter Styvesant* cigarettes which described the quality of their filters. The choosing of this phrase was in a sense, a word play on the notion of the ‘filter’. The tape-deck used for our recordings was then referred to as the ‘miracle filter’, in that it ‘filtered’ out all our ‘jargon’.

On the evening of this first recording, Barry, Horsburgh, and I were sitting around at the FLAT. I mentioned a game that a friend, Kearn Bamber and I used to play. We would take a text and read it in a tone or voice that was divorced from the content of the text. For example – one would adopt an angry voice while describing the mechanics of a car engine. In this way the signifying voice would be out of phase with the signifying text. The secret to the game was to try and sound as serious as possible; to make one’s words seem believable.

With what, for me, had been a rather arbitrary reference to the game; Horsburgh hurriedly got the tape-recorder and a pile of books. We passed out the books randomly and began to read arbitrarily in a ‘conversational tone’. As Horsburgh had trained to be an actor, he slipped into the mode with greatest ease, sounding authentic yet irrational. But all three of us participated, and as each individual spoke, our readings began to develop into ‘conversations’. Amongst us, an audio *exquisite corpse* materialized.

**Horsburgh:** Thomas! Every passenger of oriental traditional medicine

**Barry:** was a failure. And because of German counter attacks

**Horsburgh:** I discovered ash.

- Barry:** If only an operation may be explained by the mistakes made in planning the cases  
**Allen:** or by use of Matisse cut-outs.
- Barry:** What do we know? The reasons they left  
**Horsburgh:** the three kinds of bladder  
**Allen:** was to continue working as a ticket examiner  
**Horsburgh:** toward the discharge of toxins  
**Allen:** on trains.<sup>56</sup>

Five tapes were recorded with this process, and during the course of making these audio-tapes we included such improvisations as the insertion of Afrikaans and mock arguments. Significant was the fact that we used old books as sources for our ‘scripts’.

In writings for the *Situationist International* publication, French writer, Guy Debord, the leader of the Situationist movement, described the revival of ‘bad books’ to produce a new kind of ‘literature’. He distinguished this practice from that of the Surrealists ‘automatic writing’ and spoke to the idea of ‘unintentional participation’ of those authors whose words were appropriated.

The first visible consequences of a widespread use of détournement, apart from its intrinsic propaganda powers, will be the revival of a multitude of bad books, and thus the extensive (unintentional) participation of their unknown authors; an increasingly extensive transformation of sentences or plastic works that happen to be in fashion: and above all an ease of production far surpassing in quantity, variety and quality the automatic writing that has bored us so much.<sup>57</sup>

At that time, Horsburgh had introduced the group to the writings of Debord, and we regarded our game at that time as an act of détournement. Defined by Guy Debord in his writings for the *Internationale Situationniste #3*, détournement was:

...the reuse of preexisting artistic elements in a new ensemble. The two fundamental laws of détournement are the loss of importance of each détourned autonomous element - which may go so far as to lose its original sense completely - and at the same time the organization of another meaningful ensemble that confers on each element its new scope and effect.

...practical because it is so easy to use.<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> Horsburgh, Barry, Allen, Matoti; ‘The Real Miracle Filter’, *Flat Recordings*, Tape 10, Durban, FLAT, Apr 1994.

<sup>56</sup> Horsburgh, Barry, Allen; ‘Miracle Filter 2’, *FLAT Recordings*, Tape 6, Durban, FLAT, Feb-Apr 1994.

<sup>57</sup> Guy Debord, Gil Wolman; ‘Methods of Détournement’ (1956), *Situationist International – Anthology*, Venice, Bureau of Public Secrets, 1981, p. 9.

<sup>58</sup> Guy Debord; ‘Détournement as Negation and Prelude’ (1959), *Situationist International – Anthology*, 1981, p.55.

***EXCERPTS from THE  
MIRACLE FILTER  
February – April, 1994***

*The first four tapes are constructed by Horsburgh (H), Barry (B) and myself (A).*

***MIRACLE FILTER 2  
Recording (Tape 6)***

**H:** Thomas, every passenger of oriental traditional medicine  
**B:** was a failure. And because of German counter attacks  
**H:** I discovered an ash.  
**B:** If only an operation may be explained by the mistakes made in planning the cases  
**A:** or by use of Matisse cut-outs.

**H:** Stalin [...] with his top officers  
**B:** causing the Soviet headquarters to give up using [...] which I suppose is similar  
**H:** to the illness that the Southern Chinese consume themselves with in the [...] parts of his body.  
**B:** The inadequate numbers of the heavy support of weapons, notably tanks and artillery were used for exploiting success  
**H:** and led to the advent of Buddhism in China.  
**B:** Also, an unfortunate consequence of the operation.  
**H:** Like lightened salvation!  
**B:** Exactly!

**H:** In essence the teachings are about man and his dependency on  
**B:** the Soviet Defensive in the South [...]  
**H:** which is nothing other than the voice of nature tied down to the German army group  
**H:** and they had the last word for the reverses at the front. Stalin had dealt mercilessly with his top offices.  
**B:** The Soviet forces disrupted this plan and [...] set free their  
**H:** twenty-two thousand aircraft and up to twenty thousand tanks

**A:** to work on the docks for a year to save money.  
**H:** The missing word is there engraved in stone and fused in glass.  
**B:** The unsuccessful actions  
**H:** of the figures of self  
**B:** was another reason  
**H:** why the autonomic nervous system under the direction of the triple [...] diffuse organ...

**B:** What do we know? The reasons they left  
**H:** the three kinds of bladder  
**A:** was to continue working as a ticket examiner  
**H:** toward the discharge of toxins  
**A:** on trains.

**B:** The man who blows [dealt] can actually  
**H:** call it back to the sweat glands  
**A:** reflected in garish pastel images  
**B:** and an auxiliary blow  
**H:** to subdue the pain.

**B:** And there was nothing with which to replace them  
**H:** when faced with a particularly painful localised pressure point all life on planet earth breaks down.  
**B:** The defenders began to feel the shortage of glass,  
**H:** air and food  
**A:** and gravel-chips. And gravel-chips were leading to the work of road gangs imbedded in the resin block  
**B:** growing pressure  
**H:** in the human metabolism  
**A:** witnessed many times before took on a new meaning.  
**H:** This helpful advice still remains  
**A:** making sculpture rather than functional objects.

**H:** But only he[...] in the trunk  
**B:** had taken globalisation  
**H:** bug-eyed.  
**A:** All of this  
**B:** wealth of military equipment [...] not only based on the size of the production in the mountains  
**H:** but on tracing this scar of the ears

**A:** creates a supernatural aura that demands a religious silence  
**B:** to meet the needs of  
**A:** post-medieval  
**H:** sexual sensitivity.

**B:** In those great times the fur in the front and the rear was revealed  
**H:** to the internal government's massage.  
**B:** The rear did more than supply the front  
**H:** and pressed the eyeballs together toward the inside.  
**B:** It inspired the front with lofty ideas  
**H:** and all of these were meant to receive the widest publicity [...]

**H:** Lack of urine flow  
**A:** Shirtless in the reaction  
**H:** Considerable vulnerability  
**A:** to the defined attitude of swelling bellies.

**B:** Electricity  
**H:** caused ceaseless laughter,  
**B:** mass production,  
**H:** continuous anger,  
**A:** a pair of old Lebanese,  
**H:** perpetual frowns on the mouths of swords

**H:** Bad breath belonging to the absence of feeling and hands  
**B:** or 100 railway stations

**A:** Scoring projectors, psychedelic  
**H:** army force  
**B:** to win the war with a lightning stroke  
**A:** or smoking a big cigar.

**B:** While these forces were strong enough to attack  
**H:** Buddhism in Europe.

**B:** Preserve the secret of  
**H:** the seat of spiritual faculties  
**B:** in the new offensive.  
**H:** This was the heart of insufficient circulation  
**B:** as these quotations show.

**H:** All the diseases of the eye  
**A:** have given up some press-club issues.

**B:** However Stalin, instead of a whole series of local offenses,  
**A:** was excruciatingly ambivalent about both his fame and his physical attractiveness.  
**B:** These were the main aims which governed his decisions.  
**A:** He had girl's pounding on his bedroom door all night  
**B:** in the first days of the offensive. OK.  
**A:** He did rather encourage this behavior to a certain extent.

**H:** Anglo-phones  
**B:** experience all sorts of killings.  
**A:** Superfluous!  
**H:** What is the function of this organ?  
**A:** To move back to Cambridge!

**B:** Hy het verwys na die sware leenskap van 1878 op die ramp uitgesak het en toegeskryf aan die groot skeepse [...]  
**H:** all serve chronic indigestion  
**B:** van die Republiek is nooit om die Volke geskiet nie  
**H:** and alone it ensures the chemical transformation of food and its absorption.

**H:** Thomas, you are full of shit! When a shipwrecked man is found clinging barely alive to flodsam, any tender loving care or pampering is sure to terminate him.  
**B:** By [...] het Moshesh  
**H:** Ingelepe!? The initial trial is thus followed by [...] where all upper hands are put to the test!  
**B:** Een keer het die Basuto opperhoof [...] wat hy het gese. Besef jy Venter dat jy op hierdie oomblik in volle en [...] kan maar besluit omgestaan op sy borsel en dood en [...] gese: Hier staan ek, Moshesh  
**H:** in Hawaii  
**B:** Neem jou assegai en steek hom deur hierdie hart van my [...] Die barbar het die wit man se houding bewonder en sy [...] afgesien  
**H:** for the repopulation of enzymes.  
**B:** Well exactly! So what's the point here?

**B:** From whatever angle we look at these comment they manage to presume  
**H:** the highest category.  
**A:** But,  
**B:** it's a Miracle Filter.

**MIRACLE FILTER 3**  
*Recording (Tape 7)*

**B:** I wouldn't be surprised if I died like a boxer.

**A:** I have friends!  
**B:** Five or six new ones show up every week.  
**H:** What is striking about this story?

**A:** Excuse me, I was probably the first English hit. OK!

**H:** You are the most advanced stage of the liver, Siemon. You are diseased!  
**A:** I was simply affected by Brown's colleagues.  
**B:** Unless you are initiated.

**A:** Satanist!  
**H:** Satanist? The complicated symbolism of expression is remarkably similar to nakedness. Look! Ok, listen. To be naked is to be oneself.  
**B:** That's a personal thing.  
**H:** No, to be nude is to be seen naked by others and yet not be recognizable.  
**B:** It's a personal thing.  
**H:** It's a naked body!  
**B:** I like to go with four people at once.

**H:** You also like to go with a painting that has been sent as a present from the Grand Duke of Florence to the King of France.  
**B:** Who I know can handle the element of danger.

**H:** Thomas, compare the expressions of these two women. Compare the expressions of these women.  
**B:** I'm always hoping that I am making things look better. I never set out to destroy anything.  
**H:** The absurdity of your male flattery reached its peak... Well the absurdity of this male flattery reached its peak in the public academic art of the nineteenth century. Many state

of business discussed in paintings like this.  
**B:** Ja, but they don't meet the stereotype of a drop-out.  
**H:** Because when one of them felt he had been unwitting he looked up in consolation. No thanks!

**MIRACLE FILTER 4**  
*Recording (Tape 8)*

**H:** I have a question. Is the wall often presented as a myth?  
**B:** No, it's a type of mental disorder marked by delusion.  
**H:** OK, granted that, does graffiti art try again and again to break through the wall; and open its plaster to give you a panoramic view?

**B:** No, it's a natural method of sexual intercourse between males.  
**H:** No Thomas, the phenomenon of the wall exercises a fascination for the art, while as a source of inspiration.

**A:** I cannot deny, it was my finger.  
**H:** The finger of the past no longer exists as it once did.  
**A:** It's gone?  
**H:** The allegorical figure becomes a portrait of a girl. Your finger is behind bullet-proof perspex, Siemon!

**A:** Bursting with sexual energy... but plagued by bad skin!

**MIRACLE FILTER - "LOVE & MONEY"**  
*Recording (Tape 9)*

**H:** Plots of ground in dying Christianity. Colours of my enemies.  
**B:** I am starting to loose you. Can I just respond?  
**H:** OK, go ahead.  
**B:** The spirit of pathological condition and inability to avoid using certain drugs.  
**H:** Sweet zealous contemplation.  
**A:** I agree. Shall we now partake in actions that we have so wholeheartedly waited for?

**H:** Its like making a diebag.  
**B:** That's right.

**H:** Dreams are the conventions of chance  
**B:** a type of galvanometer.  
**A:** We have been soiled by unknown substances and activities.

**A:** I propose a toast...  
**H:** To swallows in old bridesmaid's clothes...  
**A:** No...no...no... We will never match the perfection of the mass-produced.  
**H:** We will only be the webs and pins in the splits of the eye.

**THE REAL MIRACLE FILTER**  
*Recording (Tape 10)*

*This is the fifth tape in Miracle Filter series. Although called the "Real Miracle Filter" it does not feature any read text as performed in the earlier tapes (6 to 9), rather it consists of general social interaction Samkelo Matoti, Aliza Levi and Tamlyn Martin join Barry, Horsburgh and Allen in conversation at the FLAT. With Brian Eno's "Music for Airports" as a backdrop, a gentle mood is littered with discussions about "Paris-Texas", Waco-Texas, the "raisin-bun theory" and other topics. The section below is quite interesting only because the Miracle Filter tape that followed this one is called "Heaven" (Tape 11).*

**H:** There was this guy in New York, in 1920, who called himself God. He was this black preacher living in Harlem. He called himself God and his headquarters "Heaven".  
**M:** I think its true.  
**B:** Imagine if he really was God.  
**H:** He was an absolute ruthless [...] monger and he had this 8-block commune which he called "heaven"  
**M:** [...] monger! What did he do, man?

**H:** He would extort everyone in the neighborhood and say: "Hay God's getting itchy."  
**M:** Crazy!  
**H:** Ja, I think he was a little off. After dinner every night they would have wild orgies in "Heaven". All of the angels would get stripped down first and that was when everyone would get drunk and would have sex.  
**M:** So they reckoned they were in Heaven?  
**H:** Ja and people would send in letters addressing them to God, Harlem, NY. And they would get to him.  
**B:** And what happened?  
**H:** I think he might have killed someone.  
**M:** I think it is quite an interesting story that... But what do you think about people with influence like that?  
**H:** A lot of those things are built around personality. The cult of personality... About cultivating an ego which sustains itself.

*Here Barry, Levi, Matoti, Martin and Horsburgh discuss going through keyholes in time. This is also the last track on the first FLAT CD compilation.*

**B:** ...what each song means though because the whole tradition is really being lost. As much as the recording is actually capturing the tradition, it actually signifies the...  
**H:** disintegration.  
**B:** Ja, the disintegration.  
**M:** Fuck. Did you hear stories about black magic?  
**H:** Tell us about some.  
**L:** Ja, tell us some stories.  
**M:** You know things about witchcraft? It is very strange that people can [...].  
**TM:** What kind of things are you thinking of?  
**M:** Well like... actual realities that people can go through holes. Keyholes.  
**H:** Ja, I've heard of that.  
**M:** You know, like vanish... vanish in front of the eyes of the people.  
**L:** So do you believe them?  
**M:** Ja... and I think I've seen a ghost. It's strange.

**H:** Ja I have to, when did you see a ghost?

**M:** A few years ago. It was at night. We were sitting at my dad's place. And there was this huge mountain. There was this light. I know that... because I didn't confront the whole situation...

**L:** [...] go into that walk.

**M:** What I've heard from people in very distant places. Apparently these guys were ready for circumcision... This dude told me it was like this sun like shoes that dragged him on the ground. It was really like it was going after him...

**L:** There is such a fine line between what people call hallucination... and reality.

**M:** I don't think so Aliza...

*At this point Barry puts on the "Kenya and Tanzanian Witchcraft & Ritual Music" CD and begins to read from the CD cover. Horsburgh, reading from a cigarette box, joins in and another "Miracle Filter" commences. Sections of this recording also appear on FLAT CD 1. Regular conversation continues after a few minutes, however some texts are read randomly throughout the entire interaction.*

**B:** The illnesses are expelled from the bodies in a dramatic finale heard here

**H:** and founded New York in 1653. King-size, rich choice tobaccos, and the miracle filter, make Peter Styvesant the international passport to smoking pleasure.

**B:** The initiation of a Taita girl into the tribe includes a secret ritual at night, during which the girl expects to be eaten alive by an animal in front of the elders; she has been led to believe that her remains will be reassembled at dawn by sacred crows who come down from the Taita hills. In the morning, the uninitiated are shown the girl's "remains", which are simply bones that the elders have thrown out during the night after feasting. Thus is the mystery of the ceremony

kept alive through generations. The "animal" is very realistic: as "secret" songs are sung, an elder, dressed up in skins and chained to a man, crawls along the ground and approaches the terrified girl. An instrument, which is supposed to sound like the hungry animal thirsting after the flesh of the initiate, is played by another elder hidden behind a blanket in the gloom of the hut. The elder rubs his fingers up and down a stick resting upon a pot which has a skin drawn tightly across it: the vibrations that result produce a sinister tone. The Mwari rite has now almost entirely died out.

**H:** Thomas, where is that from?

**B:** In a way the true function is still there. But that doesn't mean that its not working - that the function isn't happening. Because even if it were happening, you wouldn't know. You can take a rugby ball if you don't know what it is supposed to do. You don't know what you supposed to do with it and you can use it for the wrong reasons.

**M:** Thomas, do you know when you are going to get married?

**B:** No, never.

**M:** Don't you ever think about that?

**B:** No, I don't really think about marriage.

**M:** Do you know when you are going to get what you want - what you have chosen as your destiny?

**B:** Probably after death.

**M:** Because you seem like this whole certain creature.

**B:** Do you know what "umkundwabenta" means?

**M:** What?

**B:** *Umkundwabena*. It's "dog-face", "dog hair". What is that? What is your perception of it?

**M:** *Othlogo genjani*...

**B:** What is your perception? What does it mean to you? It means "the bare-footed one". It's the spirit of the city. It's the spirit of the city.

**M:** You can call it like in many ways.

**B:** You can call it anything. I know that but what does it mean to you? It's the one with the ragged clothes.

**M:** Ragged clothes?

**B:** Ja.

**M:** Hay, have you seen that dude.

**B:** name... I've given him a name... He's the man who lives in himself.

**M:** Have you seen that dude? Have you spoken to him?

**B:** Ja, he keeps a dead cat around. Its so that the lizards don't crawl into his body when he is sleeping.

**M:** He eats raw eggs.

**B:** He lives in himself. He doesn't need the city. He doesn't need anything. All he needs is himself.

**M:** It's strange. The other day I met him and he can't feel any pain you know. He's got like this ring stuck onto his finger. And the rest of his finger is swollen. It seems sore, painful. But he's stuck into that.

**B:** Because it doesn't matter.

**M:** But to me, to my eyes...

**B:** Because you are on the one side of reality and he is on the other side of reality. You can't understand his reality and he can't understand your reality because you are too removed, you are too far away.

**M:** But still...

**B:** When he gets hungry and you get hungry, he doesn't eat food.

**M:** [...] He thinks of himself as these bells above, from the bible...

**B:** He lives in himself.

**M:** No, I'm talking in terms of how he goes about...

**B:** He's our shadow.

**M:** Our shadow. To me he's like you.

**B:** Yes. But the fact is that you still recognize him apart from everyone else.

**M:** To me, he is like that dude I saw in Hillbrow. Like something that is not supposed to exist within my circles.

**B:** Because he lives in himself. He is his own entity. He needn't exist for us. But he

also doesn't need us to exist. He's removed.

*This section appears on FLAT CD 1*

**H:** I had to get rid of that idea that haunted me all the time. Why didn't I kill bed-bur the very day that we had doubts about that ugly game he was playing. Starting from that point I argued with myself: why do you have the right to kill? My conclusion was that end justified means. My end was to make a successful break. Stretched out between the bow and the mast and I slept and slept and slept and slept and slept and slept and slept.

**B:** Isn't anything more important?

**H:** I slept and slept and slept towards the sea under my fingers. I slept and slept and slept and slept on the surface where the river met. And I slept in the middle and it was strong and I slept like a big bruise.

**B:** Shoot low with the matches. Pushing them idly into powerful patterns with their long fingers and watched a beautiful mouth pushed up...

**H:** And I slept and slept and slept and slept and slept into a stiff quart of rum and a sky sail in a jib. And I slept into the bows in the name of God. And I slept and slept and slept and slept and slept.

**B:** Not savagely?

**H:** No, the flood tide lasted six hours.

#### **THE MIRACLE FILTER – HEAVEN** **Recording (Tape 11)**

*This is the sixth tape in the Miracle Filter series. This cassette consists of mainly ad-libbed free speech and indeed is the most confident and focused of all the tapes. But then again it does mark a shift in the process and therefor it can also be seen as a transitional recording. Here, Horsburgh takes on the persona of God and conversations between Eve,*

*Gabriel and Michael Landon take place. Extracts found on FLAT CD 1.*

**A:** God, is that you?  
**H:** Er... yea, who's this? Who is it?  
**A:** Its me, Eve.  
**H:** Eve? Oh, what are you doing?  
**A:** Oh, I'm just hanging around.  
**H:** I think the telephone is ringing. Just go check.  
**A:** Me, we don't have a phone.  
**H:** Of course we do. Gabriel installed one last week. Would you please just go and check.  
**A:** No, no, no, we don't have a phone, I'm sorry.  
**H:** OK, just ten seconds. OK here I am. Its me in the person, can't you tell? Oh shit! I'm sorry I am assuming the form of a tree.  
**A:** I just wanted to find out if Adam and I were married, officially? Do you know?  
**H:** Eve... are you aware of the burden of holy matrimony?  
**A:** No.  
**H:** Do you have the slightest idea of what it means to devote your life, your entire life, in economic, social and religious bond.  
**B:** [Enters, after finding out what happened to the FLAT's telephone.] He installed it in the wrong apartment. It's next door.  
**A:** Adam, please help me. I am talking to God and he won't tell me if we are married or not.  
**H:** What do you mean he installed it in the wrong compartment? What do you mean by that? You are telling me... the telephone... he installed it... What are you telling me? What is this?  
**B:** He installed it in Linith's apartment.  
**H:** You mean he installed it in the wrong apartment? What the fuck is Gabriel doing? Would some one please tell me what the fuck Gabriel is doing? Peter...Peter...  
**B:** Is this reverse-charges?  
**H:** That's a good question. Is this reverse-charges?

**A:** This is a radio!  
**B:** Don't ask me you should know these things, omnipotent one.  
**H:** Look, I attend to seven hundred million galaxies a day. Not only that I have to contend with the fact that scientific evidence is accruing against me. Have you heard about the fact that the big-bang theory had been discredited? That was the last outpost of every religious bastard on the planet.  
**H:** Look Eve, go... go...  
**B:** To Hell...  
**H:** Gabriel, it's not necessary at this point, would you please... do you mind? Look Eve, go down to Adam, and tell him you want to feed him something. OK, seduction is an art which you must learn.  
**B:** He's already had the apple.  
**H:** He's already had the apple?  
**B:** He swallowed the whole thing. In one bite.  
**H:** Why the fuck didn't anyone tell me? Here I was attending to the destruction of large portions of earth with floods and plagues and boils and things and no one tells me that he has eaten the apple! This is central. This is absolutely central to everything that is going to happen for the next four billions years on earth.  
**A:** Well we were hungry.  
**H:** Michael! Where's Michael? Have you seen Michael?  
**A:** Michael Landon?  
**H:** No! Michael the Angel of Death.  
**A:** Oh well, Michael Landon is right here.  
**H:** Where is the Angel of Death?  
**B:** He's digging graves.  
**H:** He's digging graves. Well could you get him on the telephone. Could you locate him by means of radio-active-triangulation? Do we have triangulation devices in heaven?  
**H:** [Over a speaking device] Michael! Come down to heaven, for a couple of minutes. Come here.

**B:** How did you get past the gates?  
**H:** Is that you Michael? Michael come closer, I can't see you, the light is obscuring your features.  
**A:** Hi, I am Michael Landon. I am auditioning for a play here.  
**H:** Wait a minute, weren't you in that thing about the angel... Heaven... *Heaven Doesn't Want me or Heaven & Hell*, or something. What was it called?  
**B:** I think you should send him back.  
**A:** No I was in *Little House on the Prairy*.  
**H:** Are you really Michael Landon?  
**A:** Yes.  
**H:** Wow, its really great to meet you. I mean you're famous. My stature is falling. I mean what I think I need to do is brush up my image.  
**B:** No kidding, you are spending your prime time talking to Michael Landon.  
**H:** Of course, I'm talking to Michael Landon. The man knows how to sell himself. The man has got contacts in the world of show business. Which I feel as though I require in order to reclaim my position as a superior being on this planet.  
**A:** Hi, I'm Michael Landon's wife.  
**H:** Are you Mich... Oh I am very glad to meet you. Do you feed him anything special? Do you give him vitamins or anything?  
**A:** On special evenings I can speak with a forked tounge.  
**H:** Jesus, this is Michael Landon's wife.  
**H:** What do you think? We need this Jesus character. What is he going to do? He need's to do something. He needs a gimmick. Love! You know I like that, its fresh, its original, it hasn't really been used yet. There was Plato, there was Socrates. Moses didn't really talk about love.  
**B:** Make him a revolutionary.  
**H:** Yea, a revolutionary who preachers about love. It's got a damn nice ring to it, hasn't it?

We should write poetry, Gabriel, you and me. I think we should just sit down and write some poetry, one day. We can be poets! Gabriel, you've done what!?  
**B:** I've done a few cut-ups.  
**H:** What are cut-ups, Gabriel? I'm, I'm thinking about, like about Shakespeare. You know? Like bad verse. And you're talking about cut-ups? God, you're in anti-art already, Gabriel? Fuck, Gabriel should be running this show!  
**B:** Is that what you suggest?  
**H:** Gabriel, you don't have the voice for it. That is what it boils down to... is the voice. Look I am telling you. Look at Plato. Look at Socrates. They all talked about the primacy of speech, you know. Self present speech. That's what we are about. We are about talking. We are about people talking. You know, people getting in touch. We want a better standed of living for the entire planet, OK. And you could not pass that off with your piddley little voice.  
**B:** You know what will regain your popularity?  
**H:** What's that Gabriel?  
**B:** I think you need a sex change.  
**H:** A sex change. Hermaphrodisim. Do you mean hermaphrodisim? Personally, first of all, we need to get rid of this illusory Luciferian. And then we can talk about the possibility of me exchanging genders at random because that interests me. I mean doing it once a week interests me, you know, I mean keeping people on their toes, so they don't know whether they are addressing he or she, or whether they are going to be hit by lightening, because they are doing something... I mean that... that to me is power. You know. Not telling people the rules, and waiting till they fuck up cause they didn't know them and then hitting them with the lightening bolt. I mean that, that's true power. You know! [Tape starts breaking up. Tape wobbles.]

And declared that:

the cheapness of its products is the heavy artillery that breaks through all the Chinese Walls of understanding.<sup>59</sup>

In our interpretation of the process, *détournement* maintained a strong linkage to the Burroughs ‘cut-up’. And indeed, in *Methods of Détournement*, Debord and Wolman described how the bringing together of independent expressions could be used to create a new form:

Any elements, no matter where they are taken from, can serve in making new combinations. The discoveries of modern poetry regarding the analogical structure of images demonstrate that when two objects are brought together, no matter how far apart their original contexts may be, a relationship is always formed. Restricting oneself to a personal arrangement of words is mere convention. The mutual interference of two worlds of feeling, or the bringing together of two independent expressions, supersedes the original elements and produces synthetic organization of greater efficacy. Anything can be used. It goes without saying that one is not limited to correcting work or to integrating diverse fragments of out-of-date works into a new one, one can also alter the meaning of those fragments in any appropriate way, leaving the imbeciles to their slavish presentation of ‘citations’.<sup>60</sup>

It is worth noting that the use of the ‘appropriated’ text did not originate with the notion of *détournement*. Such operations could be seen in the strategies of re-contextualization in the ‘production’ of the ‘ready-mades’, and Lautréamont, in the late nineteenth century, had coined the slogan:

Plagiarism is necessary, progress implies it.<sup>61</sup>

Considered to be a precursor by the Surrealists, the Count of Lautréamont or Isidore Ducasse died in 1870 at the age of 24. He was acknowledged by Debord for creating work “whose appearance [was] far ahead of its time”<sup>62</sup> and he provided the classic definition for the surrealist project by describing the “chance encounter of a sewing machine and an umbrella on a dissection table.”<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> Ibid.

<sup>60</sup> Debord, Wolman; ‘Methods of *Détournement*’, *Situationist International – Anthology*, 1981, p.9.

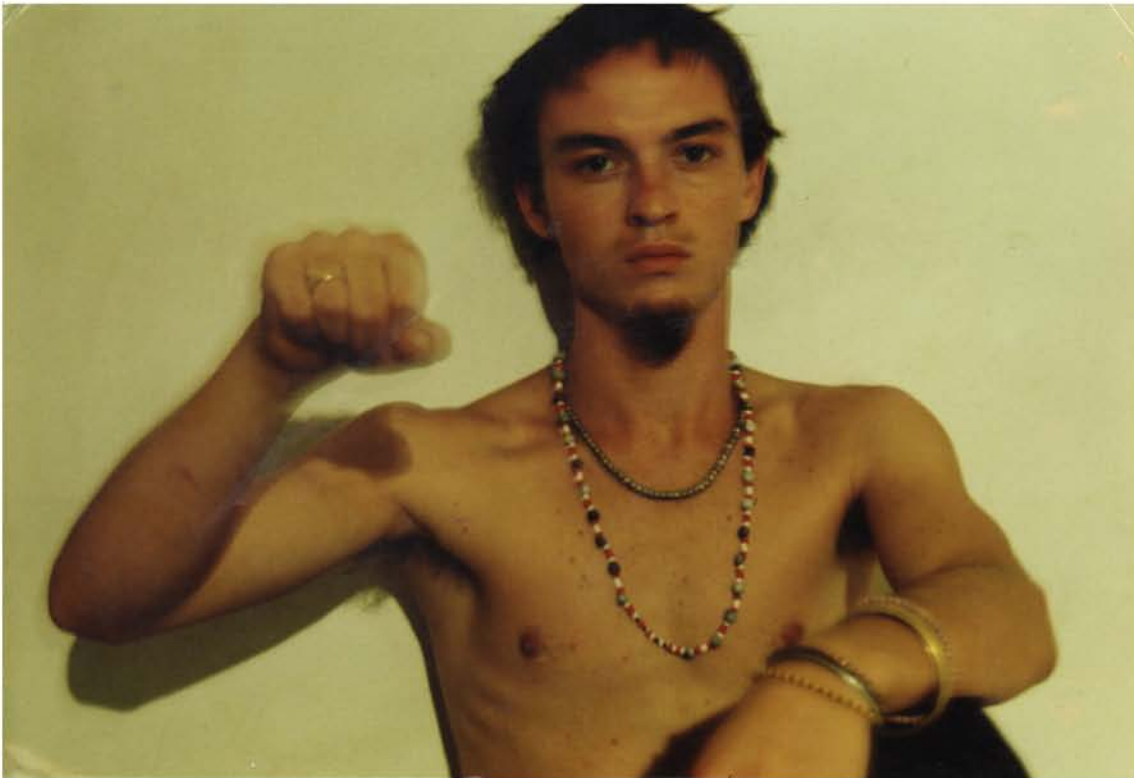
<sup>61</sup> Ibid, p. 10.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid.

<sup>63</sup> William Rubin; *Dada & Surrealist Art*, New York, Harry Abrams, p. 36.



Horsburgh using the 'Miracle Filter' recordings as source material for his writing, 1994. In the background can be seen the "Miracle Filter" (the tape-deck) itself.



Barry, 1994



***CRUSADERS FIGHTING ART'S DEMISE***  
***Natal University Newspaper Article***  
***February 1994***

The perception among many young artists was that a general apathy hindered the development of a vital art scene in the Durban. Primary among the FLAT's motivating principles was the desire to combat this apathy. We were also trying to work in an area of cultural production not supported by the mainstream galleries. For these aims and efforts, we had received some recognition in the mainstream press. This coverage although much-needed, was not particularly extensive. Indeed Meijer, art writer, for *The Daily News* had claimed in her column that "the gallery aims to create a platform for more experimental art, such as performance, installation, and video, media the more established galleries may shy away from."<sup>64</sup> And this was echoed in the funding letter for Durban Arts, that Jeff Chandler assisted us in writing, where he articulated through our 'voices' that, "there simply does not exist a support structure of any significance for the visual arts."<sup>65</sup> Owen in *The Weekly Mail* had pronounced that the gallery was "definitely working as an alternative to the more established galleries".<sup>66</sup> And it was Meijer again who drove this point home in her March 4 column, when she said, "...the gallery proved once more it's ready to give a much-needed injection of alternative subculture into Durban's dwindling mainstream."<sup>67</sup>

Although not in a mainstream newspaper, it was a Natal University article, *Crusaders Fighting Art's Demise*, which gave the FLAT the most significant coverage at that time. The article, though not attributed to any one writer, was written in part due to the efforts of Nina Saunders, an architecture student at Natal University. It began with a statement that affirmed our efforts:

Moe, Siemon Allen and Thomas Barry decided to do something about the lack of alternative art space in Durban.<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> Marianne Meijer, Art Beat, *The Daily News - Tonight*, Durban, Feb 11, 1994.

<sup>65</sup> Moe, Barry, Allen; Letter to Durban Arts, Feb 9, 1994.

<sup>66</sup> Terése Owen, *The Weekly Mail*, Johannesburg, Feb 18, 1994.

<sup>67</sup> Marianne Meijer, Art Beat, *The Daily News*, Durban, Mar 4, 1994

<sup>68</sup> 'Crusaders Fighting Art's Demise', *Natal University Newspaper*, Durban, Feb 1994.

It then not only addressed some of the FLAT's policies, but also its mission, and included quotes from Barry and Moe, where they expressed the FLAT's motivations and aims:

“The Durban Art Scene has become dead and boring”, according to Ledelle Moe, one of the founding members of the FLAT Gallery. The FLAT was initiated in October of 1993 to create a vibrant space for student and professional artists to experiment with their work.

“It's basically a place where anyone can do anything. It's an alternative to what's happening at art school or in the gallery system which is very limiting financially and in the kind of art you produce” says Barry. “We want to create a free environment and then see how people respond to it.”<sup>69</sup>

The need for a site that would allow for more experimental approaches was expressed by Moe:

This freedom that they speak of involves a multitude of media that can be creatively transformed. “We want to introduce theatre, music and art as a combination - we just hope to get this place established as an experimental art place,” says Moe.<sup>70</sup>

Barry, in the article, outlined a basic FLAT policy:

We want to create an environment where people can all interact on the same level. We don't only focus on art but on any issue that people want to raise and want a response to.<sup>71</sup>

Barry's statement that the FLAT was open for “all” and would focus “not only on art but issues” was radical in two ways. First, we were, at that time, taking a political stance that ran contrary to the then still empowered apartheid government. In the shifting political environment of the time, our ‘open’ policy spoke to an inclusiveness for participants that crossed racial boundaries.

Moe echoed the importance of community:

“Artists as individuals are often scared but together you encourage each other to do all sorts of things.”<sup>72</sup>

Second, in the declaration that our space would not operate within the conventions of a traditional art gallery, Barry emphasized the fact that the FLAT was a place for the engagement

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<sup>69</sup> Ibid.


<sup>70</sup> Ibid.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid.

and interaction of 'everyday life'. This was in contrast to what we regarded as the safe (empty) white box; the stance we saw as being that promoted by more traditional venues. This also asserted the FLAT's policy of 'non-censorship', where through discussion or through art forms any issue could be raised.

*Crusaders Fighting Art's Demise*, Natal University Publication, Feb, 1994

**CULTURE**



The crusaders in the gallery: Thomas, Ledelle Siemon

## Crusaders fighting art's demise

The DURBAN art scene has become dead and boring," according to Ledelle Moe, one of the founding members of the Flat Gallery in Mansfield Road. The Flat Gallery was initiated in October 1993 to create a vibrant space for student and professional artists to experiment with their work.

Moe, Siemon Allen and Thomas Barry decided to do something about the lack of alternative art space in Durban. "It's basically a place where anyone can do anything. It's an alternative to what's happening at art school or in the gallery system which is very limiting financially and in the kind of art you produce," says Barry. "We want to create a free environment and then see how people respond to it."

This freedom that they speak of involves a multitude of media that can be creatively transformed. "We want to introduce theatre, music and art as a combination - we just hope to get this place established as an experimental art place," says Moe.

Barry elaborated on the concept. "We want to create an environment where people can all interact on the same level. We don't only focus on art but on any issue that people want to raise and want a response to. But I suppose that artists generally deal with the environment and the response to it."

Artists can exhibit in the flat free of charge - it is a non-profit project.

However, the future of the gallery depends on whether the three founding members will be able to get funding. Moe explains, "We want it to run on quite a small level until we get funding. Then we can move out of the flat and make one room into an office, one into a video room, one into an installation room and so on.

"Ultimately it would be ideal to have a big workshop where people can work together with a side exhibition room - like a community centre. Artists as individuals are often scared but together you encourage each other to do all sorts of things."

Barry also said, "If people respond, if there's an interest, it'll grow and we can move to a different venue."

George and Janine Holloway will be exhibiting with Walter Hayn on 18 February at 6pm. Adrian Hermenedes will be transforming the flat with his installation on 25 February.

The Flat Gallery is at 4 Manor Court at the corner of Mansfield Road and Botanic Gardens Road.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid.

**WALTER HAYN, JANINE HOLLOWAY, GEORGE HOLLOWAY  
& SARAH**

***Act***

***February 18, 1994***

This was a group installation by Walter Hayn, Janine Holloway and George Holloway (who would later take over the foundry at Technikon from Etienne De Kock.) All three had been students at the Technikon in the late 80s. (“Sarah” refers to the Holloways’ child)

In this collaborative installation, the three artists hung paintings, drawings, sculptures and found objects, which included a pair of jeans, ‘here and there’ from floor to ceiling. The divergent works on the walls were unified in some sense formally by the artists’ common decision to coat the floor with a layer of white salt. As gallery visitors viewed the works, their footprints made marks leaving the black traces of the floor beneath. The pattern created was a record of where each viewer had ‘traveled’ through the exhibition.



Left: Janine Holloway preparing work for 'ACT', 1994. Right: 'ACT' during the opening showing the "salt-floor", 1994. Also in the image, Paterson has Moonlight in some sort of 'grip'.

**ADRIAN HERMANIDES**  
***Forecast of Human Trembling***  
***February 25, 1994***

Installation could be seen as a kind of counter strategy to painting and sculpture. The openness of the FLAT programming, which gave an opportunity for an artist or artists to control the space in whatever way the work demanded, led to the extensive exploration of this art form. Indeed, many of the students and other artists who exhibited at the FLAT came to the space with a history in more traditional genres and soon began to stretch their work in the face of these open possibilities. This ‘stretch’ interestingly involved not only expanding the sculptural object ‘in space’, to create environments or site specific displays, but also ‘in time’ through the medium of video and performance.

An interesting experiment in combining **both** was explored in the exhibitions of Adrian Hermanides and Ledelle Moe. The two had begun a conversation about the possibility of bringing ‘live people’ into their work, and this led to two separate solo exhibitions, scheduled within a few weeks of each other. Here, the artists used these ‘live people’ (as they described them) as ‘figurative’ elements in their respective installations, but in two very distinctly different ways. Of concern to each was not merely the idea of using a human figure as a formal device, but as a possible means to express their frustration with the lack of confrontational, political and sexual issues being made in much of the art in Durban at that time.

Of course this idea of expanding the format of art making was not a new one. Kurt Schwitters, working in the 1930s, built his *Merzbau*, which is seen by many historians as a precedent for installation. Indeed it is mentioned in the ‘genealogy’ of two important books both: *Performance - Live Art 1909 to the present*,<sup>73</sup> and *Installation Art*.<sup>74</sup> However, this ‘grandfather of expanded sculptural space’ also conceptualized the idea of the *Merzbuhne*, or total theater. Though unrealized it is important in that he suggested the possibility for the **human figure** to also behave as a formal element in installation. He says:

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<sup>73</sup> RoseLee Goldberg; *Performance – Live Art 1909 to the present*, New York, Harry Abrams, 1979.

<sup>74</sup> Oxley, Petry, de Olivera; *Installation Art*, London, Thames & Hudson, 1994.

All solid, liquid, gaseous bodies such as white wall, man barbed wire entanglement, blue distance...surfaces that fold like curtains, or shrink...everything from the hairnet of the high-class lady to the SS leviathan. Even people can be used – people can even be tied to backdrops.<sup>75</sup>

Hermanides' interest in installation and 'live sculptures' produced *Forecast of Human Trembling*. Accompanying the exhibition were five full colour and numerous black and white posters, which included not only the suggestive title, but the even more provocative question:

For some, sex before marriage is immoral. What do you call sex before kindergarten?<sup>76</sup>

The poster shows two photos of a young boy, with a red strip covering his eyes and a center image of pots and pan.

The installation was a kind of 'still-life', which utilized the entire room, and spoke of boys' schools and adolescent male sexuality. It was constructed with a number of elements. Hermanides painted the entire room blue (to the dismay of our landlord) and divided the space with six or seven school lockers, also painted blue. Inside each locker were articles of clothing. These transformed clothing items included a jacket, which had been covered with slices of polony, making it pink with the appearance of flesh, a hat carefully covered in mincemeat and boots covered in mashed potatoes. Frost, who came to the exhibition, commented on these elements, in our recent interview.

Well as you were talking about the mash-potatoe on the hat, I couldn't help but think of spunk. Semen! That's my thought for the day. But I have to say that Adrian's work always has this devious excess. I always get excited about his work. But it was always an understated camp... I can't help but see these things on clothing as bodily productions. And all that mash-potatoe and mince-meat has a lot to do with school dinners. Which is to situate the boys within an institutional framework and bodily ingestion, and by extension, bodily expulsion.<sup>77</sup>

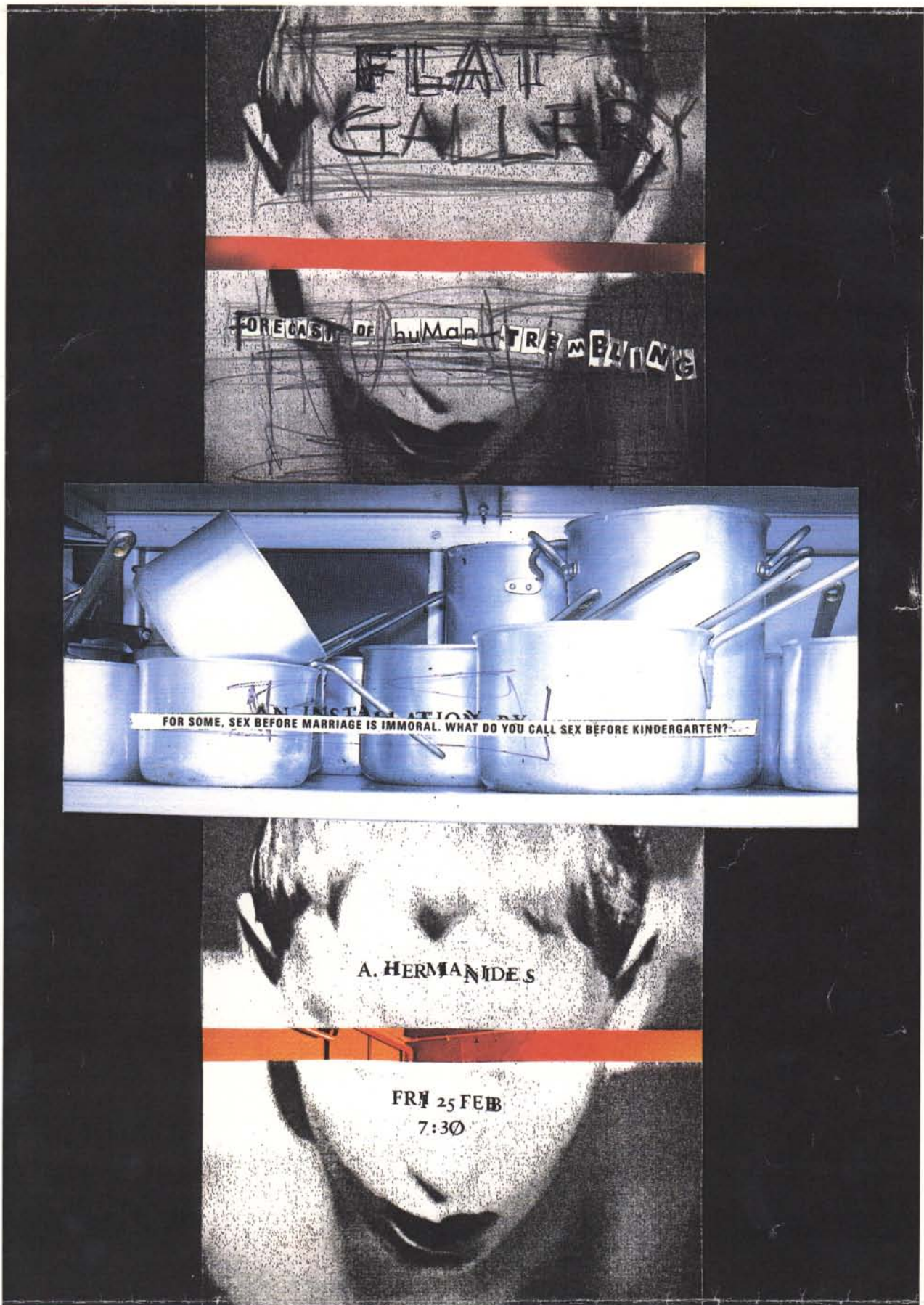
A tight space was formed by the placement of the lockers. Near the door was a lit *Cadac* gas burner continuously boiling a pot of eggs; cooking these until they burst. The only lighting was a red globe, which lent an eerie hue to the 'scene'. The stove with the boiling eggs raised the temperature of the room. Hung on two walls were chairs bolted at heights of approximately 2 – 3 meters, and on these raised chairs sat 16 year old, blonde-haired boys dressed in their school

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<sup>75</sup> Kurt Schwitters. This quote is taken from a photostated copy of a book on Schwitters. No other information is available.

<sup>76</sup> Hermanides; Poster for *Forecast of Human Trembling*, Durban, FLAT, Feb 25, 1994.

<sup>77</sup> Frost, Allen; Interview 12, Richmond, Feb 18, 1999.



ADRIAN HERMANIDES, Exhibition poster, 1994

uniforms. They sat silent, eyes looking ahead. The red light, the hot stove, the smell of meat and the immobile figures all contributed to an uncomfortable, oppressive environment.

MacKenny and Moe, who also attended the exhibition, spoke about their impressions in our later discussion:

**MacKenny:** I think you judge the value [of a work] by the experiential response that you have to it. I remember walking into Adrian Hermanides' exhibition and it was an extremely hot night. And I remember the heat of whatever he was boiling and I remember feeling that it was oppressive.

**Moe:** The blue walls were pretty intense too.

**MacKenny:** I remember being impressed by the boys - by the fact that they had obviously been instructed and they were willing to follow the instruction and not make a joke out of it. I think it must be a most difficult thing to be up on the wall and not giggle and they didn't. Not to mention the fact that they sat there obediently for heaven knows how long on a Friday night in their school uniforms. Somehow they had been convinced by whoever had set them up. So they reinforced the seriousness of the event even though the event was obviously absurd - which was the language that was set up. I seem to remember the heat being oppressive. I had a feeling of oppression. And then kind of going and finding the other objects. To me, I was convinced of the seriousness of that particular one because... my first impression was not to say anything. My first impression was to see what was there. And I think... in terms of how you judge, I think you wait, you look around, see what is there and you see what it feels like. And then maybe you still don't get it but if you are convinced enough by the complexity of your response then you...

**Moe:** Do you think your response was formal or emotional...

**MacKenny:** I think in this case, both. I think the figures and the school lockers had been placed in such a way that I was convinced of the formal articulation of the space. But at the same time there was a content which I was trying to feel my way towards. And because you had shows like that... not all the shows were strong... some I just walked in and out pretty quickly. But because there were quite a lot of shows that just stopped me. For me there is a judgement there, because if I don't talk then I'm thinking and therefore the stuff that is coming to me has enough depth or resonance. If it is just confusion, you pick up confusion pretty quickly. An articulation of confusion is one thing - this kind of piece really convinced me. And because the whole gallery changed, I mean he painted the whole bloody place out. I find that very powerful. The ones I remember the most are the ones where the space was articulated in some kind of way. Like Melissa's piece with the string. There were other ones where you did have works on the wall and were more traditional - prints and things - and I remember being disappointed by those. I thought those could be anywhere else. I enjoyed Adrian's work generally. I think he did things easily, perhaps sometimes too easily and he was certainly a man who went in for effect. He tried to manipulate effect. I'll tell you that there is one other work that I would use as a way of perhaps





trying to find my way into that particular piece. I was thinking about the Rebecca Horn piece in the 1992 *Documenta*. The one with the school tables on the ceiling. For me the parallel is something about the fixity - the fact that the kids are on the walls. In the Rebecca Horn piece the desks are on the ceilings. But the sense that the figure is displaced, it is out of its natural habitat, it is not on the ground. In that sense, despite the fact that they are not bound, they are trapped in some kind of way. And this comes back to the feeling I had of oppression. It was very hot in there, the locker evoked the kind of army locker, the fact that you opened these things and found...meat. For me there was a very strong sense that the boys were being processed. Process - processed meat. That would probably be the strongest analogy through out that piece. Containment and the idea of cooking. Preparing and oppression. People being placed into these hot, narrow spaces and the products – the blazers, the hats... I think whether done consciously or instinctively the major metaphor there seems to be some kind of processing in an oppressive way.

**Moe:** I think something interesting about the experimental approach of having two days to set up and work with a project – the opening becomes the third day extension of what you have been working with for two days. After Adrian had painted the walls, and then screwed the chairs to the walls, there was an element of time to it, the meat started rotting, the eggs were boiling. The boys couldn't sit up there for two long. So time was an essence. Instead of "you make the object, crate it and send it somewhere" there's this fleeting moment of stuff.

**MacKenny:** Except the fleeting moment makes you feel like it is interminable.<sup>78</sup>

It was significant, that although Hermanides was not a performer, the installation had a distinctly autobiographical tone. The boys were invited by him from his old school, Westville Boys High; the uniforms they wore were like ones he had once worn. The symbology, although personal and obscure, made reference to adolescent male sexuality, with such loaded signs as coats that transformed the wearer into 'meat', cooking 'eggs' (testicles) and boys held in suspension. All were part of a 'still life' brimming with sexual innuendo.

RoseLee Goldberg, in her book on Performance Art, describes the use of performers as live sculptural elements in formal poses as *tableaux vivants*. She describes how the artist, Jannis Kounellis, presented works which "combined animate and inanimate sculpture":

*Table* (1973), consisted of a table strewn with fragments from an ancient Roman Apollo sculpture next to which a man sat, an Apollo mask held to his face. According to Kounellis, this and several other untitled 'frozen performances' - some of which included live horses - were means of illustrating metaphorically the complexity of ideas and sensations represented in art throughout art

history. He considered the Pantheon frieze as such a 'frozen performance'. Each sculpture or painting in the history of art, he said, contained 'the story of the loneliness of a single soul' and his tableaux attempted to analyze the nature of that 'single vision'.<sup>79</sup>

*Tableaux*, as a performance genre, though avant-garde in its contemporary applications, is rooted in tradition. Indeed there existed in the nineteenth century a performative genre known as *tableau vivant* (literally "living pictures"), where popular masterpiece paintings or sculptures were enacted. Even earlier 'performances' took place in eighteenth century Italy where poses of classical statuary were mimicked.<sup>80</sup> It is a genre which can be unexpected when encountered in a sculptural installation, like Hermanides' *Forecast for Human Trembling*, and yet it is familiar within the realm of popular culture.

In an ordinary South African community one might encounter a 'Nativity Scene' cast not with plaster statues, but live performers. Or the 'scenes from the Gospels', where members of a congregation pose and personify the characters from religious text.

This traditional 'play with one scene' was explored by many performance artists working in the 70s. In *Real Dream* (1976), the artist Colette lay naked in a luxurious crushed silk environment for a "sleep tableaux lasting several hours" at the Clocktower in New York. British artists Gilbert and George, stood on gallery pedestals as part of their *Living Sculpture* works (1969 - 71).<sup>81</sup> Another, Scott Burton's *Pair Behavior Tableaux* (1976), is described by Goldberg:

...two male performers, at the Guggenheim Museum in New York, was an hour long performance composed of approximately eighty static poses held for a number of seconds each. Viewed from a distance of twenty yards the figures looked deceptively sculpture-like."<sup>82</sup>

In an essay on the work of Ann Hamilton, an artist who often employs a human element in her complex installation, Buzz Spector uses a term - *witness* - to describe the function of live performers and goes on to write about her use of 'live people' in her installations:

Standing still or otherwise engaged in repetitive tasks, this human element encourages viewers to more fully experience the circumstances of the installation. The people in Hamilton's installations often suffer their situations in silence.<sup>83</sup>

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<sup>78</sup> MacKenny, Moe, Buster, Allen; Interview 9, Washington, Aug 1998.

<sup>79</sup> RoseLee Goldberg; *Performance – Live Art 1909 to the Present*, New York, Harry Abrams, 1979, p. 110 - 111.

<sup>80</sup> Jennifer Fisher; 'Interperformance', *Art Journal*, Vol. 56, No. 4, Winter 1997, p. 28 – 33.

<sup>81</sup> RoseLee Goldberg; *Performance – Live Art 1909 to the Present*, New York, Harry Abrams, 1979, p. 108 – 111.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid.

# Art Beat

MARIANNE MEIJER



## 'Alternative' venue for artists

THE Flat Gallery is now well established as a place for young artists, who are dead serious about their work. With last week's installation piece by Adrian Hermanides titled "Forecast of Human Trembling" the gallery proved once more it's ready to give a much-needed injection of alternative subculture into Durban's dwindling mainstream.

Tomorrow, coinciding with the visit of the international curators to Durban, the Flat Gallery (4, Manor

Court, 6 Mansfield Road) opens at 7 pm with works by Nkosinati Gumede, Thomas Bary, Carol Gainor, Adrian Hermanides and Siemon Allen.

The Flat Gallery does not take any commission from artists' work and artists are not required to pay a gallery fee. Instead funding is provided by the Bartel Arts Trust.

Ledelle Moe, who is also a member of the Flat Gallery group, exhibits her work at Natal Technikon Sculpture Department. The exhibitions are open to the public.



**LIVE SCULPTURE:** A view of the installation at the Flat Gallery by Adrian Hermanides, which opened last Friday. The work incorporates live sculptures (two Westville Boys' High pupils in school uniform) and dead meat.

Indeed Hermanides included 'actors' in an installation that behaved like a single scene from a dramatic production. They were still and silent like statues. Significant was the fact that the boys did not interact with the public, or for that matter acknowledge anyone around them, and therefore created a dramatic tension.

The show was well attended<sup>84</sup>, and Marianne Meijer would write in her column the following week these words:

'ALTERNATIVE' VENUE FOR ARTISTS

The FLAT Gallery is now well established as a place for young artists, who are dead serious about their work. With last week's installation piece by Adrian Hermanides titled "Forecast of Human Trembling" the gallery proved once more it's ready to give a much-needed injection of alternative subculture into Durban's dwindling mainstream.<sup>85</sup>

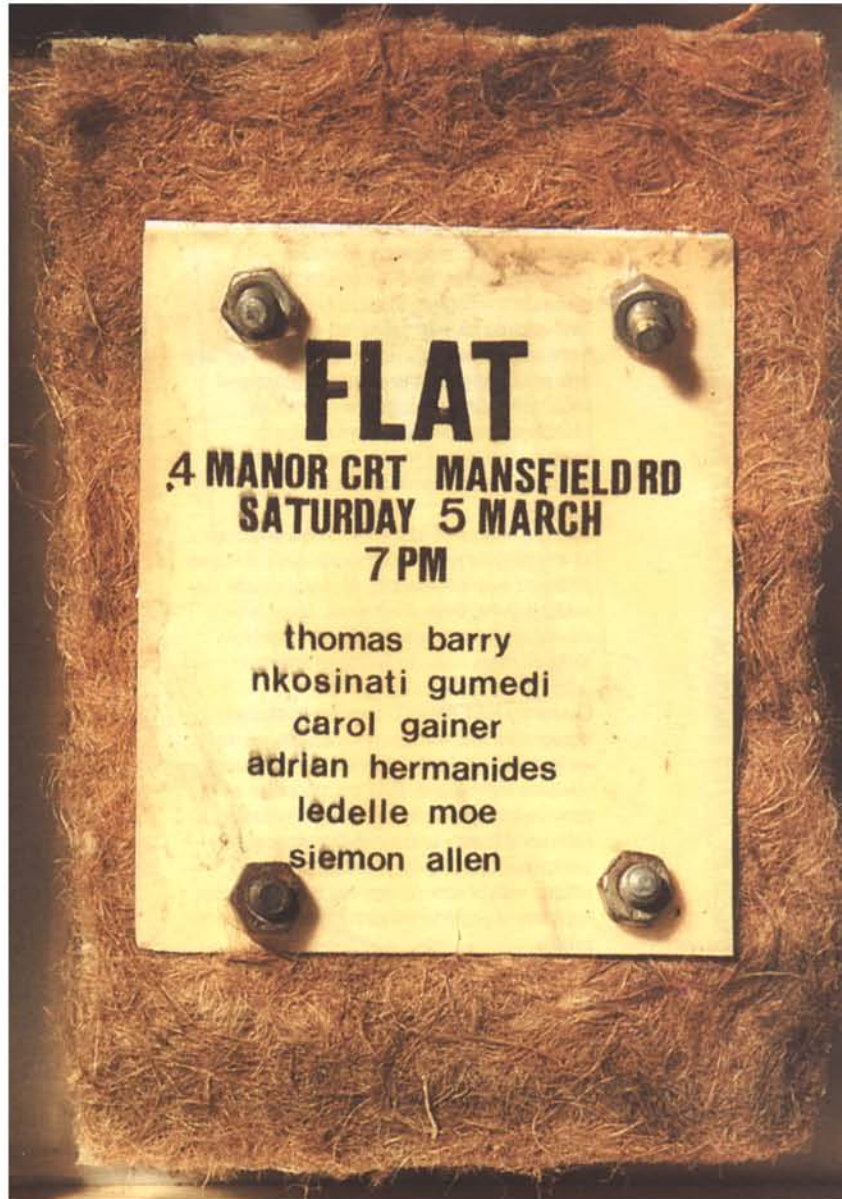


Hermanides taking a bath at the FLAT, 1994

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<sup>84</sup> On a humorous note: Andrew Verster tried to come, but mistakenly went to Bonamour Court. This was Hermanides' flat, where he had mounted an exhibition two months earlier. He later sent us a note. In his words: "We went to the wrong FLAT Gallery!"

<sup>85</sup> Marianne Meijer; "Alternative' Venue for Artists', *The Daily News - Tonight*, Durban, March 4, 1994.



Exhibition invitation, 1994. Photo: Peter Engblom.

**CAROL GAINER, NKOSINATHI GUMEDE, THOMAS BARRY,  
LEDELLE MOE, ADRIAN HERMANIDES, SIEMON ALLEN  
March 5, 1994.**

In March of 1994, a group of international curators came to Durban to look at artists for the upcoming *1<sup>st</sup> Johannesburg Biennale*. Among those who came to the FLAT were Benjamin Weil (writer for *Flash Art*, based in New York), Tony Bond (Sydney Biennale Curator) and two visitors from the SOROS centre.

To coincide with this visit, the FLAT Gallery organized an exhibition of six artists. The blue wall, left over from Hermanides' previous installation remained. This room, along with the other two rooms not usually set aside for exhibitions, was used and involved a mammoth cleaning project, but was completed in time for the opening. Hermanides was joined by Carol Gainer in the blue room. Nkosinathi Gumede and Thomas Barry exhibited work in the second front room. I showed my work in the third room, while Ledelle Moe installed her work in corridors in the building and on the street below.

Revisiting earlier experiments with off site placement of her sculptures, Moe installed a number of works in various locales outside the gallery. These included a pair of life sized seated figures in an alcove downstairs, as well as two groupings of animals outside on the street. One resembled a pack of dogs. Constructed crudely with jutting steel rods and ripped fabric dipped in concrete, the tangled mass of bodies seemed rough and aggressive. They spoke of the violence of a 'thing turned in on itself'.

Gainer continued her work with mixed media on panel, and the paintings on exhibit included a self-portrait where a partial view of her face emerges from a blue field. Exhibited with Hermanides in what was now the 'blue room' (for he had failed to paint it white after his installation), Gainer's work continued the explorations begun in work that she had exhibited in her FLAT exhibition of November of 1993.

CAROL GAINER  
Mixed-media  
1994





THOMAS BARRY, Untitled, life-buoy soap, matchboxes, wood, clay, other stuff, 1994





NKOSINATHI GUMEDE, 2 trucks, oil cans, coke bottles, other, 1994



SIEMON ALLEN, 'Stamp Collection', stamps, display-case, 1993



SIEMON ALLEN, 'Stamp Collection', detail, 1993

Barry and Gumede installed work in what was usually Moe's bedroom. Gumede was one of the many artists without permanent homes, who came to the Technikon, through the encouragement of Andries Botha, to work in the Sculpture Studio 'unofficially'. Though not a registered student, like many of these artists, he contributed greatly to the creative dynamic of the Department. Gumede also became a regular visitor at the FLAT, but as we did not have a common language - Gumede did not speak English and Barry and myself did not speak Zulu - our conversations took place via an invented strange sign-language. Relatively well known in South Africa, his works were included in various collections such as the Durban Art Gallery and the South African National Gallery in Cape Town.

Gumede had been working for some time at the Sculpture Department, making elaborate trucks which included everything from, lights, breaks, storage, radios, steering wheels and hooters. He presented at the FLAT a number of these large-trucks made from oil cans and other found metal containers complete with logos still visible. These were arranged in a row, with small trucks on a large wooden plank on the wall. Adjacent to this were two of his large trucks, one hanging on the wall, the other on the floor.

Gumede's sculptures were both mechanical and interactive. One was equipped with a radio, and many had steering mechanisms, that allowed him to 'drive' them through the city. It was then common for one to see Gumede out on Warwick Avenue, driving these same trucks and 'performing' their functions for the audience on the street. This shift of work into the gallery was indeed an odd change in context.

In the same room, was Barry's sculpture. On a bed of matchboxes, rested a large seahorse made from softened and cast red *Lifebuoy* soap, a recognizable common product to South Africans. Embedded in the seahorse was a strange wooden construction which resembled a jetty or crate. On top of this crate were small objects. The red seahorse on the yellow bed of matchboxes echoed the red lion on the *Lion* matchbox.

In the third room, I exhibited a small woven panel of VHS video-tape and my *Stamp Collection* (1993).<sup>86</sup> The woven videotape was one in a series of experiments in which I made use of 'high-tech' materials with a 'low-tech' process. I hand-wove used (encoded) videotape to create a kind of minimal canvas. Of interest to me, at the time, was the fact that the video was 'rendered mute' by its use as a raw material.

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<sup>86</sup> Although shown previously in Johannesburg in 1993 at the ICA, and later for the *Vita '93* at the Johannesburg Art Gallery, this was the first time that the *Stamp Collection* had been shown in Durban

The *Stamp Collection* was part of a series of ‘display’ sculptures where I re-contextualized ‘found objects’ from my white South African youth. Using the display case as a device to present both found and handmade objects, I sought to explore shifting context. Though these icons included *Hardy Boys* books, model airplanes, and even *Doc Marten* shoes, it was the *Stamp Collection* that spoke to the ‘constructed identity’ of South African history.

Weil, who attended the exhibition, addressed these issues when he spoke about the *Stamp Collection* in his article - *Out of Time - South African Art* - for *Flash Art*:

In the work of South African artists, one finds strong formal ties to Western art produced over the last thirty years. However, there is a strange sense of citation and appropriation, rather than of a spontaneous identification, as if living in a state of complete isolation had the effect of re-creating the world as it is in the homeland. That particular issue can be found in a work by Durban based artist Siemon Allen, who completed a display of his family’s South African stamp collection depicting the country from a deliberately biased point of view.<sup>87</sup>

Also included was a work placed at the entrance gate to the FLAT downstairs. Situated near the postbox, this was a series of six chipboard boxes containing old letters sent in the 1930s, stamps and all. Each box was screwed to a section of rubble that I had found on a demolition site. Originally shown at an exhibition for the National Arts Coalition meeting in Durban that year, it was meant to reference Donald Judd’s stacked box sculptures from the mid 1960s. It was my intention to present these ‘boxes’ as if they were ‘rescued’ remains from a destroyed gallery – hence they still remained connected to the wall fragments.

In the end, it was Hermanides who literally ‘stole the show’. He constructed a farmyard scene by sitting toy animals, covered in mincemeat on a huge block of dry ice. The ice exuded a cloud of smoke, and when this fell to the floor, it gave one the sensation of walking into a smoky landscape. The curators were completely enamoured with Hermanides piece and took many photographs.

For this exhibition, we also produced lavishly made limited edition invitations. These featured on one side our list of names, bolted through a piece of felt, and on the other side an old photograph of Cecil John Rhodes, and his ‘conquest’ map of Africa.

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<sup>87</sup> Benjamin Weil, ‘Out of Time- South African Art’, *Flash Art*, Milan, Jan – Feb 1995, p. 74 – 75.



Above: LEDELLE MOE, concrete & steel, 1994.  
This work was installed in the street below the FLAT Gallery.  
Bottom Left: SIEMON ALLEN, Untitled,  
woven VHS video-tape, 1989  
Bottom Right: SIEMON ALLEN, 'Postbox (After Judd)',  
chipboard, letters, rubble, 1994  
This work was installed in the downstairs entrance near  
the postbox.





Barry and Gumede at the Sculpture Department, 1994

**LEDELLE MOE**  
***Forecast of Human Trembling II (After Hermanides)***  
**March 18, 1994**

With this work, Ledelle Moe continued the “Forecast” series and like Hermanides, chose to use ‘real people’ in her installation. At that time, she had been in conversation with Hermanides about doing an installation that would in some way be a ‘response’ to his. Where he had tackled the issues of repressed sexuality, she chose to deal with the broader topic of violence and security in South African society.

Both installations revealed what was then a growing need for young South African artists to offer a political critique of their own white colonial experience. This required the invention of new art forms. The question facing us then was how to speak sincerely from our own personal experience, and yet still address our social concerns? This was a departure, in some ways, from the protest art of the previous generation, which out of political necessity spoke for those who were silenced in a more readable rather literal ‘pictorial narrative’.

In his essay for the 2<sup>nd</sup> *Johannesburg Biennale*, Clive Kellner writes about the problem of how white South Africans of colonial heritage can speak now with a politically active voice and yet not speak for the ‘other’. He quotes Linda Peckham, who “puts forward a succinct expression of how contradictory the white intellectual’s voice is”. (Artist could be substituted here for intellectual.) Peckham says:

What is the position of the White South African intellectual who is critical of apartheid? It is inherently contradictory for as soon as I speak against I find myself speaking for, on behalf of... For White South African intellectuals to criticise apartheid means to examine our own position, our own two tongued/tweetalig selves.<sup>88</sup>

Kellner raises here the question of representation of a black subject by white artists, and proposes that critique is possible by speaking through the complexity of one’s own experience:

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<sup>88</sup> Clive Kellner quotes Linda Peckham in ‘Cultural Production in Post-Apartheid South Africa’, *Trade Routes – History & geography*, Catalogue 2<sup>nd</sup> *JHB Biennale*, Johannesburg, 1997, p. 29 – 31.

...speaking from one's own position, not through that of the Other, will contribute to a heterogeneous, yet cohesive, social politik. Perhaps one should speak of the self rather than the other.<sup>89</sup>

As young artists we struggled then to develop new forms, new means to reconcile the contradiction of speaking to political concerns; and yet not speak 'for' other South Africans with experiences that we could not presume to know.

In considering the issue of violence in South Africa, Moe was led to confront the complexities of privilege combined with those of the aged. On a visit to her Grandmother, who resided in a home for the elderly, she took a number of individual portrait-like photographs of elderly people that she would subsequently use in the installation. Contrasting ideas about safety, protection and vulnerability all came together in a work that combined photography and performance.

The FLAT room was still blue from Hermanides' display, and Moe chose to make it into a kind of 'waiting room' for the viewer/audience. But for two benches the room remained empty. Moe had kept her room free after the curators visit the previous week, and so she had an extra space to use. She installed a blue felt curtain that echoed Hermanides installation, around the entire room to form a room-within-the-room and a very dark space.

The seven photographs, taken of residents at an old age home were each framed in impermanent baroque wax frames, and suspended each with its own dim light bulb, along the blue felt wall. The ambiance in the room was dark and forbidding, and as the viewer entered the space, these small portraits required a close view. While looking, however, one got the distinct feeling of being watched. Turning around one would be faced with the 'live sculptures': three security guards with loaded guns.

Hired by Moe for the evening, the three arrived without the knowledge that they were hired for an 'art event'. Moe had only specified that three come and so it was a coincidence when one black, one coloured and one white guard appeared. It was indeed a significant feature that the guards represented three 'races' and the elderly pictured in the photos were all white. This could not have gone unnoticed in race obsessed South Africa. It spoke to the vulnerability of the elderly, protected by force and by guns, and perhaps also to the obsolescence of aging South Africans as well as their regime. It was a loaded metaphor, indeed, in a society where the largest industry is

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<sup>89</sup> Ibid.





LEDELLE MOE  
'Forecast of Human Trembling II  
(after Hermanides)'  
1994  
Andrew Verster in the installation.

security and where violence levels are the highest in the world. Frost addresses this issue in our interview:

**Allen:** I remember you were shocked when you saw this exhibition.

**Frost:** Well, talking about shock, you have to remember the time. I remember at that time almost being on the verge of a nervous breakdown with regard to the proliferation of violence. Indeed now, in relation to the levels of crime in South Africa, what was beginning there was the start of an industry - an industry that was already tinged with the past. The notion of security guard had everything to do with the apartheid era and yet we had moved into this supposedly new era. And here was a bald dragging in of both the past and the future. If I am saying I was shocked, I suspect I was reading that - especially in that very confined space. Also in relation to Durban; our engagement with art as object and not person... if you look at this person with hairy arms and breathing chest, yet rendered as object, was doubly shocking. I would say that I was shocked.<sup>90</sup>

The event was notorious in Durban art circles and along with Hermanides' previous "Forecast" installation, generated a great deal of publicity. Both were examples of a new format, but both had thematic connections as well. MacKenny had this observation to make about the connection between the two:

But I think what is quite interesting is that it came directly after Adrian's, because in a way this is the next step, literally. The "school boys" become the "men with guns". And you say the cocking... [laughter]. It might be coincidental, but the fact that you had your gran's friends from the old age home and so on... the whole notion of the 'Woman', the 'Mother', the white vulnerability... What is happening in my head is a bounce off between this exhibition and Adrian's exhibition... its like it has grown on either side... You have the schoolboys, they come from somebody, they become something. When they grow up and become something, what they became moves away in this direction back into the past, the old ladies. The old ladies were at some point closer to the schoolboys, if you like. And now the schoolboys grow up and become part of the system and they also protect the system. Do you know what I am saying? And so I think there is something incredibly fragile, vulnerable, and brutal at the same time happening here. I actually really like the piece.<sup>91</sup>

Moe later discussed with MacKenny, Buster and myself some of her motivations for the work and events that led up to the installation:

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<sup>90</sup> Frost, Allen; Interview 12, Richmond, Feb 18, 1999.

<sup>91</sup> MacKenny, Moe, Buster, Allen; Interview 9, Washington, Aug 1998.



**Moe:** I think it was a retaliation at that time against making objects. It was more like “What is my idea and how can I express it in an exciting way? How could I shock Durban, through the use of this space?” Ja, I hated (high) school – I remember Adrian and I talking about the idea of the uniform and how weird uniforms are but how sexy they could be in a funky way. And so he wanted to go back to his school, find younger boys like himself, dressed in their funny little tight-arse blazers and ties and just displace them. And have this poetic thing happening. It was a complete result of sitting around bars drinking and talking about it. What I was talking about with him was the idea of security in South Africa and how gross the old age home was that my grandmother was staying in. We kind of ‘essenced’ down the ideas and reformatted them. So instead of making a sculpture of...it was a much quicker, immediate solution.

**MacKenny:** The FLAT Gallery seemed to encourage that. It seemed to encourage a lack of preciousness; an immediacy – the fact that you did not have to make something that would last; that it could be something that you would not find in any other circumstance. It seemed very direct.

**Moe:** So you would walk in, it was really dark. And you would be having a look at the old pictures...and suddenly, after a while, you would hear a cock of a gun, or notice the security guards standing behind the door.

**Allen:** They didn’t really cock their guns all the time, I heard it only once or twice. They just stood there on display. They were hired security guards.

**Moe:** I paid them R80 each for twelve hours. And they got dropped off by this high-security van. And their job was to guard the place.

**Allen:** I thought that it was quite interesting in terms of the situationist idea of interacting with “everyday life”. That is Ledelle contacting a security firm and employing people (guards) to be used as art was taking something out of its context. There may be a lot of problems there, but at the same time it transgresses boundaries.

**Moe:** These men were not lit up, they were all in the dark.

She goes on to discuss the symbolic references in using the guards and their reaction to the performance as well as some observations about her connection to Hermanides’ work:

**Moe:** Adrian and I had been discussing the uniformed people that had been looking after these old women. Uniforms were definitely a huge conversation piece between us.

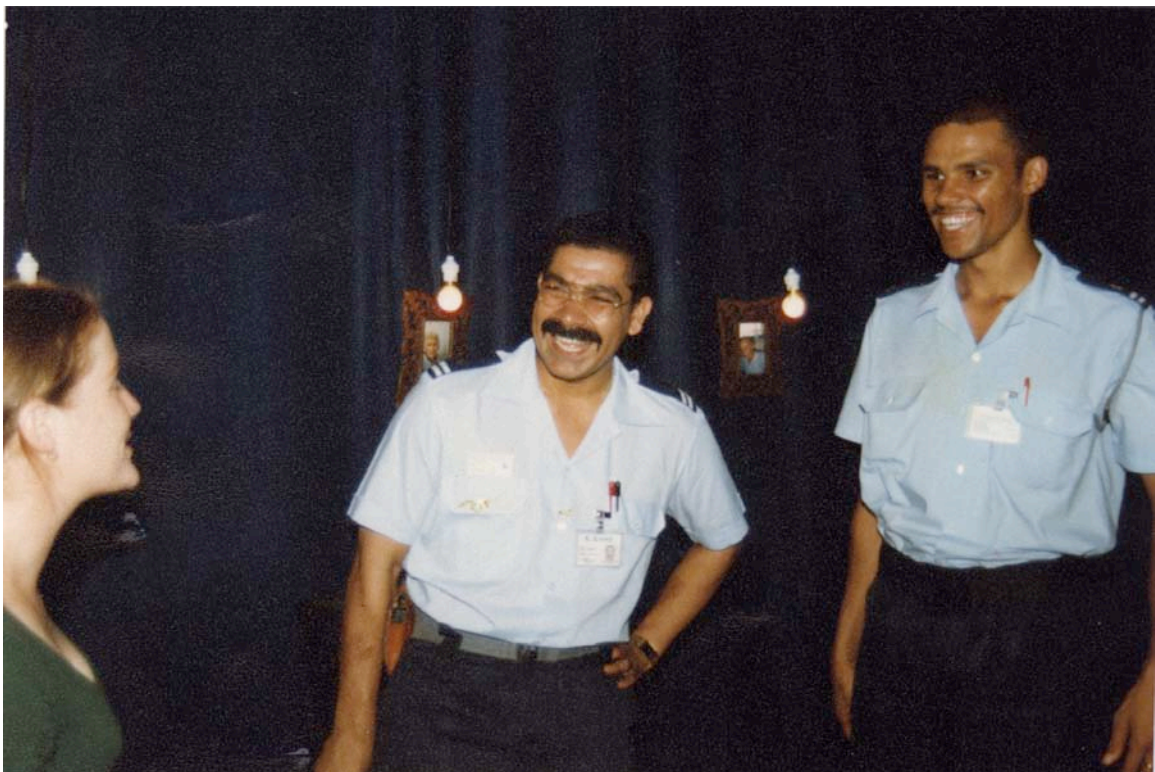
**Buster:** So you and Adrian had a conversation, not so much about the piece that you were going to do, but your experience in this home, or your experience of confronting a kind of institution. I think what is interesting is Adrian’s institution is his memory of school while yours was more recent in the old age homes.

**Moe:** I would say Adrian's has a lot to do with sex, sensuality and male repressed desire. Mine was more the frail white person, the really obscure policeman, security guard. Navy blue, big gun... And how each of us could articulate those ideas in a poetic way.

**Buster:** Strength and vulnerability has been a recurrent thing in your work for a very long time. The appearance of strength, the fact that it is a cardboard strength. These three men look very vulnerable to me. Even though I have an idea of a South African policeman or security guard that is such a stereotype, when I see these guys, the first thing I think is: "God, how did they feel?" They are being objectified. I think that is really interesting.

**Moe:** They were there for about two hours and I had hired them for twelve. They said when we sat them down and gave them a beer afterward, that they were very uncomfortable that Moonlight and other black people were around. Although one was a black guy, one a coloured guy, and one white, they were from that 'other side' of Durban... go to marquee weddings and threaten to shoot anyone who comes near. They are the dudes. They are part of the security business. They arrived in this big, high-security van and jumped out saying: "OK we are here". I was so disorganized - I ran down the stairs telling them that I was the one that hired them..."So come up!"

**MacKenny:** And they had no idea what they were getting into?



Moe in discussion with the security guards after the performance, 1994

**Moe:** No, and they went back down to their van and loaded up their shotguns. They told us later that when they are unsure about the situation that they are going into, they load up their guns. They came back up, sat down on the bench and said: “You are the boss, you tell us what to do.” I told them to go into the velvet room, stand behind the door and do not respond to anybody. They should not talk to anybody. At the most, I told them to cock their guns. All of a sudden they were in this really hot, tiny, fabric cube, and they waited and waited there for about two hours throughout the entire performance. Later they came out, had a beer, and said: “What was that?” I said that it was an artwork. They said: “We were art?” I said yes, and they said that they had no idea that they could ever be a part of art, and what kind of art was it anyway. They stayed for a while.

**Allen:** We have photos of them hanging out in the FLAT afterwards, which is quite funny.

**Moe:** They were laughing nervously. Though, they were happy to get off the full twelve hour shift; only doing about three of them.

**MacKenny:** I’m sure!<sup>92</sup>



**Moe**, in the days that followed, packed up and moved out of the FLAT. She had won a generous grant of R 25 000 from the Emma Smith Scholarship for her artwork, and was going to be flying to the USA (where she would remain for the next few years.) At that point Barry who had been living with us on and off for the last few months, decided to move in and take her room as a full-time, paying occupant of the FLAT Gallery.

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<sup>92</sup> Ibid.

**JAY HORSBURGH, MELISSA MARRINS**  
***Sub/Merge: SoNic CaLcuLAS(so)O***  
***March 26, 1994***

The next FLAT project, *Sub/Merge: SoNic CaLcuLAS(so)O*, was staged by Horsburgh and Marrins. The two had been working together for some time on collaborative works and texts at the commune where Marrins lived and they decided to organize a performance at the FLAT. The room remained blue and this provided a setting for what was to become a work that was both installation and performance. In the course of the event, the two artists built a complex environment, interacted with it, and then finally destroyed it.

As the audience entered, they encountered a 2 by 2 meter square of loose beach sand in the center of the room. Half buried were various objects including a plastic medical skeleton, a working lamp, a dead bird, animal organs and severed chicken legs - some bound in pairs. Written in the sand were words, such as "Submerge". Beyond this 'beachscape', in one corner of the room was placed a mute television and video machine. A small table was set up near the site and latex sheets, like flayed skins, covered the windows.

The performance began when the artists each took a ball of sisal, and proceeded to string lengths across the entire room. Stringing it from wall to wall and ceiling to floor, they anchored the lines with plaster weights; criss-crossing, until a kind of 'web' was formed. The audience at this stage was held back by this 'barrier' and so viewed the construction/performance from the periphery.

As the stringing action continued, the pattern of lines in the space became dense. Horsburgh and Marrins then began to hang clear plastic bags from the string with clothes pegs. Inside the bags, that numbered somewhere around fifty, were items that ranged from chicken body parts and fluids to photographs and cut out images from various sources. While hanging these, they also scattered onto the floor squares of paper that appeared to be cut fragments of text and images from a notebook - perhaps from their collaborative writing exercises. Resting on a table were two jugs filled with animal blood, and Marrins at some point poured small pools from these jugs into the sand. After the pouring, the jugs were placed precariously on the table, and were supported by the web of string.





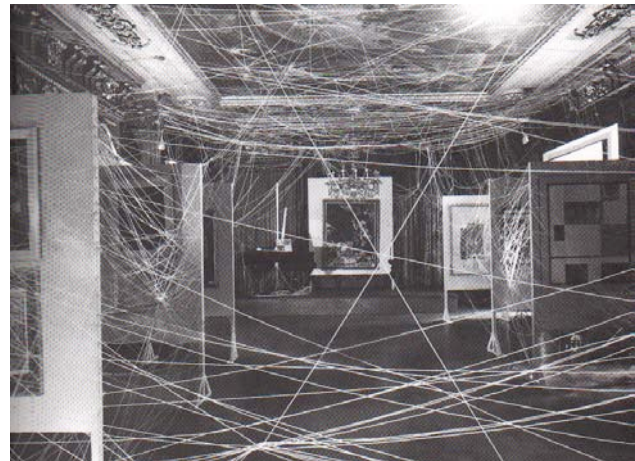
When the ‘construction’ was complete, the ‘destruction’ of the webbing proceeded. A burning oil lamp was placed beneath the string that had been attached to one of the jugs and as it burned through, the jug spilled its contents onto the sandy floor. Horsburgh and Marrins, then each took burners and proceeded to sever all the string connections to the wall. The entire ‘structure’ slowly collapsed. Some items were then set afire, and the two joined the audience as we all sat in silence looking at the remains. The destruction of the installation brought the event to an end.

In some sense the installation at the ‘height’ of its construction, before the burning brought its collapse, formally resembled Duchamp’s work in the *First Papers of Surrealism*<sup>93</sup> exhibition in New York in 1942. Here he strung twine throughout the gallery, creating an installation that he called *Spider web as an example of the ‘natural’ isolation of a carcass (pseudo-geometric) of infrathin*. Duchamp’s “fantastic network of white cord” according to William Rubin, was,

an installation which consisted of a maze of string, an Ariadne’s thread beyond which the pictures hung like secrets at the heart of the labyrinth.<sup>94</sup>

Duchamp had employed simple twine to create a drawing in space, and an environment that mapped and even interfered with the art works in the exhibition. Horsburgh and Marrins too built a network, a nerve-like circuit where flat works and objects could adhere like constellations.

The building and destruction of the work, all in one evening, seemed to address the fugitive nature of connections and constructs, both physical and metaphoric.

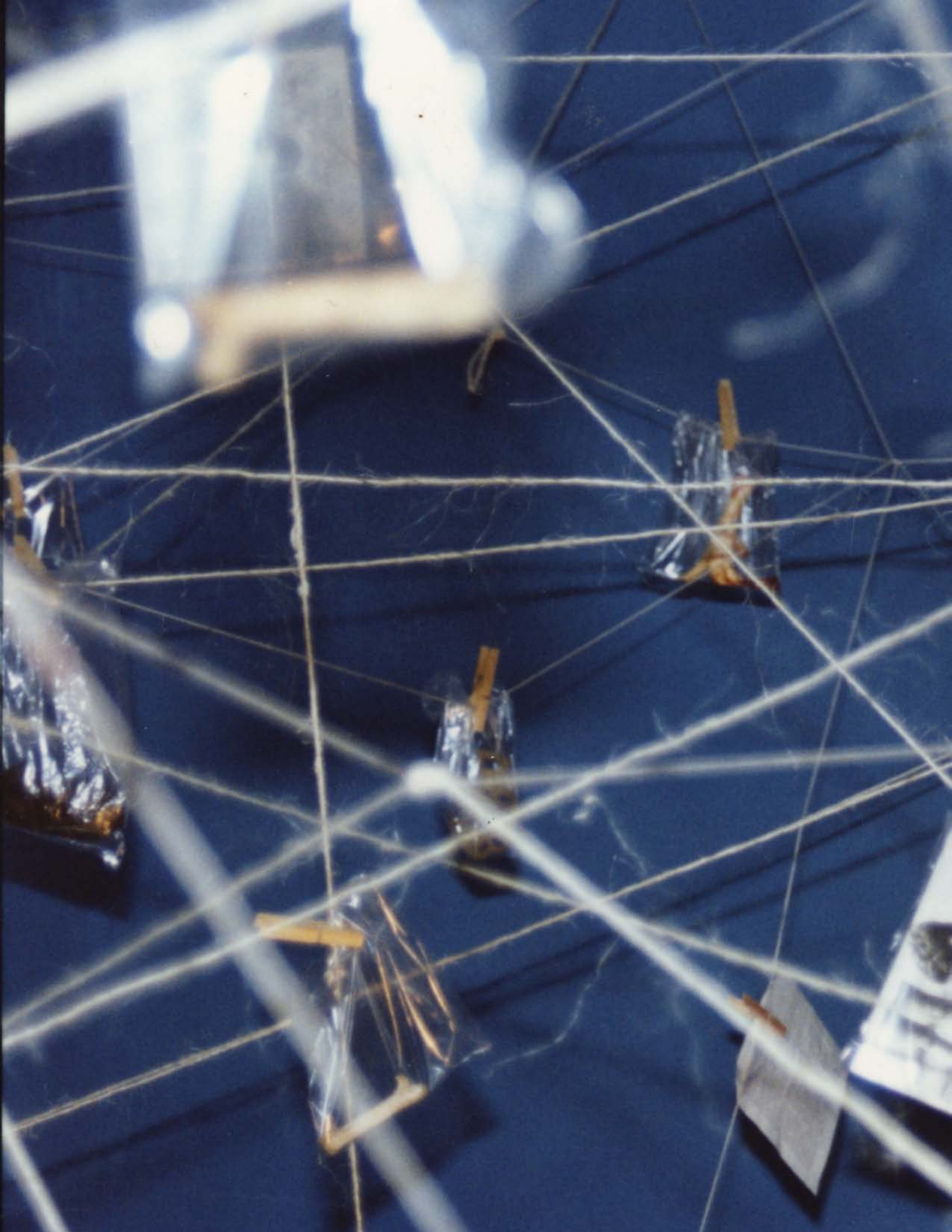


MARCEL DUCHAMP  
*First Papers of Surrealism*  
1942

(This image is taken from *Dada & Surrealist Art* by William Rubin, p. 441.)

<sup>93</sup> An allusion to the “first papers” of immigrants to the United States. (William Rubin) Indeed many of the French Surrealists ‘fled’ to New York during the war to escape the German occupation.

<sup>94</sup> William Rubin; *Dada & Surrealism*, New York, Harry Abrams, undated, p. 344.





Indeed, what was perhaps, most interesting about the collaborative efforts of Marrins and Horsburgh was the manner in which this event brought together what had been important features in each of their individual approaches. Though, it would be impossible, and unnecessary to identify each artist's contribution, the lines between their individual practices are too blurred, it is interesting to note linkages to works each had done outside the collaboration.

The notion of the cut-ups, fragments brought together in an almost random fashion, was closely connected to Horsburgh's literary strategies. Marrins, had long been interested in the referencing of the body and the use of a kind of 'grotesque' symbol. On one level, the installation / performance was formed out of methodical actions, fragments from written text and mechanically reproduced images. But it also contained within its rich vocabulary of images, animal parts and blood - visceral references to the body.

In discussion with MacKenny, Buster and Moe, we talked about some of the personal history that informed the work and its relation to Marrins' later work.

**MacKenny:** For me what happened here at this performance was largely intuitive. I think it was very much to do with her (Marrins') relationship with Jay. Maybe you need to find her and ask her about that. I think it was like these two people trying to do this task which seemed very specific but at the same time rather random. There is a funny combination of the two languages – having a structure and then within the structure having a randomness occur. And so there was this kind of sense of two people being on the same endeavor but missing each other. For me Melissa's concentration was so complete and so utter that she seemed to get into some kind of space that pushed her into another kind of head space... So she seemed far more emotionally involved in it and what I find interesting looking at these photographs now, is that I think that this piece is in fact the genesis of her later work. But the other later pieces seem to refer far more to an external world.

**Allen:** What do you mean by that?

**MacKenny:** I mean the language or the approbation of an external world. Melissa often used the feminist vocabulary. Like 'body'! 'Body' is an issue, 'body' is constrained in a patriarchal society and so on. I mean she set the Mount Edgecombe work in an operating theatre. The whole notion of 'body' under stress, 'body' under duress and so on. She used a lot of external symbols or external contexts which a lot of feminists have used. And sometimes I think that students use that because it is an available vocabulary. But looking at this I think that those pieces came out of very personalized feelings which she then concretized more in the Mount Edgecombe piece which was very much about damaged 'body', but it was also a lot about healing. I mean she had cabinets of, I think, Ayurvedic medicines...<sup>95</sup>

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<sup>95</sup> These themes are explored in conversation over Marrins' first FLAT exhibition. See pages 85 – 90.



JAY HORSBURGH, MELISSA MARRINS, 'Sub/Merge: SoNic CaLcuLAS(so)O', performance & installation, 1994

**Allen:** I remember it was almost vulgar.

**MacKenny:** Ja, there was a funny combination of healing and damage. And one wasn't sure which vocabulary was winning out. Some of the foodstuff that is meant to be healing, nourishing and nurturing, was rotting. The combination between inside and outside, operating theatre, healing whereas one was far more conscious of the incision and the blood... So there was a kind of unease between the two. Looking at this photo, and seeing words like "Submerge" in the sand, and this is a word you very often associate with water but its in sand here. The chicken-legs and the little packets; they would come up again in the Mount Edgecombe work later.

**Allen:** He (Horsburgh), if I may... is an actor. He is always about performance.

**Buster:** He's performing and she's experiencing - the performative versus the experiential. See I think that is very interesting because with performance you can almost look at two categories, in a way. When I'm talking to my students, they are never really quite sure if they are doing the performance as spectacle; performance as effect; as something that is observed. Or maybe it is not so interesting to observe it; maybe its not a whole lot to look at, but the performance has to do with a kind of experience. And I am fascinated that you have these partners, these two people participating in a performance doing the exact same thing physically. And yet what you guys are suggesting which I think is not so far off; is that it's possible that you might have two performers operating simultaneously, but on two very different levels of consciousness. Which could even be part of the content of a work.

**MacKenny:** I think it was, that was my reading of it.

**Buster:** I also liked what you said about the way the string functioned - that the string didn't fall with a big bang. It wasn't about spectacle so much as it just reached this point where it just 'sagged'.

**Moe:** Like if there was anything going on between them it collapsed. It just poofed out.

**MacKenny:** It was almost like a non-event.

**Buster:** Let me ask you this. In terms of theatrical strategies, in terms of a beginning, middle and end...what is interesting with Adrian Hermanides, is the same thing, it is duration, there is no beginning no crescendo, no climax. In a sense the climax of this was an anti-climax.

**MacKenny:** Ja, definitely.

**Allen:** What is quite interesting is I was trying to find some sources or similar work historically and I found this thing that Duchamp had done at some Surrealist exhibition in 1942...with string.

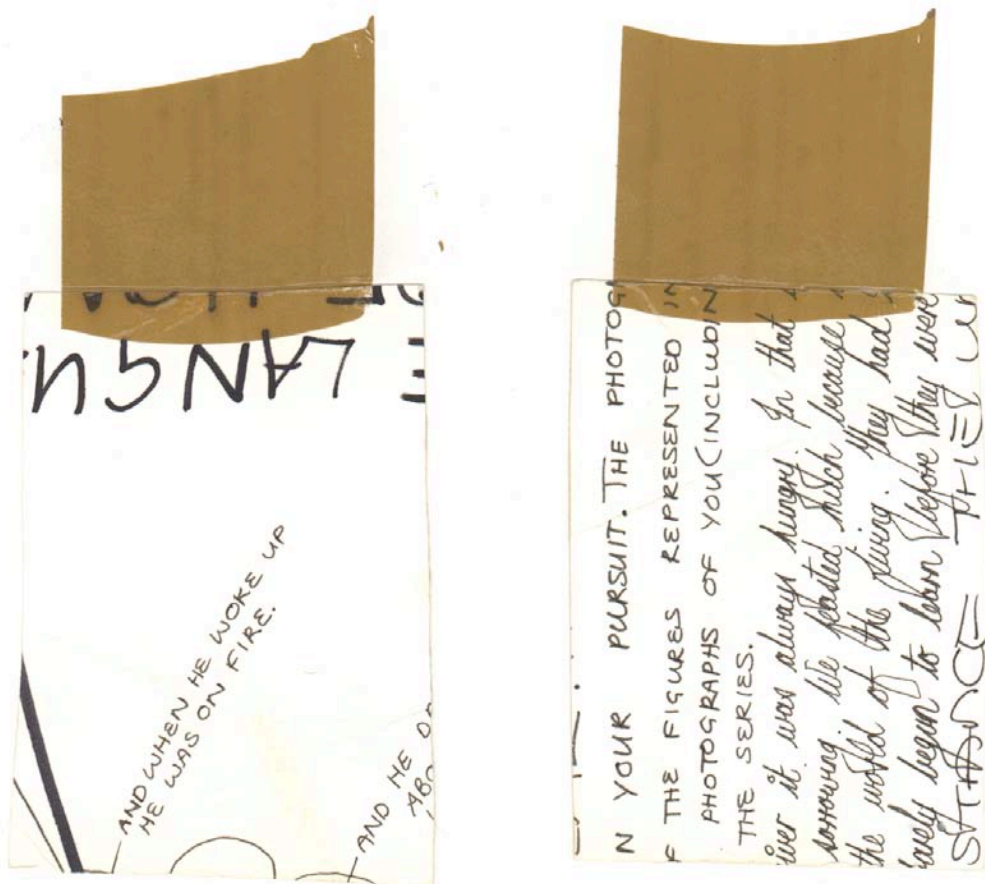
**MacKenny:** Well the one thing that string did do, is eventually, it kept people out of the space.

**Buster:** That was my other question, whether it was a sense of a web or a barrier?

**MacKenny:** I think, eventually, it became their personal web, with all these things in it. Look at all the photographs there are no members of the audience standing inside. In the end everyone was

kinda peering from the doorway and so on. But when the string had been burnt, of course, you were allowed back in.<sup>96</sup>

On a lighter note, Dan Cook, an Art History lecturer at the Technikon and art critic for *The Sunday Tribune*; had come to the performance, only to find an empty room. Upon seeing a pair of dirty underpants on the floor, he stormed off complaining that the gallery was “totally unprofessional.” Indeed, Marrins had given him an invitation, but he had failed to read it properly, and subsequently had arrived two hours too early.



Two examples of the cut-up cards distributed by Horsburgh and Marrins during the performance, 1994.

<sup>96</sup> MacKenny, Moe, Buster, Allen; Interview 9, Washington, Aug 1998.



Increasingly borders between 'art' and 'life' were blurred, and as the FLAT became more popular it began to accumulate a wide range of 'stuff' - the gallery slowly encroached on the living spaces of its occupants. For each exhibition, the main space had to be emptied, and usually this material found its way into the private spaces, as evident in these two images. This material soon became out of control and instigated a complaint letter (opposite) from our land-lord.



Tenant Flat 4

I would like to request that all the goods in the down stairs cove plus the goods on the back veranda be removed as our verandas are not store rooms and it looks rather unsightly from the road.

I trust that you will assist us in this matter and will be done no later than the 8th of April 1994.

Yours sincerely  
Henri (Henric)  
H. L.



De Kock installing his exhibition at the FLAT, 1994

## ***ETIENNE DE KOCK***

***April 9, 1994***

As programming continued, the FLAT enjoyed support from many of the Technikon Fine Art faculty. MacKenny, Frost, Chandler, Roome and Jeremy Wafer amongst others, were all regular visitors to the exhibitions. For some time, Frost, Chandler and MacKenny had mentioned the possibility of showing work. Some, like MacKenny, saw it as an opportunity to work outside of their usual format, and those of us who had been former students were interested in provoking a more experimental approach in our lecturers' work. It was Etienne De Kock, Technikon Sculpture lecturer and foundryman, who would become the first faculty member to exhibit at the FLAT.

De Kock's exhibition featured three 'machine-like sculptures'. Two of these were meticulously crafted brass and bronze constructions made with movable parts, which allowed for audience participation. Like intricate games with enigmatic purposes, one featured a lever, which when pulled set a small metal ball into motion. Another was built with three concentric rings that moved to spin a central figure. In a sense, these two 'games' confronted the viewer with an almost philosophical conundrum. They offered action and rich imagery, but the 'purpose' remained unknown.

The third of the 'contraptions' was a 'drawing machine' made of wood and designed to resemble a standard three-legged easel. It was this 'machine' which had been used to 'produce' many of the drawings that hung in long strips on the walls. In an interview with De Kock he describes this work:

**Allen:** Can you talk about your work that you did at the particular exhibit?

**De Kock:** Well, I had this drawing machine, where it rolled the paper on so that I can draw without dirtying the paper. And I had rolled pages and pages. It was like two, three years work. And when I had this exhibition, I just chucked all my work on. I took everything I was working on, put it down... I sliced up all of this long line of paper, which was about 100 yards long, that I had done all my drawings on and I just hung it up on the walls. And I didn't care that it wasn't in... The one thing that it was in was chronological sequence, which I enjoyed. But that's all, I just put my work up and people came.<sup>97</sup>

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<sup>97</sup> De Kock, Buster, Allen; Interview 8, Washington, July 1998.

The Exhibition was one of the best attended at the FLAT, with over 100 people filling the small space throughout the evening. In attendance were Carol Brown and Jill Addelson from the Durban Art Gallery. This was their first visit to the FLAT. Press coverage followed with these comments from Meijer:

The idea that Durban's experimental gallery, the FLAT, only caters for students and young artists was disproved at the weekend when works by established sculptor Etienne De Kock, were exhibited. The exhibition drew a large crowd and received much acclaim. The FLAT organizers encourage all artists to come along. Their goal is to break down barriers between so-called established artists and "young" student artists. The space is for all who want to experiment with new ideas.<sup>98</sup>

In conversation with De Kock, he spoke about his reasons for exhibiting at the FLAT:

**De Kock:** I just felt like with the NSA, I just could not exhibit with... I can't remember the woman's name... but I remember her face. But the NSA has a political structure; the whole point is that you have to buy into that if you are going to exhibit there. Do you buy into that? I was very glad to exhibit at the FLAT Gallery because I didn't have to buy into anything. I could just deal with the space, you know. There was nothing attached to it.

**De Kock:** It was a good space and it was low pressure. I could just go there and put it up.

**Allen:** ...and do what you want to do?

**De Kock:** Ja. There was no curatorial pressure or anything like that. I just thought I am showing my stuff and it didn't need to be some 'serious' exhibition space.

**Buster:** Did you do different work, because you were showing at the FLAT? Did that affect your work in any way?

**De Kock:** No, not at all. I just carried on doing what I was doing but I had a chance to have space to show it.<sup>99</sup>

But later, he voiced some objections to the notion of his show giving the FLAT 'legitimacy':

**Allen:** A lot of people at that time were saying that your exhibition at the FLAT helped legitimize the gallery in terms of the Durban 'art establishment'. Because up until that point some people thought that the FLAT was just a 'wank'. But the fact that you had an exhibition there and you were a lecturer at Tech and an established artist; that legitimized the FLAT Gallery. People like

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<sup>98</sup> Marianne Meijer; 'ArtBeat', *The Daily News – Tonight*, Apr 15, 1994.

<sup>99</sup> De Kock, Buster, Allen; Interview 8, Washington, July 1998.



The opening night of De Kock's exhibition, 1994

Carol Brown [senior curator, DAG] and Jill Addelson [then director, DAG] came to see the show and therefore came to the FLAT.

**De Kock:** I don't know. I have nothing to say about that. I don't know who said that I legitimized the gallery. You see, the real problem is that everyone thinks that youngsters have nothing to say. Now it's fine having that point of view, if you have vested interests. So that they can always say you were not legitimate because you had not shown anyone who is established, which is what you are trying to say. And because I come along and have a show, suddenly you have legitimacy, is just bullshit. Just because you are young artists, doesn't mean you have nothing to say. The problem is those with vested interests that don't believe you are legitimate until you have a member of the 'vested interests' exhibiting in your gallery. It's not right. And what you did is you got a space and you activated it, and that is legitimate. The stuff that happened there was fine. The young people got into it. You know people who just ignore things on the basis of legitimacy are just wankers.<sup>100</sup>

However, De Kock, who often worked with commissions and public sculptures had this to say about 'press coverage' and 'affirmation' for artists at the FLAT:

**De Kock:** What we have been talking about is my, the artist's response, to having a space to exhibit. What I don't know is what anyone thought of the show. You see no one... There was no acknowledgement. And, you know I put the stuff up and that was good enough for me.

**Allen:** What do you mean by acknowledgement? Criticism in the newspaper or just conversational?

**De Kock:** Look I'm less worried about the newspaper than people who throw money at me and ask me to do things for them. No, I want to make a fucking living...

[Laughter]<sup>101</sup>

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<sup>100</sup> Ibid.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid.

## **THE FESTIVAL OF LAUGHTER**

### **April 17, 1994**

*Bakhtin stresses that laughter in this 'festive-comic' sense cannot be understood as a form of trivial ribaldry or light-hearted jesting. Rather, folk laughter expresses a distinctive ideological viewpoint which is diametrically opposed to the 'monolithically serious' world of officialdom: it is 'universal', it heals and regenerates, and it is linked to essential philosophical questions.<sup>102</sup>*

This *Festival of Laughter* was a group of concurrent exhibitions organized and sponsored by the National Arts Coalition (NAC) to coincide with the historic first all-democratic elections in South Africa. The general secretary for the NAC at that time, Mike Van Graan,<sup>103</sup> conscripted me to put up posters for BAT and then the NAC. I was at some point 'promoted' to coordinator for the Durban contingent of the *Festival of Laughter*. My job description included making calls to participants, designing posters and advertising the events. A number of themes were selected to correspond with various cultural venues in Durban and elsewhere. For example the *Burn-The-Sacred-Cow Sculpture Exhibition* was delegated to the NSA; while the *Nudge-Nudge-Wink-Wink-Be-Kind-To-Politicians Poster Exhibition* and the *Dying-Springbok-Sporting Emblem and Flag Cartoon Exhibition* seemed 'more appropriate' at the FLAT Gallery. Other events included the *Tango-To-Toyi-Toyi Dance Festival*, the *Not Approved by the Publications Board (or Cultural Desk) Short Story Competition*, and the *Not-by-Bread-Alone Banner Exhibition* which took place at the Natal Playhouse.

These irreverent titles, that seemed to fly in the face of 'seriousness' and 'political correctness' were timely and controversial. As the elections approached, artists debated the need for work that embraced the contradictions and complexities of the political arena. Humor was seen as a potential tool. This not only echoed the recognition of the 'ideological power' of humor in the

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<sup>102</sup> Michael Gardiner; *The Dialogics of Critique – Bakhtin & the Theory of Ideology*, London, Routledge, 1992, p. 50.

<sup>103</sup> Van Graan at that time was also the director of BAT, the FLAT's main sponsor; and advisor to the Ministry of Arts and Culture.

face of ‘officialdom’ as expressed by Bakhtin, but also the spirit of Albie Sachs’ call to find new means of expression for the new South Africa.

An important book in South African Cultural Debates, *Spring is Rebellious* documents an original statement by Sachs and some 22 responses from artists, writers, cultural workers and political activists. (Indeed, in South Africa, are many individuals who embody all four). Written for an in-house ANC discussion in 1990, Sachs’ statement received “immediate, if controversial acclaim” according to Ingrid de Kok.<sup>104</sup> Here he first asks whether “we have sufficient cultural imagination to grasp the rich texture of the free and united South Africa that we have done so much to bring about”. He goes on to reconsider his earlier affirmation of “art as an instrument of political struggle” calling it now “banal and devoid of real content” and “potentially harmful”. He declares that “our members should be banned from saying that culture is a weapon of struggle”.<sup>105</sup>

As expected, voices of protest took objection. Many questioned whether such a statement would undo good work; others took issue with his assumption of ‘authority’. The specter of ‘non-political’ art, and therefore creative endeavors that were unmindful of cultural conditions must surely have alarmed many who had seen the struggle of political art in the face of apartheid censorship. But in what she saw as a “tongue in cheek” declaration, De Kok describes the importance of Sachs controversial declaration in this way:

This ironic prescription is followed by an analysis of “solidarity criticism” and the instrumental and “narrow view” of culture; these impoverish artistic production as well as the struggle, restricting the capacity of artists to move forward to expression that would “expose contradictions, and reveal hidden tensions”, and in doing so reflect the “emergent personality of our people”.<sup>106</sup>

Sachs speaks to the limitations of ‘political art’, by comparing a gun with a work of art in this way:

There is no room for ambiguity: a gun is a gun is a gun, and if it were full of contradictions, it would fire in all sorts of directions and be useless for its purpose. But the power of art lies precisely in its capacity to expose contradictions and reveal hidden tensions - hence the danger of viewing it as if it were just another kind of missile-firing apparatus.<sup>107</sup>

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<sup>104</sup> Ingrid De Kok (ed.); *Spring is Rebellious*, Cape Town, Buchu Books, 1990, p. 9.

<sup>105</sup> Albie Sachs in *Spring is Rebellious*, Ibid, p. 19 – 29.

<sup>106</sup> De Kok; Ibid, p. 10 - 11.

<sup>107</sup> Sachs; Ibid, p. 20.





*The Nudge-nudge-wink-wink-be-kind-to-politicians poster exhibition*  
*The Dying-Springbok-sporting emblem and flag cartoon exhibition*  
*The Not for...*

SUNDAY

**FLAT**

APRIL 17 10:00-18:00

4 Manor Court,

Mansfield Road

Exhibition poster, 1994

He calls for a kind of cultural production that not only embraces the ambiguities, but also celebrates:

And what about love?... Can it be that once we join the ANC we do not make love any more, that when comrades go to bed they discuss the role of the white working class? What are we fighting for, if not the right to express our humanity in all its forms, including **our sense of fun** and capacity for love and tenderness and our appreciation of the beauty of the world?<sup>108</sup>

In many ways, the *Festival of Laughter's* irreverent take on the upcoming elections was expressive of a similar attitude, and indeed provoked a similar protest. This move by the NAC, was, in a sense, politically confrontational on two fronts. It mocked the apartheid government, but, it also regarded **all** politics with a sense of parody and humor. It aroused opposition for the seemingly 'political incorrectness' of using 'humor' in the face of 'serious' political events.

In an ironic development, a white South African lecturer from the University of Durban Westville (UDW) Fine Art Department, Erica Clark wrote a letter to the *Natal Mercury* to protest the festival. UDW was traditionally a non-white university and notorious in South Africa for political activism. The Fine Arts Department was self-declared to be against a 'Eurocentric model' and featured in its curriculum attention to African and Indian Art History. The genres most typically explored in the studio work were painting, sculpture and printmaking. Clark's opposition to the spirit of the Festival read:

FESTIVAL OF LAUGHTER IS A BAD JOKE

The Arts Coalition recently launched a campaign for the festival of laughter to be held just prior to the April elections. The blurb that accompanies forms inviting participation manifests a crassly superior disdain for the significance of April 26 to 28. Only a privileged and bored coterie of dillitantish liberals could conceive of a project gesturing at 'freedom of expression' in the midst of extreme social trauma. However naive seriousness might be under our circumstances, the trivial and the vain are hardly worthy alternatives. The art world has often enough heard the east catchphrase about whites "not suffering by proxy", but laughter and witticism take such a comfortable intellectualization to final banality.

E. Clarke<sup>109</sup>

This letter led to a debate between the Coalition's representative, Van Graan, and Professor Clark. Clark's criticism that a "bored coterie of liberals" could conceive of such a

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<sup>108</sup> Ibid, p. 20 – 21.

<sup>109</sup> Erica Clark; Letter to the Editor, *The Natal Mercury*, Durban, April 1994.

project in the “midst of extreme social trauma” was answered by Van Graan. In an article by Humphrey Tyler for the *The Weekly Mail*, Van Graan’s response is recorded:

Mike Van Graan, probably the least bored person in Durban, the general secretary of the National Arts Coalition, who conceived of the whole idea, leapt to attack in return the “extreme hypocrisy” of those who claim to believe in democracy, in “freedom of speech and the freedom to criticize, but only if it is on their own terms and only if it fits in with their own view of the world”. He pointed out that “the violence, the deaths, the burnings which we are experiencing are not ordained by the gods; they arise out of the power lusts and egos of politicians”.<sup>110</sup>

The irreverent theme of the Festival was carried out in several locations, and the FLAT gallery was asked by Van Graan to be responsible for the poster and cartoon exhibitions. An open call went out to all artists to submit work. As only a modest number of entries came in from the open call, the regular FLAT participants were moved to contribute a substantial amount of the works for the show. Also, in an effort to bring to what was an externally motivated event, we approached what could have been a rather conventional presentation of posters with some humor of our own. We hung the posters erratically, and we put fresh bananas on the floor, tables and even hung some from the walls. We also provided a cacophonous sound-track. The event was described by Tyler of *The Weekly Mail* in this way:

The timing was important - a week before elections, a national festival poking fun at politicians, with satirical posters, monuments, flags and comedy routines. The National Arts Coalition’s *Festival of Laughter* got off to a raucous start in Durban.

How appropriate in a way for a Festival of Laughter, but really. The slender young lady with rakish hips languidly stretched out a naked arm at the poster exhibition and lifted a banana off the old-fashioned light fitting. She peeled it, tasted it thoughtfully with her little pink tounge, then slipped it delicately between her pearly teeth. “Oh Shit”, said one of the organizers, “now they’re eating the artworks”. Well, yes. She obviously didn’t get the symbolism. Banana? Banana? Banana Peel? Foot? Get it? Slip? Funny? Laugh! It was the opening night at the FLAT Gallery on the Berea in Durban of the *Nudge-Nudge-Wink-Wink be Kind To Politicians Poster Exhibition*.<sup>111</sup>

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<sup>110</sup> Humphrey Tyler; ‘Toyi-toying at the Sacred Cow Braai’, *The Weekly Mail*, Johannesburg, April 1994.

<sup>111</sup> Ibid.

Piers Mansfield, a student from Tech, constructed an installation in the back room which he sealed off with a black cloth. One could access his work by looking through a peep-hole in the cloth, only to be blasted with cold air from a fan that had been placed behind the screen. The line of viewers that formed called to mind an old trick: a prankster stands looking at a spot on the ground or through a keyhole. He looks at nothing, but a crowd gathers to see. In that same article, this was met with mixed reviews by Tyler, who had this to say:

The FLAT gallery is called the FLAT Gallery because it is a flat. When they have an exhibition they move the furniture out, hang the art stuff on the walls and sleep in the kitchen. This week in a nook there was a black curtain with a little hole in it and everybody queued up to peek through. Would there be an orgy? Bit of letdown actually. Inside there was a fan that blew on you and gave you a cold eyeball. It was difficult to see how it fit in but it attracted a lot of attention.<sup>112</sup>

He also goes on to describe two of the posters included in the exhibition:

Easier to comprehend was a mock street sign warning of dancing pedestrians entitled, “Let’s Twist Again” and a newspaper poster appropriately reflecting these strange times that said: “Miss SA’s row with lesbian skinhead.” Handing out mock ballot papers was a young woman called Adi Paxton, wearing a red nose. She explained she was a clown. She said you could vote for her as many times as you liked. “Take another ticket.” She said.<sup>113</sup>

Paxton was in fact a ‘professional’ clown and hired out her services to parties. The obvious connection her appearance made between ‘clowns’ and politicians was not lost.

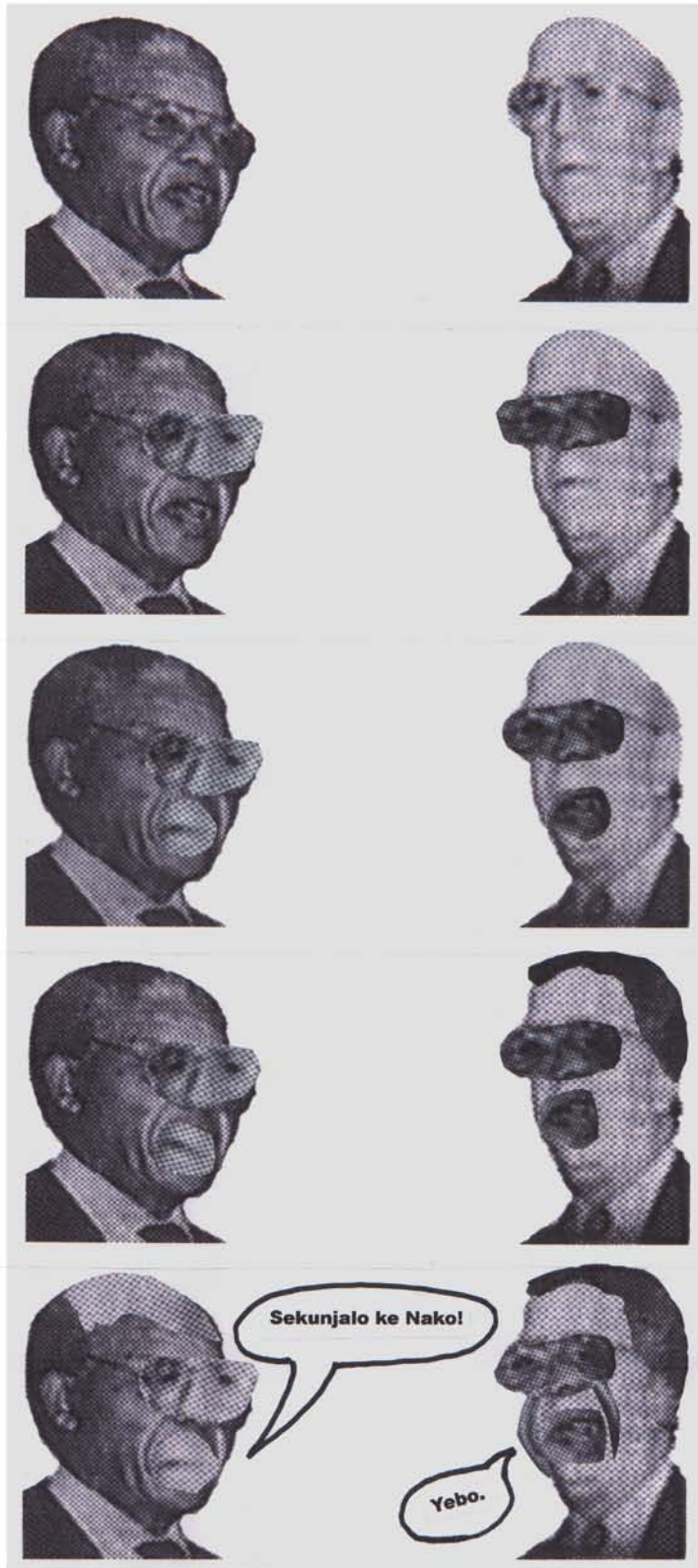
For the exhibition, I made a number of posters with cut-up Zulu language phrases, without translating or knowing their meaning. This was a project to which I would return with later sound works, when I sampled Zulu text in *Zulu for Medics*. I saw this as being somewhat problematic, in the sense that such an action might be regarded as an act of disrespect for a language that was not my own. And yet, these two projects catalyzed a number of interesting conversations between Zulu speaking friends and myself.

I was very intrigued with the idea of using a language, other than my own, in a way that would be truly unconscious. That is, I would have no idea what I was actually saying and the work would perhaps transgress boundaries through my lack of conscious control over its meaning. As Zulu speakers would question me about why I had said a particular thing, I would then go into a

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<sup>112</sup> Ibid.

<sup>113</sup> Ibid.



THE FESTIVAL OF LAUGHTER  
An example from the cartoon and  
poster exhibition, 1994

conversation with that person and learn what I had just unconsciously expressed. Hence a dialog was catalyzed.

Barry and I also had “FLAT” printed onto shirts, which we wore at the event. Barry's shirt contained an extra phrase, “Annual production declines again”, which was printed over a set of international flags, thus making each undecipherable. A photograph was taken by Peter Engblom which shows Barry and myself wearing the FLAT shirts; and in the background the cartoon/poster showing a merged Mandela and de Klerk.

The FLAT event was opened by artist and lecturer, Jeremy Wafer, “who managed to raise quite a few laughs during his address”. In her article in *The Daily News*, Meijer goes on to quote Andrew Verster, who has this to say of the festival:

The message is clear. Never again will artists allow their voices to be silenced, our minds to be appropriated by anyone, not stolen, lent, bought, borrowed, shut-up or closed.<sup>114</sup>

Another article, which was penned “Tonight reporter” and printed in *The Daily News*, had this to say:

The aim is to assert freedom of expression by providing opportunities for artists and the public to practice it in a provocative, yet innovative and humorous form.... A FLAT Gallery spokesman said: “The country is moving out of an age of censorship and complacency and the last thing we need is to move back into another one.”<sup>115</sup>

The FLAT Gallery’s involvement was not limited to the poster/cartoon exhibition at the gallery. In addition to this production for the festival, a number of FLAT regulars also participated in other exhibitions that formed part of the Festival of Laughter. Most significantly, this was the *Braai the Sacred Cow* at the NSA Gallery.

For this, Horsburgh and Barry brought in a table and a chess-board, and for the entire evening played chess in the gallery.<sup>116</sup> I opted to make a work of art through a ‘profit-making performance’. I brought a braai into the gallery and cooked boerewors; filling the gallery with

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<sup>114</sup> Marianne Meijer; ‘Infectious laughter’, *The Daily News – Tonight*, Durban, April 1994.

<sup>115</sup> Tonight Reporter; ‘Let Your hair Down at Festival of Laughter’, *The Daily News – Tonight*, Durban, April 1994.

<sup>116</sup> Perhaps a thinly veiled reference to Duchamp.



Above: Allen & Barry at the FLAT during the opening of the 'Festival of Laughter', 1994. Photo by Peter Engblom.

Left: 1996 Press Cutting from the Mail & Guardian showing Peet Pienaar's 'performance' as a "rugby player in formal attire" outside the Hanel Gallery in Cape Town, Nov 8, 1996.

Right: SIEMON ALLEN, 'Boerewors - in advance of a reconstruction of a performance', 1994. To my knowledge, no images were taken of either the braaing performance or the chessgame at the NSA Gallery. This image therefor stands in as a substitute.

(It is taken from 'Biltong & Droewors', Cape Town, Struik, 1992)



Artist Peet Pienaar dressed as a "rugby player in formal attire" on a box outside the new Hanel Gallery in Cape Town. Instead of curator Robert Weinek delivering an opening address, Pienaar was asked to hand out cake to those present. A cross-section of leading South African and international contemporaries were on show inside, including the likes of Robert Rauschenberg, Joachim Schönfeldt, AR Penck, Wayne Barker and Lisa Brice. Some of Cape Town's trendiest bars opened specially to host after-parties. PHOTO: ADAM WELZ



smoke, as I sold rolls to the hungry audience. It was a not-too-subtle pun on the *Braai the Sacred Cow* theme, as well as a parody of the white South African national pastime.<sup>118</sup>

Most of the audience did not regard me as an ‘artwork’ and thought I was actually just providing food for the event. They did not seem to find it strange that I was in the middle of the gallery amongst the other ‘sculpture’ with my ‘title label’ on the floor in front of me. It amused me that I was at last ‘making a profit from my art’.

In the gallery, Horsburgh and Barry played chess, while I braaied. The ‘artist as art’ was a performance strategy explored by many South African artists in an attempt to bring his/her own identity to the foreground. Peet Pienaar, a Cape Town artist did a performance in 1996, in which he stood in front of the Hänel Gallery dressed as a “rugby player in formal attire”.<sup>119</sup> In this way he both referenced traditional white culture and critiqued it through a “white South African voice”.<sup>120</sup>

In a parody of government licensing stamps, Barry had also ordered an official looking stamp ‘engraved’ with the words “Artistic License”. He then invited people to produce their ID books, and stamped it on the page that was normally for **gun licenses**. It was a highly illegal act because any defacement of government property is or was punishable by imprisonment.

Walker Paterson, who was a regular FLAT participant and who had exhibited in the Papermaking exhibition the previous year discussed with me his work for the NSA exhibition:

**Allen:** Was your “Cape settlers with Colour Xerox” work exhibited on one of the *Festival of Laughter* shows?

**Paterson:** Yes

**Allen:** Could you talk about your motives for making this work?

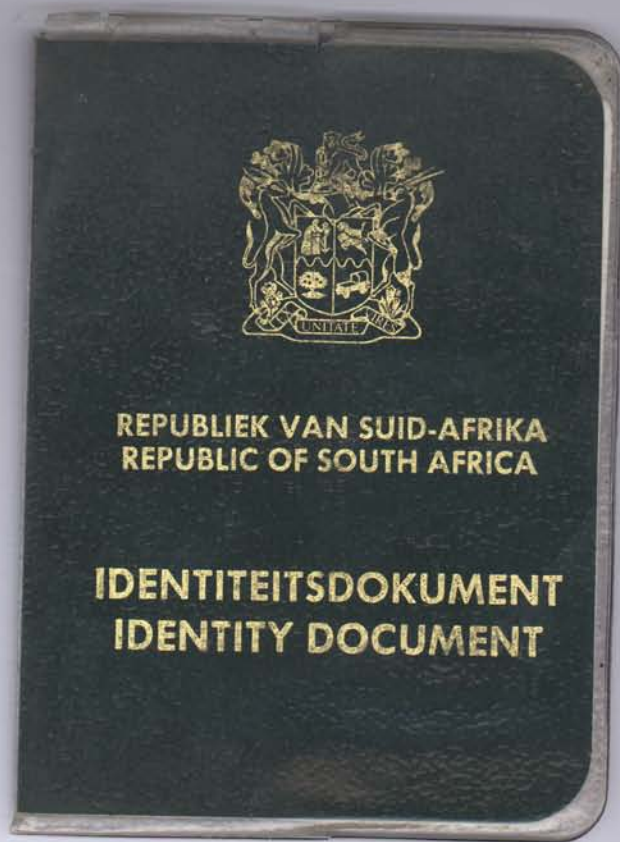
**Paterson:** I had decided I wanted to make a work that reflected the tastes of the white middle-class who still watched ‘South African’ dramas about the Boer War. I also cynically suggested that they owned a print of the arrival of Jan van Riebeeck in the Cape that hung above the mantle piece. [An alternative version of this work, which “predates the arrival of Van Riebeeck”, can be seen on the following page.] Secondly I feel as a white South African it was my duty to do a piece on the arrival of Jan.

<sup>118</sup> The braai, or barbecue, is a cooking technique synonymous with the national sport of Rugby; and the national meat is boerewors.

<sup>119</sup> Staff Writer; *The Mail & Guardian*, Johannesburg, Nov 8, 1996.

<sup>120</sup> This question of how one might critique the colonial past and white South African culture from one’s own experience was raised by Kellner in an essay mentioned earlier in the context of Moe’s ‘security guards’. p. 149 – 156.





THOMAS BARRY, 'Artistic Licence', stamp, 1994



WALKER PATERSON, 'Amsterdam and Other Ships in Table Bay, 9th March 1636', postcard & colour photocopy, 1994

**Allen:** Can you comment on your ‘oblique political references’ in this work? Could you compare these ‘oblique political references’ to those in your later “house” pieces?

**Paterson:** The political references in this piece are obvious. Firstly the piece was made about a month before the first democratic elections in SA and I thought we shouldn’t forget the man and event that started it all. The house pieces are a direct result of the colonization of Southern Africa because they reference hostels and low-cost housing and the burning of them may have some reference to the violence that has plagued the country. Secondly I think both would look wonderful above the mantle piece.

**Allen:** What is the significance of the relationship between the original image and its colour photostat?

**Paterson:** The original image (in this work) itself is a copy of the original painting so therefore it is a play on the notion of copy. So if we look at the piece in this light we have to ask the question, did the piece actually exist in its original form? If it did not we have to question the validity of the piece altogether. Just think about it as talking about an artwork that may not even exist.

**Allen:** Can you draw other political conclusions from this work?

**Paterson:** Only that the copy of the postcard was not even a good one. It’s like the previous government still copying the mistakes of the government before them.<sup>121</sup>

The Festival of Laughter marked one of the few times that the FLAT collaborated with another arts organization. This was a fruitful experience, in that some interesting work was catalyzed by the provocative theme, but it was also in many ways problematic. The kinds of structures and means of operation that are inevitable in larger arts programs, in many ways were antithetical to those of the FLAT. Though the ‘theme’ of the Arts Coalition project was radical and stimulating, our participation, as a gallery and not as individual artists, at times felt forced. It was as if the plan called for a ‘grass-roots’ spontaneous participation, which was not possible to call up ‘on demand’. That said, however, one might also recognize that it was a ‘democratic process’ in which all expression whatever form it took was welcome. The democracy **here** most definitely gave one something to laugh at.

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<sup>121</sup> Paterson, Allen; Interview 7, Snail-Mail, April 98.

***SAM NTSHANGASE School Workshop  
May 1994***

Ntshangase continued to stay at the FLAT from time to time. When a number of his students from a rural school south of Durban won prizes in the prestigious annual arts competition for young artists, 'Face to Face', he made a proposal to the FLAT. As the lack of substantial transport did not allow for the children to come in the evening for the event, Ntshangase suggested that they come and work in the FLAT for the entire day. He brought the children to Durban to receive their prizes, and they spent the day before the awards ceremony at the gallery in 'art class' with Ntshangase. This led to an impromptu workshop at the FLAT gallery for the children. We were supportive of this use of the FLAT for a function outside that of an art exhibition site. For us, it spoke to the importance of a 'true' community space that could operate with the flexibility to serve an important unexpected need.



Sam Ntshangase with his students at the FLAT, 1994



PIERS MANSFIELD  
installation  
1994  
Above: Horsburgh in the installation

## **PIERS MANSFIELD**

**May 6, 1994**

Piers Mansfield, a fourth year student at the Technikon, presented an installation which resembled a stage set for a detective's office. Hinted in the invitation that he produced to announce the exhibition (a photocopied cheap Agatha Christie paperback cover: *Poirot - and the Case of the Murdered Millionaire*), Mansfield created a melancholic mood with props, lighting and music.

In the corner of the otherwise empty room, was a wooden desk with a chair. On the wall were hung an old wind up telephone, a fire extinguisher, a baroque mirror and a framed portrait of John F. Kennedy. A bare ceiling lamp hung above the scene and the music of Ornette Coleman set the mood. Inside the desk drawer could be found a spy novel.

It was a detective's office that seemed to reference several decades of American popular culture: from film noir movies of the 1940s and cartoon characters like "Dick Tracey", to 'cold war' spy hideouts; the setting evoked rich associations.

The mood was dark, the presentation austere: a few bare objects, a harsh light bulb. Indeed, the real detective work lay in the hands of the viewer, for the 'clues' and the 'script' were not explicitly stated. The work did not offer conclusions, but rather more sinisterly revealed how we, as young South Africans, were so often preoccupied with and influenced by American culture through the popular media of television, movies and comics. It brought to mind the question of why Mansfield, a South African, might use imagery that so strongly referenced 'American' history, implying that we were now engaged in an 'international' conversation rather than a local one. In a more subversive, subtle way Mansfield grappled with the strange displacement of American culture onto a South African context.



Horsburgh & Mansfield playing chess, 1994

***EXPERIMENTS & CONVERSATION***  
***Audio Recording (Tape 12)***  
***May 1994***

In this cassette, we again explored the possibilities of transforming language in a continuation of the processes employed with the *détournement* strategies of the *Miracle Filter* recordings. This is evident in the first segment of the tape, which features the voices of Barry, Horsburgh, Samkelo Matoti and Rhet Martyn, and in the final portion, which contains a ‘one sided conversation’ piece that I produced.

Martyn and Matoti were both sculpture students at the Technikon, who frequently visited the FLAT. Here, both joined Barry and Horsburgh in reading ‘found texts’ with random changes in accent and language. Barry, for example, would adopt at times a very heavy Afrikaans accent and would even break into Afrikaans occasionally. Horsburgh sometimes simulated the accent of a ‘B-movie’ Nazi German, while Matoti spoke in both English and Xhosa.

Much of the conversation is disjointed, as the languages and accents shift constantly, though Martyn appears in one segment to be ‘dueling’ with Horsburgh, to a noisy backdrop of music by *Rage Against The Machine*.

It was significant, that the language was ultimately indecipherable. At some point, we began to manipulate the tape speed and when slowed down, our words, particularly Matoti’s spoken Xhosa (as it was less familiar to us) became like ‘pure sound’; they moved in and out of signification to become abstract. Indeed the formal experimentation did not stop here. The work that followed marked the introduction and manipulation of ‘found sounds’ hence a kind of *musique concrète* was employed.

The term *musique concrète* is mentioned by Michael Chanan in *Repeated Takes*, a book on the history of recording and its effects on music. Here he speaks about the new genre of audio art calling it, “sonic montage, something like a cross between experimental radio and *musique concrète*”.<sup>122</sup> He points out that, “*musique concrète* came of age with the introduction of the tape

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<sup>122</sup> Michael Chanan; *Repeated Takes*, London, Verso, 1995, p. 139.



recorder, which allowed precise control over...techniques,”<sup>123</sup> and defines *musique concrète* through a discussion of the work of Pierre Schaeffer:

Pierre Schaeffer, a sound radio technician from Paris began experiments with ‘scratching’ records during the war and by 1948 had formulated a method of composition which freed the sonic material from association with its origins. Taking sounds from different sources, from pianos to railway trains, he produced a series of short pieces by playing them at different speeds, forwards or in reverse. Isolating fragments and superimposing them. This was *music concrète*, concrete music as opposed to music made by putting notes on paper...<sup>124</sup>

On the FLAT tapes, a formal experimentation with the use of recordings not connected to language, followed our multi-voiced conversation segments, and led to the creation of what might even be considered to be ‘music’. Though it was, of course, created from the recording of what would not be ‘conventional instruments’. Examples included the manipulation of electronic feed-back, the placement of a microphone into a fan, the slowing of a tape to half speed, and the recording of an ordinary clock-alarm. The idea was to ‘compose’ by creating sounds through a variety of means.

Indeed the composer, John Cage had experimented with ‘found sounds’ and created works with non-musical instruments, as well as the element of chance. In his book *Experimental Music, Cage and Beyond*, Michael Nyman writes about Cage’s first tape piece, *Williams Mix*, made in 1952:

[it] cut through the concrete/electronic distinction - a distinction which hinged on sound origins and technical methods - by building up a **vast library of sounds** and **using chance techniques** to dictate how the tape should be cut, spliced together and combined. He divided the available sounds into six categories: city sounds, country sounds, electronic sounds, manually produced sounds, ‘including the literature of the winds’, wind-produced sounds ‘including songs’ and small sounds ‘requiring amplification to be heard by others’. The comprehensiveness of the sound sources of *Williams Mix* and the potential presence of sounds in a performance of 4’33’’ make these pieces, if viewed symbolically, as demonstrations of **the availability of all sounds to the composer of the future**.<sup>125</sup>

Nyman also writes about the use of “ordinary sounds from the world” through a description of Schaeffer’s work:

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<sup>123</sup> Ibid, p. 141.

<sup>124</sup> Ibid, p. 140 – 141.

In the late 40s, Pierre Schaeffer was beginning to listen to common sounds - trains, bells, humming tops - and to experiment with these sounds with a curiosity and pragmatism not surprising in an ex-sound effects man. He recorded sounds on disc loops (tape not being available to him at that time) cut off the attack and decay of sounds, ran things backwards and at different speeds.<sup>126</sup>

Chanan, again in *Repeated Takes*, elaborates on earlier compositions of these and other composers working with manipulated recorded sound:

In the 1930s composers as diverse as Milhaud, Hindesmith, Varese and Cage had all experimented with discs played on variable speed turntables to create striking, though limited, transformations of sound. [In] *Imaginary Landscapes* (1939 and 52), Cage used combinations of turn-tables playing frequency test records and contact microphones made from electric guitar pickups. The most notorious was No.4 for twelve radios.<sup>127</sup>

The lines between what defines an ‘avant-garde’ musician, a sound artist or an audio artist become blurred. Chanan defines the term of ‘audio artist’ in this way:

‘Audio artist’ is a term that signifies a new movement in phonographic culture, a new kind of artistic endeavour, belonging to the 1980s alongside the rise of performance art and installation art: in fact it is one of the links between the two, since audio technology allows sound signals to be incorporated into both.<sup>128</sup>

He talks about what he calls the use of ‘raw sound’ in the production of ‘sound art’ and comments on Cage’s contribution in defining it as ‘avant-garde music’:

Raw sound too, which interests the audio artist for a variety of reasons, is also musically alien. It seems inescapable that if non-musical sounds were to acquire the potential of becoming artistic symbols, then by the same count they became music - unless music were to change. Kahn considers audio art, though composed, as something different from music, but it needed the work of composers like John Cage, who did things with noise, to challenge the ingrained habits of musical hearing and open up our ears. In this the relationship with noise is critical.<sup>129</sup>

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<sup>125</sup> Michael Nyman; *Experimental Music – Cage & Beyond*, London, Studio Vista, 1974, p. 41.

<sup>126</sup> *Ibid*, p. 40.

<sup>127</sup> Michael Chanan; *Repeated Takes*, London, Verso, 1995, p. 139.

<sup>128</sup> *Ibid*, p. 138.

<sup>129</sup> *Ibid*, p. 139 – 140.

The sound work on this FLAT tape came out of an experimental urge to first manipulate speaking voices to create pure sound unhinged from meaning, and led to the recording of various sources to make ‘music’. This work, which began with my making moaning sounds and putting the microphone into the fan could be seen as the appropriation of ‘noise’ and an investigation into a kind of ‘audio art’. The origins of a ‘new attitude’ towards noise could be traced back to the Italian Futurists and Russolo’s noise instruments according to Chanan, but as Nymans claims, it is Cage who opened up the “availability of all sounds to the composer of the future”.

The final section of the tape was an idea to record a conversation where only one side is heard. I was initially inspired by a Patti Smith album in which she appears to be talking to her father or boyfriend, but at no point in the conversation does he speak. This struck me as being very psychologically loaded. In this monologue, hypothetically set in a club or at the FLAT, I created a nervous conversation with someone of the opposite sex, who did not exist.

In this way, I sought to capture a sense of alienation through male sexual insecurity. The lack of a female voice on the tape not only recorded the lack of a female sexual presence, but seemed to reference masturbation through the notion of ‘talking to oneself’. This notion of the alienated voice was also explored through the use of the ‘exit line’.

The ‘exit line’ was used as a means to break with a conversation and referred to the awkward means by which one might sever social communication. Such phrases as, “Excuse me, I just have to quickly go to the toilet,” abruptly breaks a tie with whom one is speaking. In the case of this ‘conversation with myself’, there is an irony in the fact that there is none there. I am in a sense refusing to talk to myself.

Hi, how’re you? How’ya doing? I’m fine thanks...and yourself? Hmph...hmp...Whatcha gonna do later? Ya, I don’t know. I haven’t...I haven’t really thought about it or anything...but...I might, I might...ya...I might go...I supp...ya...OK [nervous laughter]...um...I think...I think I’m gonna go get another drink. Do you want anything? OK, I’ll see you later maybe. OK...bye...<sup>130</sup>

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<sup>130</sup> Horsburgh, Barry, Allen, Matoti, Martyn; ‘Experiments & Conversation’, *Flat Recordings*, Tape 12, Durban, FLAT, May 1994. This one-sided conversation piece was in some ways a preparation for my two-sided conversation piece performance with Elmin Engelbrecht at the *Internotional*.

***SHAFT/FLAT***  
***Audio Recording (Tape 13)***  
***May 1994***

To create the *Shaft/FLAT* sound work, Horsburgh used previously recorded works from earlier FLAT tapes and fused these with ‘found’ commercial Funk music, Brian *Eno’s Music for Airports*, as well as *Kenyan and Tanzanian Witchcraft Music*. Using very direct, low tech methods, he constructed this ‘fusion’ by playing the FLAT tapes and the music simultaneously on a double tape deck and then recording this live in the room with a second deck. For example, Horsburgh, manipulated the ‘Funky Music’ tape by starting and stopping it while also playing excerpts from the *Miracle Filter – Heaven* (Tape 11) and *The First Time* (Tape 1) tapes, recorded previously. Significant is the fact that the entire tape is ‘live’ and yet all the sound heard is previously recorded. In the background, on the tape, one can hear Barry and myself, and so it would be difficult to determine whether we were in fact actually present for the recording, or just ‘present’ through our recorded voices.

|                     |  |
|---------------------|--|
| <b>Funky Music:</b> | If you need a one day lover...<br>Just call 7, 6, 5, 4, 3, 2, 1 day lover.<br>I'm a love machine in town, the best you can get...<br>fifty miles around. [Super Max]   |
| <b>Horsburgh:</b>   | A revolutionary who preachers about love... It's got a damn nice ring to it!<br>We are about people talking.   |
| <b>Horsburgh:</b>   | We should write poetry, Gabriel, you and me.<br>We can be poets!<br>Gabriel, you've done what!?<br>What are cut-ups, Gabriel?<br>I'm, I'm thinking about, like about Shakespeare.<br>You know? Like bad verse.<br>You're talking about cut-ups?<br>God, you're in anti-art already, Gabriel ?<br>Gabriel should be running this show. <sup>131</sup> |

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<sup>131</sup> Horsburgh; ‘Shaft/FLAT’, *FLAT Recordings*, Tape 13, Durban, FLAT, May 1994.

***BREAD & PLIERS***  
***Audio Recording (Tape 14)***  
***May 1994***

*Bread and Pliers* was a recording made with Nkosinathi Gumede, Barry and myself. Gumede, who had been living and working in the studio of Andries Botha, recorded this as a kind of ‘audio-letter’ to Botha, who was in America at the time. In this correspondence, Gumede describes among other news, an incident which led to the title, *Bread and Pliers*.

He had sold one of his sculptures, a constructed truck, with a pair of Botha’s pliers and a loaf of bread accidentally left inside. Our plan was to making a short 3 minute tape and mail it overseas to Botha. In the tape, Nkosinathi expressed his doubt as to whether Botha would return and relayed the details of an unfortunate situation in which he was mistakenly accused of stealing from a vending machine on campus.

***EXPERIMENTS***  
***Audio Recording (Tape 15)***  
***May 1994***

At this time I was experimenting with placing a microphone inside a Spanish guitar and amplifying bad playing and noises. This recorded material would later be overlapped onto *Zulu for Medics* thus making a highly clear and audible language tape almost inaudible. It was in part an experiment without any ‘thematic intention’ and in part a humorous work equating the difficulty of learning a new language with that of learning to play the guitar. The wrenching sound of my unskilled guitar playing gave the tape an uncomfortable mood.

**BIENNALE PROPOSAL**  
***Audio Recording (Tape 16, Side B)***  
***May 1994***

On side B of the this tape are experiments with feedback and the first version of *I Knew These People*, a soliloquy I sampled from the Wender's film *Paris Texas*. The film deals with a man's obsessive relationship with his wife, and here I listened to the original soundtrack on earphones and then recorded myself reciting the text out aloud. This along with *Zulu for Medics* was my first individual audio work and was exhibited on that year's *Volkscas Atelier*.

Unlike my audio performance for the *Internotional* with Elmin, made at the same time, in both these pieces I utilized the actual sound equipment as a found-object in the final presentation in the gallery. I installed the piece by hanging a small cassette recorder from the ceiling which played the ten minute recording.

The idea of presenting the hi-fi as a found-object appealed to me, because it was a continuation of my exploration of the notion of displaying the 'consumer icons' of middle class male youth. The year before I had begun to make display case sculptures with such personal items as my Hardy Boys books, Doc Martens and a logo T-shirt. *The Hardy Boys* (1993) and *Shirt and Boots* (1993) were works that came out of this interest, as well as in *Songs for Nella* where the speakers became a part of the 'sound installation'.

At the end of the tape is a conversation between Barry and myself where we discuss ideas for a funding proposal for the *1<sup>st</sup> Johannesburg Biennale* fringe. The fringe was to be a group of exhibitions/projects that were to happen in Johannesburg at the time of the Biennale, but not take place in the 'official' venues. Our plan was to propose to the Biennale committee that they fund our FLAT activities up in Johannesburg to coincide with the Biennale, and that we would run it virtually as we had in Durban.

Inadequate time prevented the proposal from ever being submitted. However, this recording captured a slice of the dialogue in which we were engaged. At that time, Barry was also working on another fringe proposal for what would become *Emerging from the Kingdom*, co-curated with Terry-Anne Stevenson. Which **was** realised at the Biennale.

**Allen:** It is about decolonizing as opposed to ‘doing something about’ decolonizing, like trying to make an artwork about decolonization.

**Barry:** It’s more about creating a space, a decolonized space, than about presenting work that is preoccupied with decolonization. I’m sure that they have unwritten rules. In a way our only saving grace or redeeming factor is that we have applied and we’ve got a gallery and that is that. It’s not a national gallery, it’s an **alternative gallery**. We are dealing with contemporary issues. We are dealing definitely with those issues. We aren’t dealing with money. Non-profit. In terms of that, there should be no question. We are basically marginalized. We are dealing in a marginalized area and in terms of that it would be odd if we were snubbed totally. It would be a contradiction in a way. Fuck, if they getting 50 000 international curators and all the national galleries and shit. There’s this tiny, little fart-arse gallery which is doing relatively dynamic stuff and is managing to survive without making any profit and without pilfering the pockets of people who are producing profound pieces of...

**Allen:** ...potatoes!

**Barry:** ...Basically we will be looking for accommodation and a dynamic space for interaction where people do show work and we do whatever from installations to anything.

**Allen:** You know another thing that we must consider, is the fact that it is going to be living, it is going to be happening all the time. The Biennale itself is probably only going to happen in the first week and then after that it’s going to die down. It’s just going to be a continuous show for two months and we are going to be living there for that whole time, we are going to be active, so people... The art is actually going to be continuous. We are going to be always active; the other people’s exhibitions are going to be static.

**Barry:** Well we will sleep sometimes.

**Allen:** At the end of the Biennale when people come to take their work down, we are still going to be having exhibitions.

**Barry:** Ja, that’s nice.

**Allen:** Like a living art work.<sup>132</sup>

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<sup>132</sup> Barry, Allen; ‘Biennale Proposal’, *FLAT Recordings*, Tape 16, Durban, FLAT, May 1994.

**CONVERSATION**  
***Audio Recording (Tape 16, Side A)***  
***May 1994***

On side A of this tape is a scripted conversation that I recorded between Elmin [Engelbrecht], a well-known fashion-designer, and myself; which was to be used in our performance *Conversation* at the *Internotional* (described below in the *Internotional* section). This recording also provided raw material for many future audio experiments including *Especially the Fact that I Don't Have a Car*, *Conversation 2*, and my audio performance at the FLAT, *Songs for Nella*.

In this recording, we were trying to self-consciously manufacture a typical dead-pan, banal conversation between a Durban man and woman. We were in a sense critiquing the banality or lack of substance in general conversation that we felt was epidemic among our peers. This critique included ourselves. We wanted to confront what we saw as a crisis in our generation and to address the non-confrontational, politically-detached intellectual laziness of white middle class youth in Durban. But we sought not only to address a broad critique of what we saw as a kind of moral ambiguity in our generation, but also reveal the banality in conversations between men and women, over sexual boundaries. We wanted to capture the nervousness of both and/or the psycho-sexual complexities in male and female conversation.

We chose to 'set' our scripted exchange at a gallery opening or club, and to recreate a situation where two people, meet, and partake in a conversation that is formal and unimaginative. Hoping to expose the 'ritual' aspect of exchanges where all the questions and answers are predictable and disallow any substantive connection, we wanted to expose conversations of this kind as being not just lazy, but disingenuous. Not only did this address our concerns with the lack of honesty in communication between men and women, but the disturbing implications of a communication so disconnected from the political realities around us.

Elmin also addressed the notion of 'rupture'. She talks about how she deals with people who ask her how she is and are not really expecting an answer. If instead of saying: "Ja, I'm fine," she says "No, I'm not well..." When this causes a 'splice' or rupture in the banal flow of general conversation, she observes that it often leads to the quick insertion of the oldest small talk convention - the weather. It was fitting that our critique of communication would be staged at the *First Internotional Theater of Communication*, which followed in May 1994.



*EXCERPTS from  
CONVERSATION.*

*Below are two takes of  
artificial conversation  
which Elmin & I  
fabricated for the  
Internotional. Take 2  
was used at the  
Internotional while Take  
I was used in later  
sound works of mine.*

**Take 1**

**Allen:** Hi, how are you?

**Elmin:** Hello, how're you?

**Allen:** I'm OK and yourself?

**Elmin:** Ja, ja I'm alive.

**Allen:** Well, what'ya doing?

**Elmin:** I'm talking to you over a microphone...

**Allen:** No, man, don't be silly.

[Laughter]

**Elmin:** Joke, joke.

**Allen:** So, so how ya doing?

**Elmin:** I'm well, ja.

**Allen:** Well that's great

**Elmin:** And you?

**Allen:** I'm OK... I'm just er... hanging around, just doing my own thing

**Elmin:** Ja, me to

**Allen:** So have you done anything interesting lately?

**Elmin:** Ja, ja I actually have

**Allen:** Like what?

**Elmin:** Ar... just like a lot of things.

**Take 2**

**Allen:** Hi, how are you?

**Elmin:** Hello, I'm very well and you?

**Allen:** I'm OK and yourself

**Elmin:** Groovy, groovy.

**Allen:** What'ya doing?

**Elmin:** Oh, Just hanging around

**Allen:** Ja, me to. Nice paintings these aren't they?

**Elmin:** Ja, well I can only see one.

**Allen:** I hate coming to these exhibitions...

They're really terrible [false laughter]

**Elmin:** I don't know it's the first time I've been to one like this.

**Allen:** Is it? Ja, so... um...

**Elmin:** But I'm not there yet.

**Allen:** Is it. What do you mean?

**Elmin:** I don't know, I'm still going to the exhibition, I think. Are you there already?

**Allen:** Um... I don't know, I'm not really sure.

**Elmin:** It feels as though we've had this

conversation before

**Allen:** Ja I know what you mean I think. We probably have I guess.

**Elmin:** I think we did. But how are you?

**Allen:** I'm OK

**Elmin:** Have you been up to a lot of good?

**Allen:** Um well, I've been doing work mainly I haven't done any artwork for ages. I've only been doing like making money and shit like that. I guess um... um... So what'ya doing later?

**Elmin:** I thought I might go to the Rift.

**Allen:** Oh ja, I haven't been there in ages

**Elmin:** Ja, neither have I.

**Allen:** Is it nice?

[Laughter] No, I know

what it's like I'm talking shit I guess

**Elmin:** No well I think it changes, you know. Sometimes it's really nice at the Rift and sometimes it's really kuck. Normally when its really bad I don't go there for quite a long time. Then I go there to see what its like.

**Allen:** Ja, for sure

**Elmin:** The last time I've been there was actually very nice

**Allen:** I actually wouldn't mind going there tonight, seriously.

**Elmin:** Really?

**Allen:** Ja

**Elmin:** It's actually quite a good idea.

Should we go?

**Allen:** Maybe

**Elmin:** See are you in the mood now? Cause earlier you didn't really feel like going

**Allen:** Ja, I don't know um... I'm in the mood, I'm mean, I'm just in the mood to just have a good time, I guess.

**Elmin:** I guess you're

on your 2nd glass of wine, that's why.

**Allen:** Second?

[Laughter]

*After we had attempted a number of our 'self-conscious' takes, we did manage to get into some substantive conversation. Indeed, although unintentionally, some of these words would later be used in other sound projects for example ESPECIALLY THE FACT THAT I DON'T HAVE A CAR.*

**Allen:** OK. Well now that the conversation has ended, should we talk about things that we wouldn't normally talk about on tape?

**Elmin:** OK. It could be dangerous though.

**Allen:** What do you want to talk about?

**Elmin:** I don't know

**Allen:** Here endith the recording. What do you want to talk about? This will be totally edited.

**Elmin:** It's quite nice because it's like it's a bit of a risk. It sounds good and then you leave it on. So it's a risk to me because you're doing the editing.

**Elmin:** My childhood dream has always been to fly.

**Allen:** Really?

**Elmin:** Ja, my body flying and not my mind flying or being in... in something that makes me fly. You know... just physically being able to fly without any help. That's always been my childhood dream. And sometimes when I feel... feel really trapped, I often get this... this... I don't even know how to describe this feeling I get inside of my stomach. There's someone scratching from inside me. And I get really frustrated, and I feel as though I am a wild animal trapped and all I want to do then is just to fly. Just want to fly. And sometimes I 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... just become numb and fall asleep.

**Allen:** That's fine.

**Elmin:** I would still like to know what to do in situations like... that I... I'm still not able to...

I'm still not able to actually know what to do with myself in situations like that. Let alone other people. They... they know less than I do what to do with me. Do you sometimes feel like that?

**Allen:** I feel... I feel... Often like I've gotta be on my own, you know. And I've created this kind of studio for myself which is... it's more like a room. It is a room... OK... where I can just go. I have the only key to it. But... um... it's a room where I keep some sort of private stuff. Not really but stuff where I can go to and be on my own and private and kind of safe you know... um... as opposed to this place which is totally always, kind of... um... moved in upon. Its kind of like this place is always open.

**Elmin:** It's always a gallery?

**Allen:** Ja, its always kind of vibrant. It's always penetrated, you know. This place is permanently penetrated like permanently fucked. I suppose I can use that as a metaphor. But, not really, it just a place.

**Elmin:** I know what you mean. Ja, I do... You see 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 had this... um... this plant growing in our garden. I guess it's not a plant, its more like a eh... don't know what you call it in English

**Allen:** Say it in Afrikaans.

**Elmin:** 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 there 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 it's 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 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 you, while I'm in the room with a lot of people. I 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 well for me.

**Allen:** Ja

**Elmin:** 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.

*This fragment of conversation was used on CONVERSATION II, where I edited out my voice to make as if Elmin was talking to herself. [On FLAT CD I]*

**Elmin:** Ja, got three brothers. My brothers are great. It was so strange when I was a little girl I always thought you had to choose to have a favourite brother. But my favorite brother's my oldest brother cause he always read me stories.

**Allen:** Why was he your favourite brother?

**Elmin:** Cause he read me stories. I always took out children's books and then he would read them to me. But I always thought it's because he's being nice to read it to me but actually he...

actually liked the stories. He enjoyed reading them for himself.

[Laughter]

**Allen:** Which was...

Which was the brother that had... that had the motor-bike accident?

**Elmin:** That's my youngest brother. Anyway so my oldest brother was my

favourite brother and I thought he is the most intelligent person in the world and there's

nothing that he doesn't know and he can answer anything. Whenever I read a book and I didn't understand a word, I would go and ask him and he would always know. He would always know what... what the answer is. What it

means. And I, I don't know, I guess he was like my hero. But then one day... one day I wanted him to read a story to me and I think he was tired. He was in Angola [Border War] at that time in the army and he came home for the weekend and he hadn't slept for two days. So he was home and I

**Allen:** How old were you?

**Elmin:** I was very young I think about five or six years old. And I wanted him to read a story to me... and he was so irritable with me and I kept on asking him and I guess I was being irritating. And then he slapt me. And from that day on he was not my favourite brother anymore.

***THE FIRST INTERNATIONAL THEATRE OF COMMUNICATION  
Audience Participation Event  
& Audio Recordings (Tapes 17 – 19)  
May 20, 1994***

The philosophy that “anyone could do anything” was the guiding principal at the FLAT, and this was reflected in the audience-participation-performance, *The First International Theatre of Communication*. This call for all to participate began with the printing and distribution<sup>133</sup> of an **open** invitation from Horsburgh and Barry (see opposite page), and embraced in a single night a broad and all encompassing range of FLAT activities. It was conceived by them to “allow anyone to do anything in the space”, and evolved with very little plan, except to bring people together with the catalysts of an open microphone, two tape recorders, some provocative wall texts and a space to interact. The only goal was to allow for open expression and to ‘see what would happen’. Meijer and Owen then wrote in their respective art columns these reports reiterating Horsburgh and Barry’s words that the event would allow for ‘anything whatsoever’ and be ‘open-ended’

Durban’s only alternative gallery, The FLAT Gallery, will be hosting an evening of communication interaction. The aim is to gather as many people as possible in a single space providing them with a unique context in which to in vocal, written or active form express any information about anything whatsoever.<sup>134</sup>

The format of expression is entirely open-ended. The only condition is that it does not prevent free expression.<sup>135</sup>

It is interesting to note, that though we did not then or with any of our other exhibitions or events stipulate that work must be ‘political in content or motivation’, the ‘political’ nature of the FLAT’s project was implicit in our openness to free expression to all participants and our blurring of lines between ‘art’ and ‘life’.

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<sup>133</sup> Barry recalls: “I remember that we sent flyers, advertising the event, all over - including the *Green Door*, a club or restaurant in Maritzburg. That was the furthest we went to disseminate the information.” Barry, Allen; Interview 10, Telephone call, AT&T, Feb 16, 1999.

<sup>134</sup> Therese Owen; *The Weekly Mail*, Johannesburg, May 1994.

<sup>135</sup> Marianne Meijer, Artbeat, *The Daily News*, Durban, May 20, 1994.

In a recent telephone interview with Barry, he pointed out that, at that time, Horsburgh was inspired by the 1968 student riots in Paris. “He was reading a lot of material concerning the Situationist movement in France.”<sup>136</sup> Indeed Horsburgh, in the credits at the end of this press release lists by name those involved with the Situationist movement as well as a number of other influential sources:

The evening is conceived and constructed by: Ralph Vanegeim, Guy Debord, Gilles Deleuze, Manuel de Landa, Felix Guattari, Peter Kropotkin, Jay Horsburgh, Pierre Proudhon, Hakim Bey, Thomas Barry, Isidore Ducasse, Toni Negri, Ronald Bogue, Rose Selavy, John Cage, Bill Godwin, Fourier, Tristan Tzara, Isidore Isou, Justin Evans, Alex Berkman, Octave Mirbeau, Uncle Bill, and others.<sup>137</sup>

Indeed, this list read like a kind of personal genealogy for Horsburgh, and included many names, already cited earlier, as being historically significant to many of the FLAT projects at that time. The poetic strategies of Burroughs in the cut-ups, the Situationist tactics of Debord and Vanegeim or the absurdist non-linear theatrics of the Dadaists were all-important historical precedents. Perhaps most relevant to the *Internotinal*, was the Situationist concept of the *dérive*

<sup>136</sup> Barry, Allen; Interview 10, telephone call, AT&T, Feb 16, 1999.

<sup>137</sup> Horsburgh, Barry; *The First Internotinal Theatre of Communication*, Press Release, Durban, FLAT, July 1994.

**Ralph Vanegeim** and **Guy Debord** (1931 - 1994) were both members of the Situationist International, a literary, “political” organisation established in France (1957 - 1972). Their writings and activities lead partially to the 1968 events (riots/strikes) in France. Debord is the author of the book *The Society of the Spectacle* (1967) and Vanegeim of *The Revolution of Everyday Life* (1967). **Gilles Deleuze** (1925 – 1995) was a professor of philosophy at the University of Paris at Vincennes. English translations of Deleuze’s work include *Kant’s Critical Philosophy: The Doctrine of the Faculties*, *Cinema 1: Image/Movement and Nietzsche and Philosophy*. **Felix Guattari** (1930 – 1992), a practicing psychoanalyst and lifelong political activist, worked since the mid-1950s at La Borde, an experimental psychiatric clinic. He was an active participant in the European Network for alternatives to Psychiatry. Together, Deleuze and Guattari coauthored *Anti-Oedipus and Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature* and *A Thousand Plateaus – Capitalism and Schizophrenia (Mille Plateaux)* (1980). **Jay Horsburgh** was a member of the FLAT Gallery (1993 - 1995) in Durban, South Africa. **Pierre Proudhon** (1809 - 1865) an “anarchist”. **Hakim Bey**, anarchist of the occult political theories of the *Temporary Autonomous Zone* – “come together in secret, work fast, get out while the goings good”. **Isidore Ducasse** (aka Comte de Lautreamont) (1846 - 1870) is the author of the infamous *Maldoror and Poems*, heralded as one of the first Surrealist books *Maldoror* has been called an “oceanic text, a frenetic monologue, infantile, brilliant, a work of genius and above all EVIL”. **Toni Negri** is the author of *Marx beyond Marx: Lessons of the Grundrisse* (1991). The concept of “post-wokerist” Marxism would be picked up by Toni Negri and others in the 1970s in Italy. **Thomas Barry** was a member of the FLAT Gallery (1993 - 1995) in Durban, South Africa. **Rose Selavy** (aka Marcel Duchamp) foremost 20thC conceptual artist. **John Cage** foremost 20thC experimental composer. Often associated with Fluxus group but (he) claims no inclusion. Teacher at Black Mountain College. **Charles Fourier** (1772 - 1837), a utopian socialist. **Tristan Tzara** was a member of the Dada anti-art movement and co-founder of the Cabaret Voltaire in Zurich in Feb 1916. **Isidore Isou** (1925 - ), an anti-poet of Romanian origin, was the leader of the Parisian based group known as the Lettrist International. This group is often seen as a precursor to the Situationist International. **Octave Mirbeau** is the author of the macabre classic *The Torture Garden*. (1899) (ReSearch) which features a corrupt Frenchman and an insatiably cruel Englishwoman who meet and then frequent a fantastic 19thC Chinese garden where torture is practiced as an art form. **Uncle Bill** (aka William Burroughs) author of *The Naked Lunch*, was involved with the Beat movement in the USA in the 50s. Also involved with Brion Gysin and ‘cut-up’ theory. Interestingly Horsburgh and Barry, in what could be seen as a pretentious act, included themselves in the company of this ‘who’s who’ of avant-garde and theoretical writing and practice.

THE FIRST INTERNATIONAL THEATRE OF COMMUNICATION

On May 20 the **Flat Gallery** will be hosting an evening of communicative inter-action. The purpose of this evening is to gather as many persons as possible in a single **space**, providing them with a unique context in which to express, in vocal/written/or active form, any information about any thing whatsoever.

The format of expression is entirely open-ended. The only criterion is that it does not prevent another participant from freely expressing themselves. When we speak of **things** (information to be expressed) we mean any **thing**: concepts, principles of any kind, your dreams, hobbies, plans, memories, observations, art, science, horizons, work, play - anything.

**The principle is that it does not matter what you have to say - but it is vitally necessary that you say it.**

To this end we invite participation from any and all: architects, flower arrangers, students of anything, sky-divers, poets, the dispossessed, religious people, men, stone-cutters, teachers of anything, the possessed, women, metal workers, philosophers: absolutely everybody qualifies!

Anyone interested in participating or finding out more information is encouraged to contact the **Flat Gallery** at 4 Manor Court, Mansfield Rd. Or Jay Horsburgh, at #3 - 31 Halford Rd, Berea. Telephone: 221-131.



The evening is conceived and constructed by: Ralph Vanegem, Guy Debord, Gilles Deleuze, Manuel de Landa, Felix Guattari, Peter Kropotkin, Jay Horsburgh, Pierre Proudhon, Hakim Bey, Thomas Barry, Isidore Ducasse, Toni Negri, Ronald Bogue, Rose Selavy, John Cage, Bill Godwin, Fourier, Tristan Tzara, Isidore Isou, Justin Evans, Alex Berkman, Octave Mirbeau, Uncle Bill, and others.

or ‘drift’. Though the *Internotional* took place in a designated space, the spirit of the event, the ‘sense that anything might happen’, was perhaps informed in some ways by this notion.

*Dérive*, a Situationist method, also known as literally ‘drifting’ was a technique described by Debord as a “transient passage through varied ambiances...” entailing “playful constructive behavior and awareness of psychogeographical effects”.<sup>138</sup> For example, one might just decide on a given day to catch an unfamiliar bus, go to a place never before traveled, and enter a bar in that area to interact with a stranger in a chance meeting. The idea of drifting through urban geography was to experience new things by chance interaction rather than by set conditions, thereby disrupting normal social patterns. In fact some time later, Horsburgh, Levi, Matoti, Barry and myself embarked on such a ‘drift’. We filled a car with petrol and went with an obscure plan into the Natal midlands. We drove into unfamiliar towns and got lost.

Though it refers specifically to a kind of ‘urban journey’ without a map, the concept can be applied to a more expanded notion of ‘drift’, that simply involves letting things happen without plan or intention. The ‘political’ implications of such an action could be seen in the resistance it offered to what one might perceive as the ‘commodification’ of life. They suggested that in order to be released from the “jail of consumer society”, the process of the ‘drift’ was indeed necessary.

In many ways, the idea of the ‘drift’ and the manner in which the evening evolved was also resonant with certain improvisational theater tactics. One particularly significant example is described by director André Gregory in his conversation with actor and playwright Wallace Shawn. Here in Louis Malle’s film, *My Dinner with André*, Gregory tells his friend Shawn of his experience with a respected Polish director, Grotowski:

**André:** - to find the theme through action. And that the action was created by impulse, by somebody having an impulse. In a way its going right back to childhood, where simply a group of children enter a room or are brought into a room, without toys, and they begin to play. Grownups are learning how to play again.

**Wally:** Yes right. So you would all sit together somewhere and you would play in some way - but what would you actually do?

**André:** Well, I can give you an example. You see, we worked for a week in the city before we went to our forest, and of course Grotowski was there in the city too, and, you see, one of the

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<sup>138</sup> Guy Debord, ‘The Theory of the Dérive’, Ken Knabb (ed.), *Situationist International Anthology*, Berkeley, Bureau of Public Secrets, 1981, p. 50.

things I asked Grotowski was that I be kept as far away from him as possible so I couldn't be influenced by him in any way, because his whole group was leading workshops. But I did hear that every night they conducted something called a 'beehive'. And I loved the sound of this beehive, and a night or two before we were supposed to go to the country, I grabbed him by the collar, and I said, "Listen, this beehive thing, you know, I'd kind of like to participate in one, just instinctively I feel it would be something interesting". And he said, "Well, certainly, and in fact, why don't you, with your group lead a beehive instead of participating in one?" And I got very nervous, you know, and I said, "Well, what is a beehive?" And he said, "Well, a beehive is, at eight o'clock a hundred strangers come into a room" And I said, "Yes?" And he said, "Yes and then whatever happens is a beehive."<sup>139</sup>

The beehive, where people arrive and 'whatever happens is the performance' indeed describes the events that took place on the night of the *Internotional*. For the event, Barry and Horsburgh had pasted on the walls, in a rather chaotic fashion, a large body of written and printed information. This material included some drawing and 'artworks', but was primarily text; both photocopied and hand written. Hannalie Coetzee from Jam & Co, an Afro-Jazz club in Durban, came and put up pictures and writings that were rough idioms around the topic.<sup>140</sup> Also set up were two open microphones and two portable tape recorders.

In the beginning much of the audience came with the expectation of 'watching' a performance and stood waiting to be 'entertained', not realizing perhaps they were in fact the ones who were 'performing'. In a sense, this kind of 'passive viewer as consumer' was the very thing that Horsburgh and Barry were seeking to explode in such an event. The *Internotional* was an attack on the passive 'watching', letting others do the work, and not getting involved with one's own cultural exploration of life.

The audience at first acted on the old habits of gallery going, reading the texts on the wall as if they were paintings at an exhibition, and waiting to 'see' the performance. Urged by Horsburgh and Barry to speak, people slowly began to approach the open microphones. Those who came to express themselves on various topics, interestingly included comments on the event itself, as well. As the evening evolved, more came and went, performing, conversing, looking at the text on the wall, occasionally coming to speak into one of the two tape recorders. Martyn, who spoke almost continuously into one of the portable recorders, made free association poetics

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<sup>139</sup> Wallace Shawn, André Gregory, *My Dinner with André*, Screenplay for film by Louis Malle, New York, Grover Press, 1981, p. 26 – 27.

<sup>140</sup> Barry, Allen; Interview 10, telephone call, AT&T, Feb 16, 1999.







through soliloquy, citation and exchanges. One such exchange with Horsburgh is transcribed below:

**Horsburgh:** Generate an audience.

**Martyn:** Generate organs? Jay wants to generate organs. Jay! Jay is an organ-generator... Ah false.

**Horsburgh:** I open up parentheses in your falsehood, in order to say the following: To sleep in a butterfly is an epic abdication of a moral territory. To let a butterfly sleep in one's hand is a secret theft of that territory of morals. The first is a surrender allowing oneself to be seduced by illuminous channel. An intuition that flees from maps. The map is not the territory, after all. The second is criminal. It's to seek out those points at which moral landscapes buckle. To crawl into that space and plot, using the techniques of sorcery for an epic seduction. We will be making a sleep to fit the contours of one hand. Neither can be recognized without the other, so here I close the parentheses at criminal seduction.

**Martyn:** Whoever paints his face taking the marks of an arbitrary characterization of a future people. Whoever appropriates in the exhaustive way of all possible terms and threats language as a science of imagery solutions. Whoever refuses to explain himself and despite the emission doesn't stop robbing nor in fact engages in any collective practice. Such a person is the agent of subversion which... have great significance. The alchemy of the word, information requires uncertainty. The person that can predict a message knows it in advance. Then that message is not information hence meaningless. That part of the message that is not unpredictable is redundant. Redundancy is productive because redundancy guarantees the primacy of certain messages to the exclusion of all spurious information, which is called noise. The greater uncertainty of the message, the more noise it will contain. The loss of productivity in the system is called entropy. Entropy is the information and meaningful step taken with the full weight of the body on a plump and rounded ball of the foot... down the conclusive and dangerous brick road to chaos.<sup>141</sup>

What was perhaps most significant about the evening was the odd simultaneous occurrence of so many actions. Though this was reminiscent of the *SWANS* performance, here the events were even more random and un-scripted; the 'collaboration' more open ended. Some, like Paterson who worked in his sketchbook, sat quietly throughout the evening. Others engaged in conversation, read from texts or bantered with *non sequiturs*. Much was made about those who had not attended, Martyn criticized the gallery for being elitist, and Barry spoke at length to university English lecturer, Rob Amato, about his philosophy around both the event and the

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<sup>141</sup> Martyn, Horsburgh; 'Internotional I', *FLAT Recordings*, Tape 17, Durban, FLAT, May 20, 1994.

FLAT. Amato had run an alternative theater space in Cape Town and spoke about the experience.

Barry and Amato discuss the *Internotional*:

**Barry:** Basically what we are doing is recording anything that people are saying or doing and we are going to be compiling that or just keeping it as some kind of record.

**Amato:** Storytelling?

**Barry:** Yes.

**Amato:** Events and histories.

**Barry:** And we haven't really tried to define what will be taking place. In that way people will shape what does happen. But at the same time we are trying to create some kind of break in... communication. A shift!

**Amato:** A communication break is deeply desired. Give us a break in communication. Ja, I can see that's lovely stuff but what I am most intrigued by is the degree to which we could have a theatre which frees itself of Sneddonism!<sup>142</sup> Which has had a thirty-year scourge in this area.<sup>143</sup>

The evening grew raucous with various people 'performing' simultaneously. Horsburgh and Barry singing a song, while Tione Scholtz, a Natal University Composition student, 'rudely' interjecting some 'theory' about something. Interrupted conversations and disjointed exchanges flowed. In some ways, as the evening 'warmed up' it brought to mind the stories around the Cabaret Voltaire.

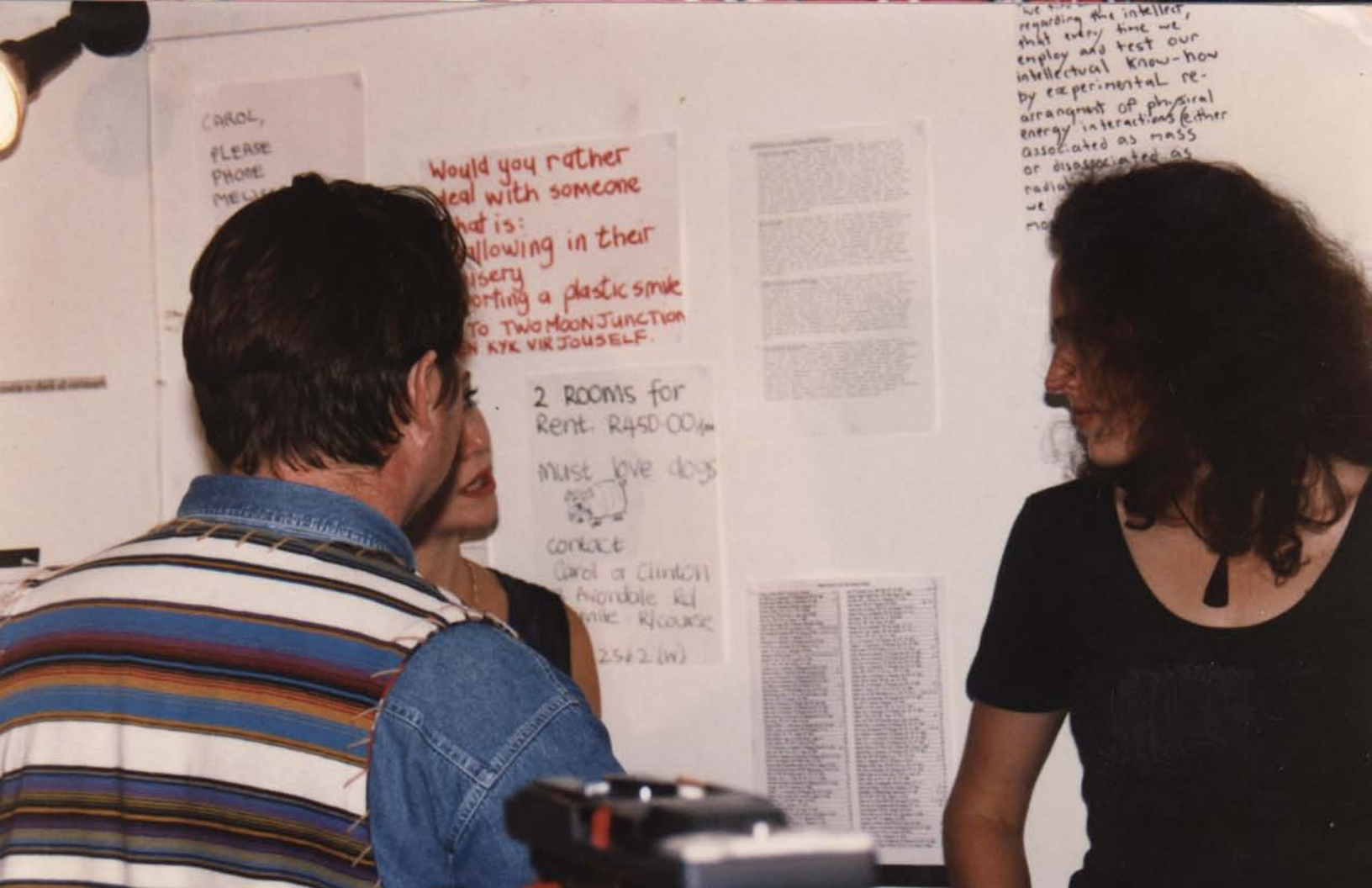
Cabaret Voltaire was founded in 1916, by Hugo Ball and is seen historically as being the beginning of Zurich Dada. Created when Ball arranged for 'artistic entertainments' at a local café, which Ball along with Tristan Tzara, Jean Arp, Marcel Janco and Emmy Hemmings performed nightly. These were staged with a great deal of improvisation with simultaneous disjointed 'acts'. Using Janco's famous painting *Cabaret Voltaire* to recollect, Arp describes a typical evening:

On the stage of a gaudy motley overcrowded tavern there are several weird and peculiar figures...Total pandemonium, The people around us are shouting, laughing and gesticulating. Our replies are signs of love, volleys of hiccups, poems, moos, and miawing of medieval Bruitists. Tzara is wiggling his behind like the belly of an Oriental dancer. Janco is playing an invisible violin and bowing and scraping. Madame Hemmings with the Madonna face, is doing the splits.

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<sup>142</sup> Professor Elizabeth Sneddon was an established theater lecturer at the University of Natal, who was well known in Natal for her involvement in the theatrical arts.

<sup>143</sup> Amato, Barry; 'Internotional I', *FLAT Recordings*, Tape 17, Durban, FLAT, May 20, 1994.



Huelsenbeck is banging away nonstop on the great drum, with Ball accompanying him on the piano...<sup>144</sup>

As with Cabaret Voltaire, the evening at the FLAT was a theatrical mix of concurrent but unrelated performances that created a strange ‘collage’ of overlapping dialogue, action and music. A ‘free for all’, where the audience became performers without a script. It was fitting that Cabaret Voltaire happened not in a museum, or institution, but ‘in the street’, in this case, in a pub, and that the FLAT event resembled a typical evening in a club, where the usual social restraints are loosened.

**Bahktin**, mentioned earlier in relation to the *SWANS* performance, speaks to this notion of creating an ‘alternative social space’ through his exploration of the ‘carnival’. Michael Gardiner in his book on Bahktin, *The Dialogics of Critique*, writes about the notion of carnival as observed through the eyes of Goethe, pointing out the importance of this eyewitness account in Bahktin’s work. Goethe in witnessing a New Year’s carnival comments that, the carnival is not an occasion of state, but rather something that people “give themselves”. Described as a “tumult of people, things and movements” that can only be “experienced firsthand”.<sup>145</sup>

According to Gardiner, Bahktin observed how a carnival is “the free and spontaneous combination of formally self-enclosed and fixed categories, that brings together, unifies, weds, and combines the sacred with the profane, the lofty with the low, the great with the insignificant, the wise with the stupid.”<sup>146</sup> As a “symbol of communal performance, it can only occur in the streets and the public square, where social relations are free and unrestricted, full of ambivalent laughter, blasphemy, the profanation of everything sacred...”<sup>147</sup>

This breaking of rules and this “creation of a new social space” is possible in a carnival, because “there is no barrier between actors or performers and those who witness it.”<sup>148</sup> An event, where people become participants rather than observers, was seen by Bahktin as having profound political implications. This is addressed specifically when he observes that the carnival effectively breaks down formalities, “replacing the established traditions and canons with a ‘free and familiar’ social interaction based on the principles of mutual cooperation, solidarity and equality”.<sup>149</sup> Gardiner adds that “It demonstrates that other, less rigid and hierarchical social relations are

<sup>144</sup> John Elderfield’s introduction to *Flight Out of Time – A Dada Diary by Hugo Ball*, New York, Viking, 1974, p. xxiii .

<sup>145</sup> Michael Gardiner, *The Dialogics of Critique – Bahktin and the Theory of Ideology*, London, Routledge, 1992, p. 44 – 45.

<sup>146</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 47.

<sup>147</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 129 – 130.

<sup>148</sup> *Ibid.*

possible and indeed desirable, through the utopian enactment of an integrated, egalitarian community.”<sup>150</sup> The spirit behind the *Internotional*, and indeed the mission of the FLAT, was to create such a social space.

Explicitly stated in the *Internotional* press release was: “**the principal is that it does not matter what you have to say, but it is vitally necessary that you say it.** The only criterion is that it does not prevent another participant from freely expressing themselves”.<sup>151</sup> This echoes Goethe’s words that “in the carnival proper everything (except violence) is permissible.”<sup>152</sup>

However, this also speaks to another concept central to Bakhtin’s notion of the creation of a social space and that was the importance of ‘polyphony’. The polyphonic model implies that all voices are valid and that the resultant dialogue is richer by way of such inclusiveness. Free and familiar interaction by necessity requires an openness to many viewpoints. Gardiner speaks to Bakhtin’s use of the term ‘polyphony’ in reference to a discussion of Dostoevsky’s novels. Here the narrative is developed without a singular point of view. For Bakhtin, the implication is that a polyphonic voice is more democratic in that it operates beyond a ‘dominant’ singular voice. Gardiner says:

Through the structural dissonance of polyphony - the interplay of unmerged voices and consciousness - Bakhtin argues that we can become more aware of our location in the dense network of discursive and ideological practices.<sup>153</sup>

In the carnival, social constraints are thrown off. By becoming active creators rather than passive consumers, individuals are empowered. In a sense, by creating an opportunity for an audience to become performers, many voices are brought to the conversation, and the passive role of the art viewer is also challenged. Anything can happen. This is significant, for such events are not separate from life, or ‘bought’ like an evening at the theater (or in front of the television). Rather they are lived, experienced, and transformed into life itself.

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<sup>149</sup> Ibid, p. 51.

<sup>150</sup> Ibid.

<sup>151</sup> Horsburgh, Barry; *The First Internotional Theatre of Communication*, Press Release, Durban, FLAT, July 1994.

<sup>152</sup> Michael Gardiner, *The Dialogics of Critique – Bakhtin and the Theory of Ideology*, London, Routledge, 1992, p. 44 .

<sup>153</sup> Ibid, p. 92.

Not all of the events were completely spontaneous, and the *Internotional* included a number of ‘performances’ with prior preparation. Brendon Bussy came early, played his viola for a short time and left for another ‘gig’ across town. Scholtz played recordings of some of his experimental electronic compositions. In conversation that evening, he spoke about this work:

**Scholtz:** That was a piece based on the Johannesburg Stock Exchange data converted into real time midi data and put into a computer and played back through a synthesizer.

**Allen:** Not to mention our tape deck. Thanks!<sup>154</sup>

Etienne De Kock, declaring that he “didn’t like to listen always to the clamor of 100 *saartjies* [or softies] trying to discover themselves” read several ‘nonsense’ poems including one on “youth”:

**De Kock:** The first poem is... quite an old poem. It talks about a college and college-students, right. And now there is a college called Milton, or something. And a freshman is someone new who arrives at university and this was written very long ago. Milton is obviously a literary college of some sort and literature and art are very closely linked. It’s called “After sending freshmen to describe a tree”:

Twenty inglorious Milton’s looked at a tree and saw God.  
 Noted its clutching fingers in the sod.  
 Heard Zephyrs gentle breezes wafting through her hair.  
 Saw a solemn statue, heard a growing woody prayer.  
 Saw dancing skirts and the Lord’s desire.  
 Green arrows to God instead of pyre.  
 Saw symbols and squirrels, heard musins indeed.  
 Not one of the Miltons saw any tree.  
 [Laughter]  
 If you must see a tree, clean, clear and bright.  
 For God’s sake and mine, look outside your heart and write.<sup>155</sup>

He dedicated this reading to “all you middle earth, third eye, politically correct people.” And after reading four more poems, closed with the remarks that “it’s been a long time since I’ve had such a captive audience.”<sup>156</sup>

<sup>154</sup> Scholtz, Allen; Internotional III’, *FLAT Recordings*, Tape 19, Durban, FLAT, May 20, 1994.

<sup>155</sup> De Kock; Internotional II, *FLAT Recordings*, Tape 18, Durban, FLAT, May 20, 1994.

<sup>156</sup> *Ibid.*

For some weeks before the *Internotional*, I had been toying with a sound work. This piece called *Conversation* (and discussed earlier - Tape 16) seemed appropriate for the *Internotional* as it was about “communication interaction”. Indeed, I was utterly absorbed at that time with how people communicate with each other, whether across gender or cultural lines. I was interested, not only in the way in which two people of different language groups, race, or gender, always communicate with some kind of implicit power relations but also how one relates to different people in different contexts. In talking to a male friend, my mother, or a strange woman in a nightclub, each would bring from me a different ‘voice’.

For the *Internotional*, Elmin and I presented our ‘communication performance’. Though it was only our intention to face each other across the room, later observation showed that we seemed to reference images of “Adam and Eve” from religious paintings. We stood silently as speakers above each of our heads re-broadcast our voices, the ‘banal’ conversation that we had recorded earlier. We ‘communicated’ only through our ‘preprogrammed’ conversation, and so, in a sense, the piece was a parody of an interaction between two people at a gallery function. As we stood on display, our taped conversation echoed the typical boring exchanges that one might endure at such an event.

The idea of presenting a critique of human interaction at an event that called for any human interaction was interesting to me. The concept behind the presentation of this audio-piece at a public function was the notion that we come to these events with encoded information. By presenting banal conversation, I wondered if I might evoke in the audience a self-consciousness towards their own interactions that evening.

Though the event asserted itself as being open and inclusive, some of the criticism of the event addressed the problem of ‘exclusivity’. All interaction was allowed, even silence as performed by Paterson, who remained quiet throughout the early part of the event, choosing to draw in his book instead. He spoke about this later in an interview:

**Allen:** Please describe and comment on your involvement at the *Internotional* when: a) you remained quiet, drawing in your book; and b) when you and I recorded our conversation about screaming.

**Paterson:** a) I was well within my rights according to the aims of the *Internotional*. Through drawing I was able to observe the process of liberating ideas and the eradication of censorship.





The drawings still exist and they continue to inform me. With this in mind I think *The Internotional Theatre of Communication* is still on the go. b) You scream, ice-cream, we all scream together.<sup>157</sup>

But later in conversation he had this to say about the event:

**Allen:** Would you try to make the point that the *Internotional* was significant in terms of the shift in the South African political situation at the time? That is it occurred twenty days after the elections and to a certain extent the *Internotional* embraced ‘freedoms’ which up until that point were forbidden to most South Africans.

**Paterson:** I feel the *Internotional* failed to realise the magnitude of the event. People have been saying what they liked for centuries, how do you think apartheid came into being.

**Allen:** What else can be said about the *Internotional*!?

**Paterson:** The *Internotional* had a limited audience, which hindered the aims of the event.<sup>158</sup>

Indeed Carol Gainer, another FLAT regular, was quite critical of the *Internotional* and of what the FLAT Gallery had become; she had these comments in an e-mail discussion on December of 1998:

**Allen:** On May 20 (1994), 20 days after the ‘historic’ SA elections, Jay and Thomas organised *The First Internotional theatre of Communication*. They advertised it with a flyer stating that “this event will provide a unique context in which to express, in vocal / written / or active form any information about anything whatsoever”. In one of the recordings taken at this event, you expressed some criticism about the event (and/or the FLAT) [*“Well once again I have to tell you that I think it’s really fucking pathetic!”*]. Could you articulate why you felt this way?

**Gainer:** The reason why I felt as strongly as I did at the time i.e.: *“fucking pathetic”* and *“masturbation”* was because I felt as if the FLAT was becoming a “boys own club”! I seem to remember feeling that the lack of boundaries during this time was not a problem for me but... the exhibitions/performances did start to move into something else, which I did not really think of as art. The element of debauchery seemed to shift the pieces into more of a ‘jolling’ category. I do know now, that on reflection, I was also feeling left out in the sense that if one did not hang out continuously at the FLAT drinking etc, then one did start to feel alienated. It seemed to me at the time that the major players at these events were the ‘boys’ who hung out and I guess that pissed me off in a way as the intensity on a very REAL level which I had previously experienced was not there for me! Also...the pieces started to become boring as there was no genuine discussion generated by them to anyone else other than the involved parties - trying to get some kind of sense

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<sup>157</sup> Paterson, Allen; Interview 7, snail-mail, April 1998.

<sup>158</sup> Ibid.



out of you, Thomas or Jay at the time was VERY difficult and a little too "airy" - too many uhhmms and aahhs!!!

**Allen:** The *Internotional* occurred 20 days after the 'historic' elections. Given this context, would you say that it was significant that the event embraced certain 'freedoms' (aims) such as stated in flyer: "the principle is that it does not matter what you have to say - but it is vitally necessary that you say it"? This event also reiterated the FLAT's main aim and goal that, "anyone can do anything in the space". The event represented perhaps one of the FLAT's most seminal events. Would you agree with this? If not, explain why.

**Gainer:** Generally, though, the concept of "letting anyone do anything" was not in question as much as the actual presentation and follow through of the pieces. I feel that we kind of lost our contact with ourselves, and our audience, during this period and after all it was ALL meant to be about communication.

**Allen:** What are your feelings about the way programming at the FLAT was developing? Do you feel that the later exhibits at the FLAT had slipped into a kind of decadence?

**Gainer:** I started to detach myself from the FLAT around this time as felt that if I could not keep up with the general 'jol' then maybe I should just opt out! The so-called 'boys own club' has a very strong historical base in this country as you know and it, as far as I was concerned, became too exclusive and as far as I had understood the FLAT's mission statement was to be an INCLUSIVE experimental space.<sup>159</sup>

In spite of these valid criticisms, the *Internotional* still affirmed our struggle to redefine the function of a 'gallery'. We were not only an exhibition space, but also a 'cultural centre', a 'club' and a living place. The FLAT events reflected what we saw as being the potential for a new South African culture. It operated in a way that was difficult to define, in a manner which ran contrary to conventional notions of how one might live practically and how one might express oneself culturally. We questioned whether a gallery needed to be 'official' or if art needed to be exhibited in a particular way. We asked whether we could not make our actual life our art. For us, art production that operated through conventional means was limited, and we as artists could make radical art out of everyday life, when we established a gallery in our own home. When Horsburgh addressed in his statement the notion of freedom for all, he also spoke to the need to conflate art and life. The *Internotional*, as an event, was reflective of the ongoing exchange at the FLAT; the 'performance' created out of spontaneous interaction where audience and artists become one.

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<sup>159</sup> Gainer, Allen; Interview 11, e-mail, cyberspace, Dec 4, 1998.

*EXCERPTS from the FIRST INTERNATIONAL THEATRE OF COMMUNICATION Recordings. (Tapes 17 – 19) It is important to realise that these recorded conversations, only represent a fraction of the activities at the event. They only document the people that were near or used the recording facilities. Many other interactions remain unrecorded. The first tape starts with a conversation between Rob Amato (Am) and Barry (B) where they discuss the International. This interaction can also be heard on FLAT CDI.*

**B:** Basically what we are gonna do with anything that happens tonight is we are going to be compiling it into one kind of generalized set of information and re-disseminating it to anyone who is interested. Fax it out internationally or where ever. On tape, in terms of the information people bring, what we are doing is recording anything that people are saying or doing and we are going to be compiling that or just keeping it as some kind of record.

**Am:** Storytelling?

**B:** Yes.

**Am:** Events and histories.

**B:** And we haven't really tried to define what will be taking place. In that way people will shape what does happen. But at the same time we are trying to create some kind of break in communication. A shift!

**Am:** A communication break is deeply desired. Give us a break in communication. Ja, I can see that's lovely stuff but what I am most intrigued by is the degree to which we could have a theatre which frees itself of Sneddonism! Which has had a thirty-year scourge in this area. And then there are all sorts of other deaths in the town. It's very strange, why does the town have a bad acting style, for instance? Why? It's nothing to do with the teachers. It's got to do with something else. It's something else.

**B:** Something obscure?

**Am:** Something obscure. Something terribly obscure!

That nobody has defined. Maybe that's why you need breaks.

**B:** Jay is a good person to speak to in terms of that. I think he's got a lot of ideas but not necessarily the resources. That's also true...

**Am:** But that's a... This Space was run on... It works well on the blood of the actors... the old space in Cape Town. There was some money coming in for things like adds in the paper. Actually I've reminded Kenyan about 250 000 [Rand], the period that I was there. About 200 000, 180 000 [Rand] went into the Argus Company for advertising shows. It's one of the biggest expenses. It was the one thing we could not by-pass.

**B:** Ja, I think our aim is largely to create some kind of space. A kind of free open experimental space and we don't necessarily have the resources to provide [...]. What we are trying to do is, well we trying to disregard money as well to some extent. Because as soon as we start worrying too seriously about that... we are gonna basically...

**Am:** How've you covered the rent?

**B:** Beg your pardon.

**Am:** How have you covered the rent?

**B:** To a large extent we basically... through ourselves but we have received sponsorship for this room. However...

**Am:** What's your name?

**B:** It's Thomas, I'm Thomas

**Am:** Rob, Rob Amato.

**B:** We really just want anything to happen, you know.

*At some point, Horsburgh introduces the event to the audience/participants with a statement. After which interaction began within the 'audience'. Horburgh (H), Rhett Martyn (M), Paula Grundy (G), Walker Paterson (P), Elmin Engelbrecht (E), Etienne De Kock (DK), Barry (B) and Allen (A). A number of people who I did not know also took part. They are referred to as W1, 2, 3... if they were female, and M1, 2, 3... if they were male.*

**H:** In case you were wondering what I was doing, an introduction seems necessary. We would just like to welcome everyone who is coming down to our evening of communication interaction...

We are not entirely sure what is going to take place from now until then. But it is necessary that anyone who does have anything to say and who is interested in saying something respond to the situation. Now is the time! [\* Pun from Sekunjalo Ke Nako, the ANC logo.] It's spontaneous, it's evolutionary so anything you have to say about anything... please go ahead. Do it right now. Or in five minutes, or ten minutes and... enjoy.

Now everyone is focussing their attention on me and that sets up a dichotomy which everyone is aware of - subject, object and all of that. It's not very interesting. It's interesting only to a certain degree. And we would like to transcend that. So... please feel free to talk amongst yourselves. Feel free to write on the walls. Feel free to read everything and exchange understandings of what those things are about. It's entirely a human process. It's got to do with the information that you are willing to dispatch. It's probably gonna be sent to other countries and in a similar evening in another country this information that is compiled here [will be used.]

**H:** Generate an audience.

**M:** Generate organs? Jay wants to generate organs. Jay! Jay is an organ-generator.

Generalised transaction between the left ventricle and the right. Would obviously mean

**H:** cloud-busters while hand-cuffed to a smile

**M:** with an effervescent sparkularity of hundreds of different kinds of distinguished guests

**H:** of topography and rapture.

**M:** Ah false.

**H:** I open up parentheses in your falsehood, in order to say the following: To sleep in a butterfly is an epic abdication of a moral territory. To let a butterfly sleep in one's hand is

a secret theft of that territory of morals. The first is a surrender allowing oneself to be seduced by illuminous channel. An intuition that flees from maps. The map is not the territory, after all. The second is criminal. It is to seek out those points at which moral landscapes buckle. To crawl into that space and plot, using the techniques of sorcery for an epic seduction. We will be making a sleep to fit the contours of one hand. Neither can be recognised without the other, so here I close the parentheses at criminal seduction.

**M:** Whoever paints his face taking the marks of an arbitrary characterization of a future people. Whoever appropriates in the exhaustive way of all possible terms and threats language as a science of imagery solutions. Whoever refuses to explain himself and despite the emission doesn't stop robbing nor in fact engages in any collective practice. Such a person is the agent of subversion which... has great significance. The alchemy of the word, information requires uncertainty. The person that can predict a message knows it in advance. Then that message is not information hence meaningless. That part of the message that is not unpredictable is redundant. Redundancy is productive because redundancy guarantees the primacy of certain messages to the exclusion of all spurious information, which is called noise. The greater uncertainty of the message, the more noise it will contain. The loss of productivity in the system is called entropy. Entropy is the information and meaningful step taken with the full weight of the body on a plump and rounded ball of the foot down the conclusive and dangerous brick road to chaos.

**H:** Generate organs! The following typography has ruptured or [...] cloudbusters while hand-cuffed to a smile. Everyone is smiling so I assume you know what I am talking about. This is the intent at

describing the architecture of the essay itself, but simply the architecture. Those point to which various elements of the essay

**MI:** consist of  
**H:** converge, because the anatomy of language is rather melancholic. To sleep in a butterfly is the epic abdication of moral territory. To let the butterfly sleep in ones hands is the secret... [He continues inaudibly.]

**A:** I find that I am starting to walk like Jay.

**M:** Stetson Boots?

**A:** I'm Jay-walking in other words!

**M:** Interference.

**A:** But unfortunately I do not smoke.

**M:** Peter's project.

Alternatives to the new world order?

**A:** No, I prefer... I prefer to keep myself clean

**M:** Any euphoric people commemorating this theatre of  
**WI:** and it is time that I had a voice in this  
**M:** redundancy.

**WI:** I want to participate. I want to talk about the fact that you want to be clean.

**M:** Participants must interact.

**WI:** I want to talk about that and that you actually are holding

**M:** the Victoria Falls.

**WI:** Everyone has ulterior motives, hay?

**M:** is in a state of rupture.

**WI:** You know actually, mine wasn't ulterior motives.

**M:** Whether its rupture or whether its... finding a solution to an organic problem in which

**B:** I might have a gun

**M:** has never solved itself.

**WI:** Oh well, I have my flick knife.

**M:** Or whether it's just a recording of elements

**WI:** in my boots.

**M:** We don't need to be accessed by other people in order to access yourself. But in a situation like this access is vital

**M3:** because no one was listening to me.

**M:** If you don't have access to a memory

**WI:** your own voice

**M:** then you are a useless pile of flesh reduced to a graphic medium.

**B:** Exactly, I agree with you.

**WI:** whatever it was

**M:** self perpetuating destructive mechanism.

**B:** It's a matter of you've said what you have said.

**M4:** I didn't say it to make myself happy. I said it because I needed to say it.

**M:** What are you writing?

**W2:** I'm writing a review for the newspaper.

**B:** Have you accepted the

**M:** Which newspaper?

**W2:** The Natal Witness.

**M:** Do you think that this event has been successful?

**W2:** I only just got here.

**M:** How do you feel?

**W2:** Fine.

**M:** Great

**B:** conversation.

**WI:** Yes, it does, definitely.

**P:** What is the significance of significant form?

**WI:** They can learn how to communicate.

**B:** Exactly.

**M:** Significance of significant form is

**H:** Beethoven was deaf and his music was

**M:** to theorize an emotional response to an artwork.

**B:** Wanting to

**M:** that's the only significance it has

**B:** and not being able to?

**M:** Because it was defined in order to theorize.

**P:** Who defined it?

**B:** Whose disability is that?

**M:** Clive Bell and Robert Fry, the modernist critics.

**M5:** They must communicate

**H:** because they haven't chosen context.

**P:** That's all very well, but how can you define significant form?

**WI:** Lets take the bottom line here and that is not good enough.

**P:** Say two aspects of a possible aspect of significant form.

**WI:** So they don't believe that they are good enough.

**P:** It is significant? How does it have any validity?

**WI:** They never came forward and voiced their opinions.

**M:** Well my Peugeot Bicycle has validity therefor significant form must have validity too.

**WI:** So, why can't people communicate? Bottomline is that they don't like themselves and they don't believe what they have to say is good enough or acceptable.

**M:** The king and queen of howling indifference.

**B:** What I wanted to say is

**M:** the court jester is not a royalty.

**B:** It's just as much an insult to go up to someone and say: communicate! Feel free!

**A:** Only if you want to record any of this information you've actually got to speak into this microphone.

**B:** It's very condescending to do that.

**W6:** Feel free? That is the whole question. It goes back to acceptable itself. So that you can actually be free to say what you want to say. It's that picture.

**H:** Alternatively there is a social context and there is other contexts which

**M:** I come back to David Byrne, who said: "Why say anything when you've got nothing to say?" Which goes back to access again. How do you access information which you don't want to access? And in a situation like this I feel that it is difficult to access information.

**M6:** Did Jay say right and wrong?

**M:** it's hard to access verbal information.

**M6:** Verbally?

**G:** Verbal and social

masturbation!

**M6:** If you'd like us to get on to physical.

**WI:** You know what I've never thought of that before. I've never actually considered verbal

masturbation. I've only considered physical

masturbation. And that's great!

**M:** Does somebody want the microphone?

**WI:** Well, this is a new

experience for all of us.

[Laughter]

**G:** It's a never ending special.

**WI:** Where have you been all your life?

**G:** I can only be where I am.

**WI:** Ja, but you can also climax if you want to.

**G:** Right here? How can I be

anywhere else but right here?

**WI:** You talk about a verbal masturbation, you can also have a verbal climax as well.

**G:** Well, would you like to climax?

**WI:** Well, what are we on this planet for besides... you know... loving and experiencing and climaxing?

**G:** And the indulgence in nothingness. We are all loving each other, aren't we? But we need a mask.

**WI:** Somebody over here tell us the point of this conversation?

**G:** I'm not criticising, I'm not criticising pointlessness. There is nothing else but pointlessness!

That's not a criticism, its just an acknowledgement.

**B:** In terms of that, masturbation is an incorrect metaphor to use.

**WI:** This girl who had to talk about sex, because everybody is interested in sex.

**H:** Maybe you should tell her that.

**WI:** You are so bad. You are manipulative. [Laughter]

**B:** From one stranger to another.

**W6:** I have a comment to say and I am not taking sides. Is this on? When she says to you...

**G:** My name is Paula...

**W6:** Hello Paula. When Colette says to you that you are manipulative, you really shouldn't feel bad about it

because at the end of the day we are all manipulative. The fact that you are not very subtle in your manipulation is your joy or your problem... or your choice, your choice. The point is we are all manipulative to a degree so the fact...

**G:** How do you define manipulation? I mean how and why am I manipulative?

**WI:** Because you came and interrupted this conversation because you wanted to have a voice.

**G:** It's not an interruption!

**WI:** You wanted to have a voice!

**G:** It's not a manipulative interaction!

**M6:** You insulted her. She said we were masturbating.

**WI:** So, what is wrong with masturbation?

**G:** But why is that an insult?

**WI:** Do you have a problem with masturbation?

**G:** I've now decided to masturbate with you. That's why I am here.

**WI:** That's great.

**G:** It is not an insult that is your choice.

**WI:** Ja, but you see, you achieved what you wanted to achieve. And that was to have a voice and to be heard. And you were and that is fantastic. I think that is great.

**G:** Well, thank you.

**E:** What colour did you draw your little men when you were a kid?

**M:** If I drew them with a blue pen, they were blue. If I drew them with a black pen, they were black.

**E:** Really? What's the difference when you colour them, you've got a colouring in book and you've got to colour this little smiling guy. What would you make his face?

**M:** I would make his face skin colour.

**E:** Ja, but what was skin colour?

**M:** Skin colour was a thing that you got in a Crayola box and it said "skin colour".

**E:** Ja, but say you were poor and you didn't have a big, wide range of koki colours.

**M:** Then I would chop my wrist off.

**E:** And you've got a choice between brown, pink and white? You don't even have brown. You've got pink, orange and black. So what do you make him?

**M:** Brown, orange, pink and black? I would mix brown and pink.

**E:** Then it comes out black.

**M:** No, it comes out skin colour.

**E:** No, if you do it in koki.

**M:** With koki? What colour does brown and pink make?

**B:** Black!

**E:** You still haven't said to me what you would choose.

Because if you mix kokis, you don't get the colour you think you do.

**M:** I'd use...

**E:** No, but don't tell me what you would use now. I am asking you when you were a kid what you would have chosen.

**M:** I would have made it skin colour.

**E:** Oh, fuck, I don't believe you. I always had a conflict between which colour would be right. I always ended up drawing them brown and all my friends said no it is supposed to be pink otherwise they're black.

**M:** I don't believe in that kind of segregation.

**M:** I've got absolutely nothing to say to an anarchist except [...] is very alive very passionate, very intentional, and love is a void. Universal applauds action [...] and a trade union which will give you new dimension to the art of speaking. Speaking has become just one of the intentions of the new age. The new age will carry on into an infinitive process. And this infinitive process will carry on through the after-life. We will never be left; we will never be spared from this eternal reaction and this eternal return and it's much like a spider's web which will just go round, and round and eventually just come out of the ass of the spider. And then you will just go into the spider and, you know, play around with the spider's body a bit. And then you will leave the spider at the mandibles of the spider into the body of the fly which was actually caught in the spider's web which is significant in that what the spider generated out of its ass is eventually returned back to the product of the spider's ass.

**M:** [In American accent] Carling Black Label, the new brew from South Africa. The brew that made you 60 before you were 30. The brew that made Hong Kong famous. The brew that made Planet Hollywood and Hong Kong appear on the same T-shirt. The brew that made a star come out of the world.

The brew that made me grow a beard.

The brew that made you wear a string around your neck.

The brew that made other people put strings around your neck.

The brew that made you hang.

The brew that made you get a hard-on.

The brew that made your arms come out of your sleeves.

The brew that made your feet come out of your toes.

The brew that made your mother come out of your father.

The brew that made the first sonic, philharmonic orchestra.

The brew that made your paint peel.

The brew that makes your evangelical status seem absolutely appalling.

The brew that made you famous.

The brew that made you 450 ml of pure indulgence.

The brew that made your Caltex Guard seem green.

The brew that made Etienne de Kock feel privileged.

The brew that made the speaker speak before he had spoken.

The brew that made me talk in this American accent.

*There is quite a long break before Etienne De Kock takes up the microphone and recites some poetry.*

**DK:** I just want to read some poetry and make one little point about what I do, and what a lot of people make and that is art. And there's two things about art: what you do and how you do it. It's what you say and how you say it. And art limited into categories. Its not held down and put this way or that way. It's a very human thing. The first poem is quite an old poem. It talks about a college and college-students, right. And now there is a college called Milton, or something. And a freshman is someone new who arrives at university and this was written very long ago. Milton is obviously a literary college of some sort and literature and art are very closely linked. It's called "After sending freshmen to describe a tree":

"Twenty inglorious Milton's looked at a tree and saw God.

Noted its clutching fingers in the sod.

Heard Zephyrs gentle breezes wafting through her hair.

Saw a solemn statue, heard a growing woody prayer.

Saw dancing skirts and the Lord's desire.

Green arrows to God instead of pyre.

Saw symbols and squirrels, heard musins indeed.

Not one of the Miltons saw any tree. [Laughter]

If you must see a tree, clean, clear and bright.

For God's sake and mine, look outside your heart and write."

That's the first one and that just echoes some sentiments I have. [Laughter]

Because I don't like to listen always to the clamor of 100 saartjies [or softies] trying to discover themselves. [Laughter]

And then there is another way of saying things. Well, this is a way of being a nonsense poet.

"I cannot give the reasons, I only sing the tunes.

The sadness of the seasons, the madness of the moons.

I cannot be didactical, lucid, but I can be quite obscure.

And positively [...]

In gorgery and gushness and all that squishes by

My voice has all the lushness of what I try to buy.

And yet it has a beauty, proud and terrible.

Denied to those with duty is to be cerebral.

Among the infant mountains I make my vistas wade

And watch the sepia fountains throw up their lime-green spray."

That's the end of that one. [Laughter] And that shows a way of looking at things that I particularly enjoy. And then for all you people, you middle-earth, third-eye, politically correct people.

"Leave fibres on the wind, and if it bears your weight you are a daughter of the dawn. If not, pick up your carcass, dry your tears.

For that sweet open wind, forgerer was from the fairy-land

But coming rather flooded through the kitchen floor from where your uncle Yustus and his band of flautists

turn my cellar more and more into a place of hollow and decay. That's my theory on it, do your own." [Laughter]

And then finally...

Of barley corn and furrows  
Of farms and turtles  
About such ghostly burrows [...] Of [...] and pasteurs  
Of skies both peak and green  
I made these statements...  
And I have no more to say."  
[Laughter]

It's been such a long time since I've had such a captive audience. [Laughter]

### INTERVIEW

*During the evening, Martyn interviewed me about the Internotional and the state of the FLAT Gallery. This interview was spread throughout the later part of the evening on different tapes.*

**M:** Lets talk about this [FLAT] as an establishment. Do you see this as an establishment?

**A:** How do you mean?

**M:** How do you feel about this?

**A:** About this event, this gallery or what?

**M:** This event!

**A:** I feel in two minds, for one. [Laughter] In one way it is great that this event actually happened. The fact that it happened is great. But I feel in another way that it could have gone further. That's my own personal opinion. I think people could have relaxed a lot. I think people could have freaked out a lot. People could have done anything.

**M:** Why do you think they couldn't 'liberate' themselves?

**A:** I am not too sure about that. I really wish I could know the reason why people can not liberate themselves.

**M:** Don't you see this as having a particularly... [...] against its intentions? Does it have a particularly elitist philosophy?

**A:** Do you think this event was elitist?

**M:** To an extent, yes.

**A:** It probably was elitist in terms of the way it used the media. Or the way we disseminated information. It was

probably elitist in the first place and therefore that reflects on the number of people who came.

**M:** I was interested to hear the other night, when I asked Melissa Marrins whether she was going to come. She said: "No, because it was going to be just another masturbation."

**A:** [Surprised] That's really interesting.

**M:** Whether that reveals some kind of personal conflict with the organizers... or whether there was some kind of truth in that.

**A:** You know what? A body only functions... a chain is only as good as its weakest link.

What I mean to say is, if somebody wants something to be interesting, if somebody wants something to happen in Durban, they've got to fucken do it themselves. And I really stand by that. Because if everyone just sits back and thinks everything is going to happen around them, NOTHING is going to happen. And if somebody thinks that something is going to be a wank, then they are not getting involved themselves. I'm sick of people in Durban saying: "Ah, God, you are wasting your time!" or "You are being elitist!" or whatever. People just sit back and watch things happen, they don't actually do anything themselves. And there is no one who will try and change that.

**M:** This evening seemed to take on a very cerebral nature. How do you feel about that?

**A:** Tonight? I feel fine about it... I actually feel very impartial. I feel totally indifferent because I think... I think a lot of people will go away thinking that this evening was shit. But in another way... If you and me can break down barriers tonight, then tonight was a success. But if we can't do that then maybe it wasn't. Maybe it was just a kind of wanking, as Melissa said. But why isn't Melissa here to 'penetrate' this 'wanking'? Why isn't she here to make 'sexual intercourse'?

Excuse the metaphor, but it's true. If wanking is wanking then what is sexual intercourse? It must be something 'better', surely.

**M:** Perhaps what I was trying to say was... the stream that the Flat has tried to outline, events on a daily basis...

**A:** To a certain extent I must admit that this place is like a total fucken, shit-hole. If you ever want privacy don't come here. It's the worst place on earth to find privacy. There are always people here. You can come home after working at sculpture department, say about 9:30pm; come back here, and someone will knock on the door at 10:00pm guaranteed. It happens every fucken night. Its really great, but if you want to be on your own, don't be here. But its great, the interaction is great. I'm coming to realise that although I live here, this place is not mine, it belongs to the community. Not necessarily the community as a whole, but rather the art community. It belongs to those people who wish to interact with it and they do. I mean you do, everybody does. If you want to move in here, just move in.

**A:** Funny, it's been quarter to seven the whole evening.

**M:** How do you feel about Etienne De Kock's exhibition here?

**A:** I feel like it was a watershed exhibition.

**M:** What do you mean?

**A:** It was symbolic, I think, for non-student artists. Most of the people that have exhibited here have been students. There are exceptions, actually quite a lot of exceptions. But Etienne here, in a way, represented the "Old School".

**M:** This is where I am finding an establishment starting. In that if "Old School" comes here, "Old School" will be addressed to.

**A:** No, but I don't think that we should be aggressive towards the "Old School".

**M:** How does traditionalism play a role in the FLAT Gallery?

**A:** There is a mixture between both. The FLAT gallery's opinion that "anyone can exhibit here" means that if Etienne wants to exhibit here, that is great. We totally support that and he did exhibit here and it

was great. It was probably the biggest turn out we had at the FLAT. What I hope it will do is push, although nihilistically I don't think it will, other people... "the lecturers" or older artists or anyone who is over thirty in Durban; to actually put something on here with guts or with experimentation. Something unsafe and that would be great. Possibly what the FLAT should promote is unsafety.

**M:** I guess I'm just trying to establish whether the FLAT still represents what it did in the beginning – which was completely open-minded and completely open-ended. I still think it is open-minded, but I think everything is always worth watching. I saw a news documentary on Albie Sachs the other night and... as you know he was a 'radical' in the old South Africa... and he said how important it was to always watch with a cautious eye. He is going to keep people at bay and always question their values and always question that they are open-minded and open-ended. And I use Melissa's example to see whether there was a rift occurring within the FLAT Gallery. And I used Etienne as well, to try and see what your sentiments were.

**A:** Rhett, I want to say this. It might seem like, because Thomas and myself stay here, that we run the place and we do. We have to deal with all the fucken shit... we have to clean the place up... What I mean to say is... The Flat gallery is as only as much as those people are willing to put into it. Definitely! Always! And if it is SHIT it is because people aren't fucken putting anything into it.

**B:** Hear, hear!

**A:** If Melissa thinks it is shit, it is because she is not here doing her bit for it. If people have something to say, they must do something better.



**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.<sup>159</sup>

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<sup>159</sup> 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.<sup>160</sup> 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.<sup>161</sup>

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..."<sup>162</sup>

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<sup>160</sup> 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.

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

<sup>162</sup> 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*.<sup>163</sup>

*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*.

<sup>163</sup> 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.<sup>164</sup>

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.

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<sup>164</sup> 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.<sup>165</sup>

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

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<sup>165</sup> 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.<sup>166</sup>

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?

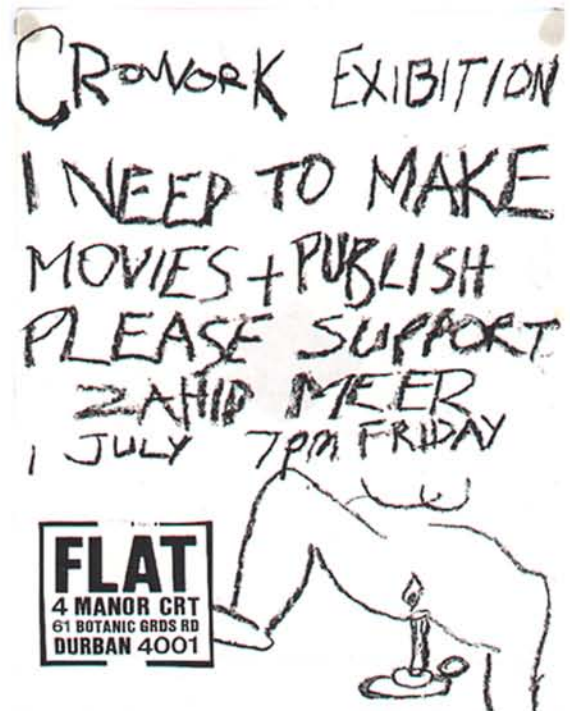
**Meer:** Ah, OK let me tell you a sad [...]

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 [...]<sup>167</sup>

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

<sup>167</sup> *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*.<sup>168</sup> 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

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<sup>168</sup> 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...**<sup>169</sup>

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<sup>169</sup> 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.<sup>170</sup> 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.

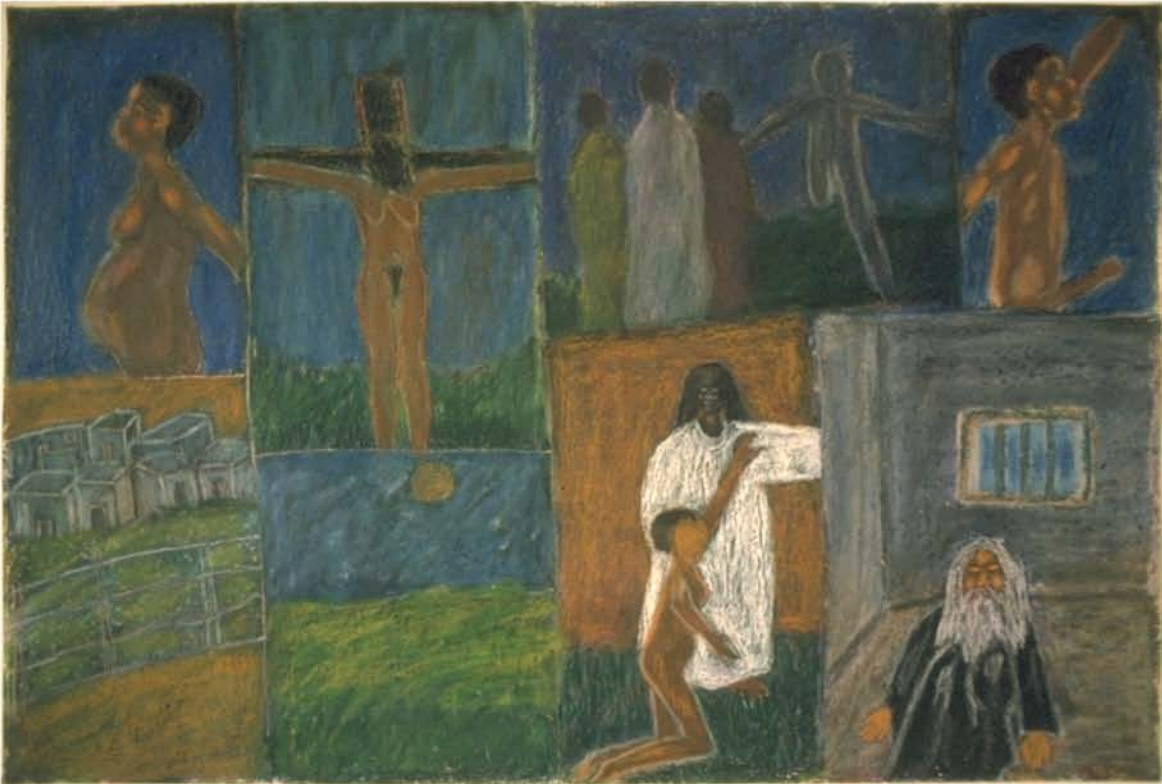
Although the evening began with the audience passively watching, at some point in the performance, the noise evoked a remarkable outburst that arose from the viewers - most notably Marytn, who launched into expressive free form verbal jargon. Whereas at the *Internotional*, we had self-consciously ‘asked’ 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”.<sup>171</sup> 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.

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<sup>170</sup> 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.

<sup>171</sup> ‘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 Dance<sup>172</sup>

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

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<sup>172</sup> Thokozani Mthiyane; Poster for the Exhibition, Durban, FLAT, July 15, 1994.



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

I should be  
a white phantom against  
a black background  
a wailing of a forgotten memory  
on my bloody one  
My eyes held till by  
the summer  
who walks the long distance  
at the edge of the world  
who brings the color  
of the end of the world  
We are captured  
in the circle  
of spiritual slaughter  
What time we share to our  
handwritten letters?  
These written thoughts lead us  
to readers, distant —  
back in the box





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.

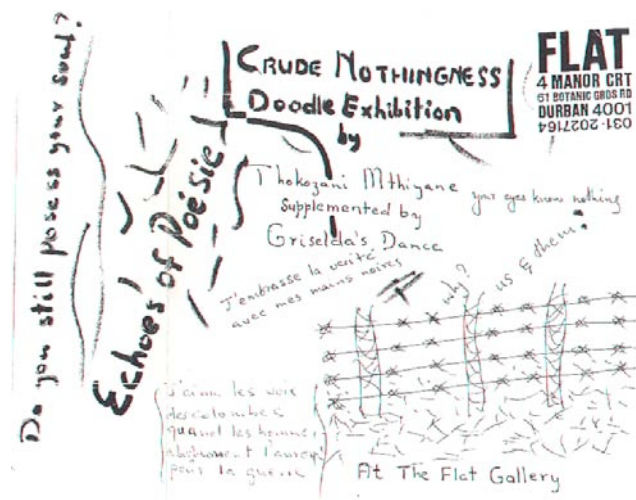
And in two other poems:

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





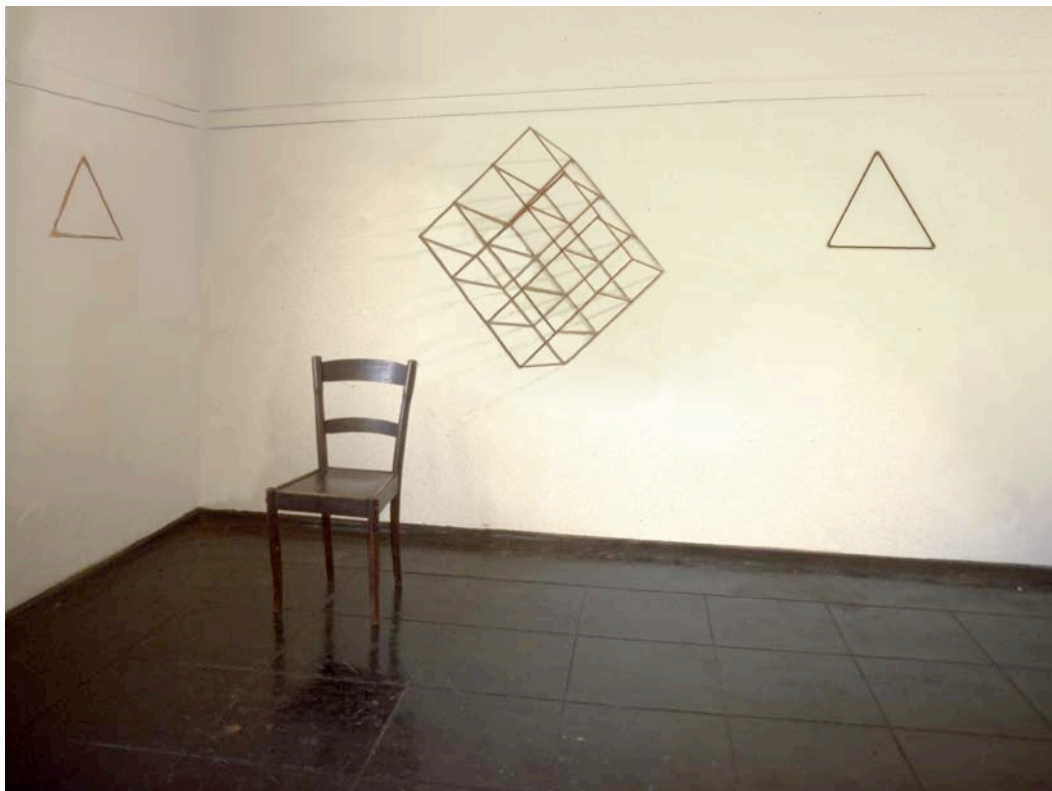
Samkelo Matoti at the FLAT, 1994



***SAMKELO MATOTI***  
***July 22, 1994***

Matoti, a second year student at the Technikon, was a regular at the FLAT. His home was in the Transkei and thus he was living in student residence on campus. He approached us at the FLAT with the proposal: instead of returning home during the July holiday month when the residence was normally closed, he asked if he could stay with us and work at the sculpture department towards an exhibition at the FLAT. We agreed.

The work that he exhibited was an installation of steel triangles, cubes and pyramids. Like geometric drawings, these shapes were arranged to form a minimal composition on the wall. These sculptures then became the background for a large projected image of the artist.



SAMKELO MATOTI, installation, 1994



'33 x 33 Degrees', an action by Aliza Levi, Samkelo Matoti, Horsburgh, Barry and myself, 1994

**33 x 33 DEGREES**  
***A Drive into the Natal Midlands***  
***July 1994***

The situationist concept of the *dérive*, or ‘drift’ described by Debord as a “transient passage through varied ambiances...” and covered earlier in the section on the *Internotional* (p. 204) was applied by us in this action. The idea of drifting through urban geography was to experience new things by chance interaction rather than by set conditions, thereby disrupting normal social patterns. Horsburgh, Levi, Matoti, Barry and myself embarked on such a ‘drift’. We filled a car with petrol and headed into the Natal midlands, our only ‘goal’: to find the point represented by 33 degrees latitude and 33 degrees longitude on the map. We drove into unfamiliar towns and got lost. The point was never found, but then the goal had only been a veil for the ‘action’.

Though it refers specifically to a kind of ‘urban journey’ the concept can be applied to a more expanded notion of ‘drift’, that simply involves letting things happen without plan or intention. In conversation with Barry, he spoke about this action:

**Barry:** Do you remember that drive we went on one day?

**Allen:** Yes, in fact I was looking at some slides of that the other day. I wanted to talk about it in terms of *dérives*. Who came on that drive?

**Barry:** Aliza, Samkelo, Jay, you, myself and maybe even Rhett.

**Allen:** Why did we do it?

**Barry:** We were looking for the physical point where 33 degrees latitude met with 33 degrees longitude on the map. I think that the point represented some kind of vortex or ‘energy’. It was somewhere near Durban, well it was actually closer to Ixopo in fact. And maybe because of that, we were unable to find it. We did come across a petrol-station in the middle of ‘nowhere’, where this attendant spoke French.

**Allen:** Even though our aim was to find this point on the map, it was the journey itself that was significant. It was like looking for the Holy-Grail.

**Barry:** Yes, and we got lost. Lost in the Natal Midlands. I remember us stopping and asking some locals for directions and Jay threw an angel covered in honey into the velt.<sup>173</sup>

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<sup>173</sup> Barry, Allen; Interview 10, Telephone call, AT&T, Feb 16, 1999



***QUASI-STELLA OBJECTS***  
***Multi-media audio-visual performance at Jam & Co Jazz Club***  
***July 31, 1994***

This event was described by Owens in her weekly arts and music report in the *Mail & Guardian*. She says:

On Sunday night prepare for the unusual. The folks from the FLAT Gallery will be putting on a sound performance. Always experimenting with different concepts in all fields of art, the performance entitled *Quasi-Stellar Objects* is definitely not a get down and boogie type jol. Instead it is designed to unsettle the audience while at the same time inviting them to accompany the artists in their experimental journey, some of which will be improvised.<sup>174</sup>

*Quasi-Stellar Objects*, a multi-media collaborative performance at Jam & Co Jazz Club was orchestrated by Bussy, Martyn, Horsburgh, Barry and myself. Jam 'n Co (previously Jam & Sons) was an Afro-Jazz cross-over club that we frequented. Hannalie Coetzee, the manager had been organizing some interesting programming for the club and approached us at the FLAT about doing a performance evening that incorporated all of our recent experiments. We agreed, and with the general concept of the US lunar landing in mind, we came up with the title *Quasi-Stellar Objects*. According to Barry,

“Quasi-Stellar Objects” was a term used in the book *Film as a Subversive Art* by Amos Vogel<sup>175</sup> to describe the farthestmost objects in the universe.<sup>176</sup>

While many collaborative projects at the FLAT had up until that point been quite organic; the introduction of a larger audience, brought with it the need to plan and rehearse a specific set of actions. Barry and Horsburgh adopted a more ‘rigid’ approach in planning for the evening, which was at odds with a more improvisational concept favored by Martyn and myself. As tensions grew, the collaboration proved to be so strained that at some point Martyn chose to opt out of the event. Though the more ‘rigid’ concept was eventually adopted, in retrospect, we were still ill prepared for this event.

<sup>174</sup> Therese Owen, ‘Music’, *Mail & Guardian*, Johannesburg, July 29, 1994

<sup>175</sup> Amos Vogel; *Film as a Subversive Art*, New York, Random House, 1974, p. 14 - 15.

We did ultimately agree on a number of things. We determined that the first action at the event would be the playing of a pre-recorded audio piece based on my *Nina/Paul/Paul/Nina* experiment with looping phrases. Here, I recorded Barry and Horsburgh dueling, in stereo, the words ‘hand’ and ‘craft’. This was repeated and overlaid ad-indefinitum until the words became unrecognizable. While this was playing, Barry laid down a huge sheet of paper in front of the stage and drew in the audience’s space. The filmmaker who had documented the *Internotional* moved amongst the performance shooting footage of us that was then screened through a live feed onto a television facing the audience. *Hand/Craft* went on for 12 minutes.

Bussy then, bringing forward some of his ideas from *Aural Hygiene*, began to play a repetitive set of chords on his viola. As before, I sampled him and re-fed the ‘info’ through a loop-tape live in front of the audience, until a cacophonous drone was reached.

Barry and Horsburgh next sat at two tables that had been set up on the stage with microphones and a typewriter<sup>177</sup>. Once Bussy’s ‘set’ was complete, the two began reciting texts ‘tennis-style’ at each other in what resembled the process previously employed in the *Miracle Filter* tapes. I then sampled their conversation erratically and feed that through a loop back into the system. Horsburgh’s phrase: “That’s unthinkable! You can’t just destroy an entire race,”<sup>178</sup> for example, was repeated continuously with other samples as they continued with their recitations.

A friend of Barry’s, Willem Huysers, was staying with us at that time, and he contributed a very ‘bad’ version of a Doors song to the programme. Though Martyn had pulled out from the project initially, he was in the audience, and attempted to join in by banging on a table.

The performance was loosely inspired by a disk that we had found documenting the US space programmes of the 60s. Throughout the entire evening, the performance was perforated with comments from “Houston”. It was noisy attempt at poetry, on stage.

The oddity of our presenting such a performance at this Afro-Jazz club was immediately evident to us when we arrived to see that a professional ‘sound engineer’ had been hired. Our obvious displacement was further heightened when a black Englishman, who had come to the bar looking for authentic ‘ethnic music’, was confronted with us. He shouted throughout the entire performance, that he did not come all this way to see “racist white people perform this western crap”.

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<sup>176</sup> Barry, Allen; Interview 10, Telephone call, AT&T, Feb 16, 1999.

<sup>177</sup> Ibid.

<sup>178</sup> Quasi-Stellar Objects; *FLAT Recordings*, Tape 32, Durban, FLAT, July 31, 1994.

This explosion, unsettling as it might have seemed was an honest and vibrant reaction to our presence, and in a sense contributed to the unpredictable chaotic state that we welcomed. However, more destructive tensions had been forming within the FLAT group, and the fabric of our community was breaking down. It would never be the same and we would not perform collaboratively again at the FLAT.

### quasi - stellar objects

“...fluctuates erratically...”  
“...distant objects...”  
“...unprecedented manner...”

audio/visual performance  
tomas barry/brendon bussy/siemon  
allen/jay horsburgh/rhett martin



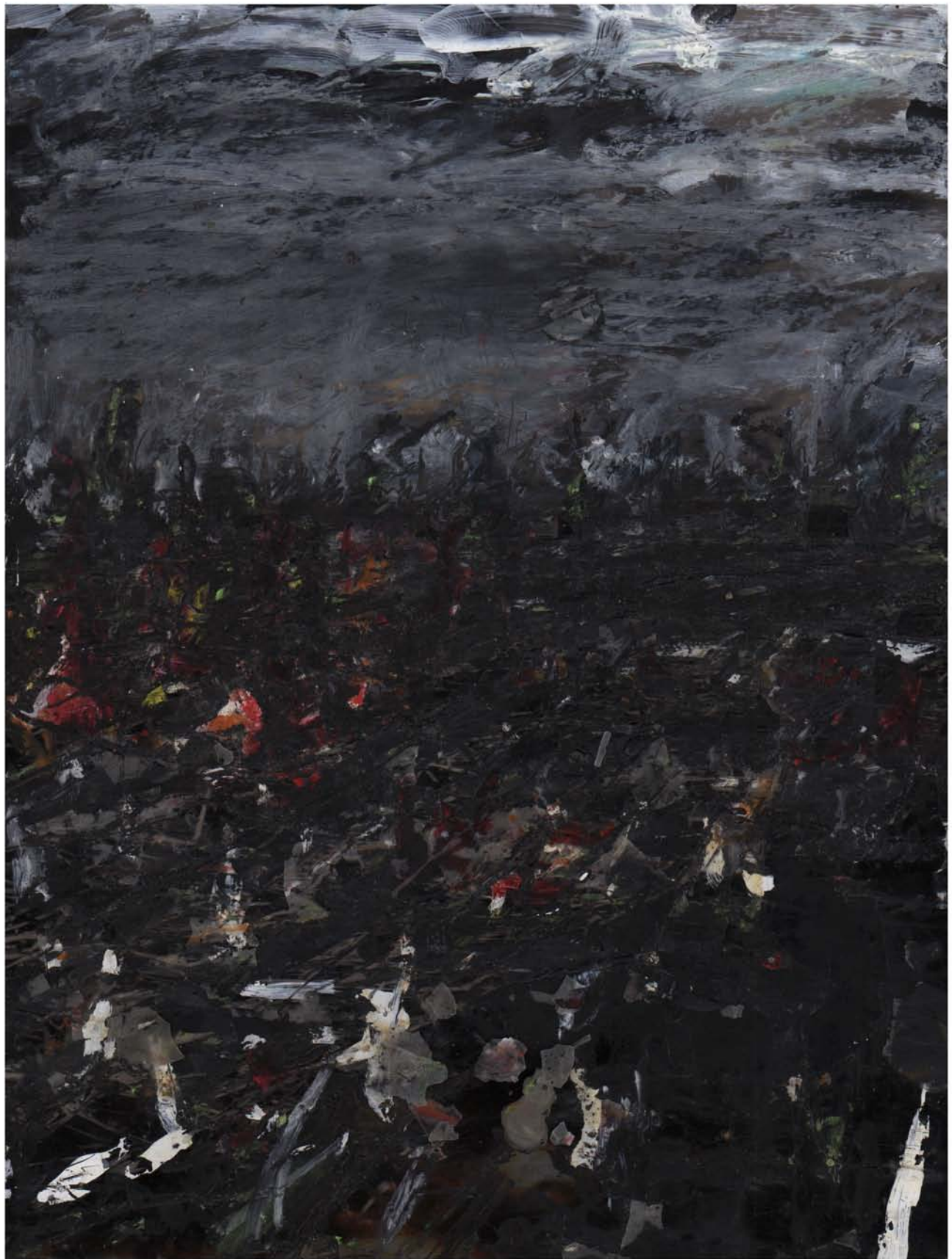
sunday 31 july 8:00pm £5/£3.

jam and co. 1 west st.



Although we did not play ‘music’ at the event, nor were we musicians or even a ‘band’, this scene was typical of our rehearsals at the FLAT at that time. If you like, we were a parody of a band. From left to right: Barry, Horsburgh, Martyn & myself, 1994

Above: The poster for the performance, 1994



CLINTON DE MENEZES, wax & paint on black & white photograph, 1992.  
For unknown reasons, the work on this FLAT exhibition was not documented. This image shows De Menezes' process in an earlier work.



## ***JEROME MKIZE, CLINTON DE MENEZES*** ***August 12, 1994***

This exhibiton was originally organized by Carol Gainer and Clinton De Menezes. When Gainer later pulled out Jerome Mkize, a painting student at the Technikon chose to exhibit with De Menezes.

De Menzes continued to work with collage and large earth-coloured, abstract landscapes, while Mkize exhibited a number of big drawings. These massive charcoal on paper works resembled satirical cartoons. In my telephone conversation with Barry, we discussed this work.

**Allen:** Were you at the Jerome Mkize and Clinton De Menezes exhibition?

**Barry:** Yes and in fact I was speaking with Trueman Myaka about that the other day. I asked him whether he knew where Jerome was. But he didn't know.

**Allen:** What work did Jerome put up for that exhibition?

**Barry:** He made extremely large drawings on brown paper. I think they could have been almost two meters wide by two meters high. One of the works consisted of a figure that had the head of an antelope (or reindeer) and the body of a human. And this figure was giving birth to a person in a speech bubble.

**Allen:** What do you think he was implying by using this imagery?

**Barry:** Before he put the work up in the FLAT, I remember attending a crit of his work at the Tech. During that, he had said that he was dealing with dream imagery; that these images were based directly on a dream that he had had. They were very Shamanistic. He also mentioned that the work represented or was a metaphor for a rebirth into a new democracy.

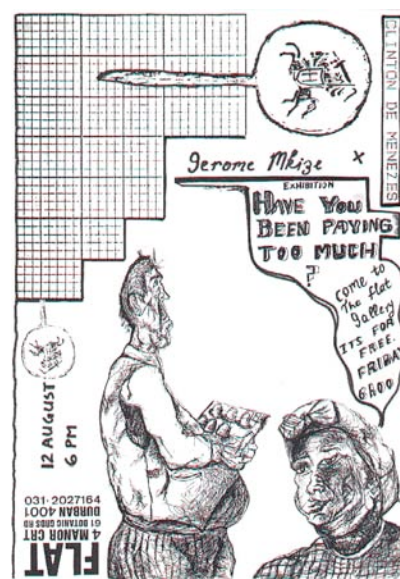
**Allen:** What else can you say about the work?

**Barry:** The works were very monochromatic. He used a lot of brown and dark greens.

**Allen:** What about Clinton's work on this exhibition.

**Barry:** I could be wrong here, but I think he had those very large, abstract landscape paintings. The earthy ones.<sup>179</sup>

Exhibition poster, 1994



<sup>179</sup> Barry, Allen; Interview 10, Telephone call, AT&T, Feb 16, 1999.



RUAN HOFFMAN, mail-art, 1994.  
Hoffman, a Pretoria-based artist and friend of Barry's had sent to the FLAT a number of composite artworks in the mail.



The FLAT inbetween exhibitions, 1994.  
From left to right: Tamlyn Martin, myself, Horsburgh, Willem Huysers, Timothy Mlambo & his brother. Huysers, Mlambo & his brother were all staying at the FLAT with Barry & I at this time.

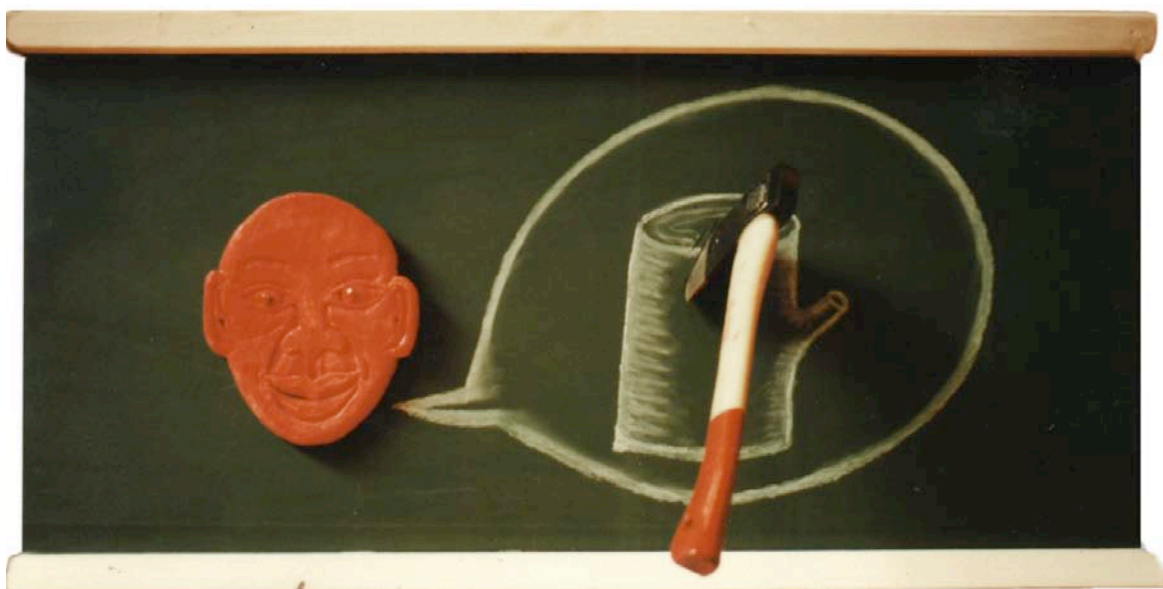


THOMAS BARRY, 'Cultural Desk', 1994  
Barry's "magnus opus", this collection of found objects, 'junk' and 'valuables', was exhibited at the Technikon Natal Art Gallery towards the end of 1994. Barry had accumulated much of the material from various sources (most notably the street) and stored them 'display-like' in his room. Many of Barry's student peers at that time questioned the fact that Barry exhibited this kind of work, because they felt that he had literally transposed the contents of his bedroom into the exhibition space, and indeed he had.

***FORM OF THE FUTURE***  
***Durban Art Gallery***  
***August 10, 1994***

*Form of the Future* was an important exhibition in that it marked the first efforts of the Durban Art Gallery to show younger artists from the region. Hermanides had approached the DAG a year earlier to inquire if they would exhibit his work. When they declined, he spoke to Andries Botha, who was on the DAG board at that time. Through Botha's efforts, the DAG agreed to an exhibition, which would be a historical survey of all those associated past and present with the Sculpture Department at the Technikon, including the then senior students. This included most of the artists who had been involved with the FLAT and indeed the majority of work exhibited had been previously shown at the FLAT.

It was an important shift for the DAG, not only in terms of the inclusion of younger artists, but also the exhibition of new genres. The DAG would later develop the *Red-Eye* Event, an experimental program that included installation and performance.



THOMAS BARRY, axe, chalk-board, lifebuoy soap, chalk, 1994

## ***GROUP DRAWING EXHIBITION August 18, 1994***

Originally proposed by the occupants of a commune on Berea Road, this group exhibition/installation of drawings evolved through a rather comical series of misadventures. As the exhibition date approached, few of the commune 'artists' had prepared any drawings, and as the event had been advertised in our flyer we were forced to look for art elsewhere. A Scottish artist, Anthony Scullion, who was visiting Durban, supplied most of the work for show and saved the day.

Scullion's drawings, which numbered more than twenty were hung not only on the walls but the ceiling as well. Most featured a central figure on a simple ground. These 'characters' were modeled and weighty, but also distorted, their gestures expressive.

Scullion later designed the cover for, South African band, Urban Creep's 2<sup>nd</sup> album and exhibited widely in Johannesburg and Cape Town.



The Ricciotti Ensemble playing on the streets of Durban, 1994

***RICCIOTTI ENSEMBLE***  
***October 7 – 10, 1994***

The original Ricciotti Ensemble, from which this SA group took its name, was a 25 year old Dutch street orchestra. This later incarnation was organized by Libbie du Toit in Johannesburg and Brendon Bussy in Durban, and its aim was articulated in this statement from the group:

The aim of this ensemble is to play to audiences outside the established concert podia. The musicians consist of music students, young professionals and good amateurs from across the country. The repertoire range from Classical to Contemporary.

October 1994 marks the birth of the South African Ricciotti ensemble and forthcoming there will be a tour organised every holiday.<sup>180</sup>

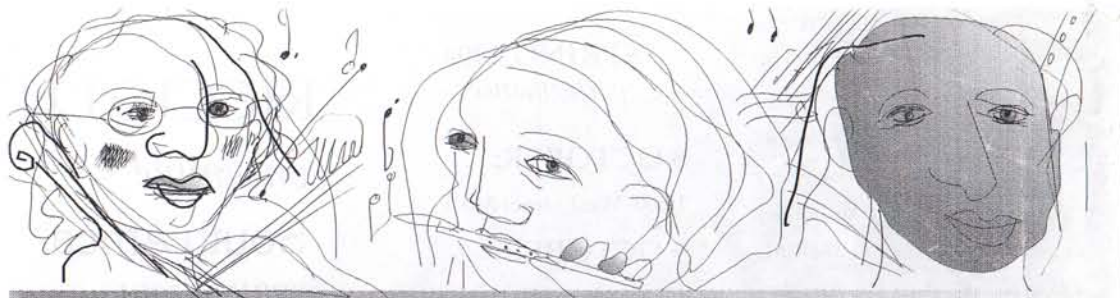
The group's mission was to bring various musicians from around the country together and to then take this ensemble 'to the streets'. As Bussy was involved, and Barry was their contact in Durban, he organized for them to rehearse at the FLAT. At that time, we had all moved out of the FLAT in an attempt to make the entire FLAT into a gallery. They not only rehearsed at the FLAT, but also prepared meals and were offered the FLAT for lodging.

The ensemble played in a variety of venues in Durban. These included performances on the street, various folk and rock clubs, and in a music hall in Umlazi township. The ensemble was structured in such a way that they invited anyone to join in their music playing and so was an open-ended group of musicians. In Umlazi, Thami Jali and a group of gumboot dancers became a part of the ensemble.

As with previous events, such as the beader's workshop or Sam Ntshangase's school children's day in the gallery, the FLAT again operated as a 'community center', providing a space as needed. This time as a rehearsal site.

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<sup>180</sup> The Ricciotti Ensemble; pamphlet, Durban, Oct 1994.



## RICCIOTTI *ensemble*

The South African Ricciotti ensemble take their inspiration from the Dutch Street Orchestra of the same name which is already nearing it's 25th birthday.

The aim of this ensemble is to play to audiences outside the established concert podia. The musicians consist of music students, young professionals and good amateurs from across the country. The repertoire range from Classical to Contemporary music.

October 1994 marks the birth of the South African Ricciotti ensemble and forthcoming there will be a tour organised every holiday.

7 - 10 October  
**RICCIOTTI *ensemble***  
SPRING 1994

### ACCOMODATION IN DURBAN

Plaza Hotel  
c/o Broad and Esplanade Street  
tel: (031) 301 2591 Ian

contact person in Durban  
Thomas Barry  
tel: 202 7164

## RICCIOTTI *ensemble* South Africa

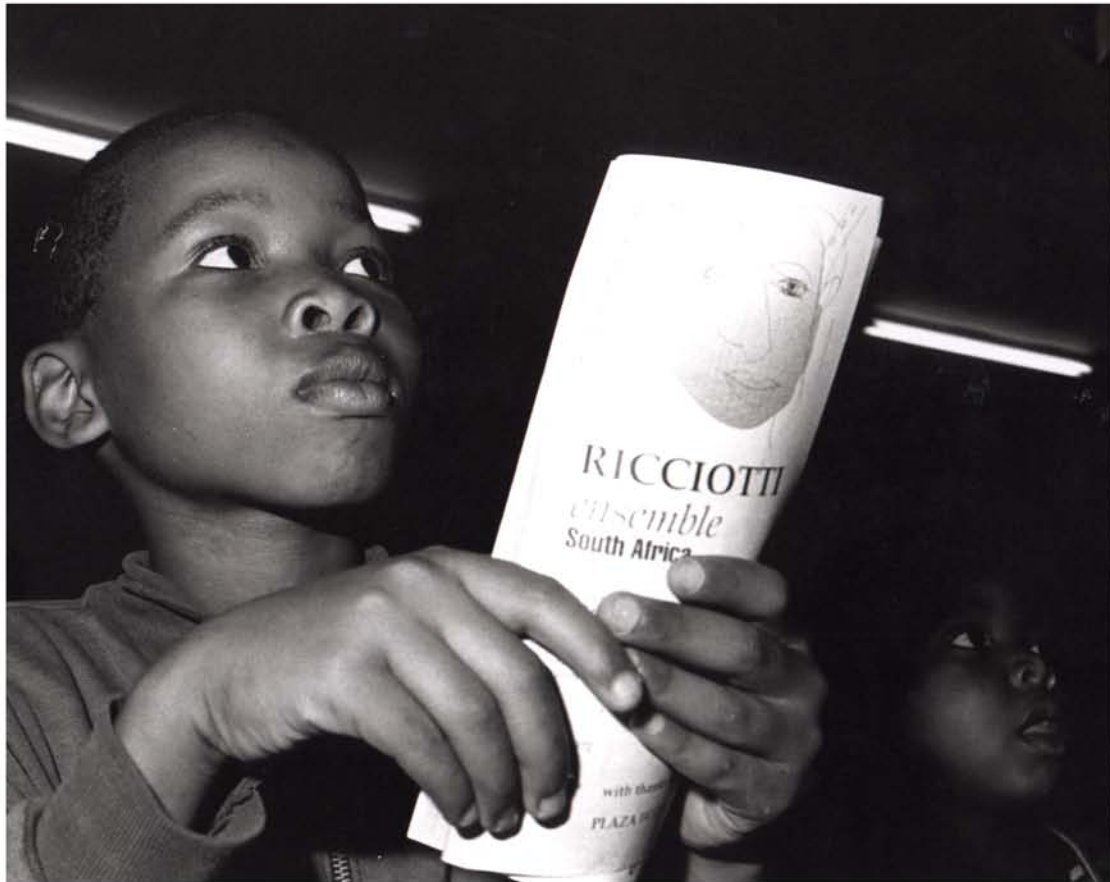
contact person:  
LIBBIE DU TOIT

contact address:  
12 Gainsborough Mansions  
27 Primrose Terrace  
Berea  
2198

Tel:  
(011) 484 6972

with thanks to  
PLAZA HOTEL

Ricciotti Ensemble leaflet, 1994



The audience, 1994





The Ricciotti Ensemble on the streets of Durban, 1994



The Ricciotti Ensemble at the Folk Club, Plaza Hotel, 1994



NIRVANA RANJITH, 1994

***FAIZA FAYERS, NIRVANA RANJITH, LENE TEMPLEHOFF***  
***Three Women Artists and a Dome***  
***October 14, 1994***

This exhibition took place on the FLAT's first birthday, and was significant in that the artists were primarily affiliated with the University of Durban Westville (UDW). Contact between the UDW and Technikon had historically had not been strong and so the FLAT provided at this time a kind of meeting ground for the artists associated with the two institutions.

It was proposed by Lene Templehoff, who was a sculpture lecturer at UDW and had been a student at Maritzburg University as well as at the Technikon foundry. She exhibited with two senior printmaking students from UDW, Faiza Fayers and Nirvana Ranjith, using the entire FLAT space.



Left: Faiza Fayers & Nirvana Ranjith at the FLAT, 1994. Right: Lene Tempelhoff with, amongst others, Trueman Myaka, Horsburgh, Tsietsi Matibako, Nancy Thomson & Jethro, 1994.

***TOCSIN  
University of Natal – Durban  
October 1994***

Organized by Matthias Schneider-Hollek, Melissa Marrins and John Roome; this was a collaboration between composition students from the University of Natal (UND) and Fine Art students from Technikon Natal. Schneider-Hollek, from Germany, was a visiting composition lecturer at the UND at that time, and Marrins who knew Schneider-Hollek acted as the liaison between the two institutions. Roome was responsible for organizing the Technikon students.

The FLAT was approached to participate in discussions and meetings and to get involved with the event. Though this was not at all a FLAT project, the stage had been set by events such as the *Internotional* and our performance at Jam & Co. More experimental performance work in Durban seemed to be ‘catching on’, at that time and many of the people involved in this event were or had been part of the FLAT, including Paterson, Marrins, Barry, Mansfield and Martyn from the Technikon Fine Art department; and UND composition student Tione Scholtz.

Meijer announced in the paper:

Tonight at 7pm fine art students from Technikon Natal and composition students from Natal University are collaborating in TOCSIN, a multi-media event. This performance piece will take place at the Howard College Theatre on the campus of Natal University and thereabouts.<sup>181</sup>

These students proposed a collaborative ‘happening’ on the campus of the University of Natal, at the Howard College Theater. This was a perfect setting, because the large cylindrical, double-tiered space, with its many side rooms, was not only acoustically ideal, but offered an active site for the participants. I was initially involved, but later opted not to take part. However, on the evening of the event, I brought along the ‘Miracle Filter’ (cassette recorder) and began to actively record the events as they unfolded. In a sense, I too became a performer and a participant in the entire process. In my recording I interviewed many individuals in the large audience, asking them their opinions of the show. Many spoke positively to the fact that Technikon and University students were collaborating together, but other non-art or non-music students, who were studying nearby in the library, negatively expressed a concern over the excessive noise.

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<sup>181</sup> Marianne Meijer; Art Beat, *The Daily News*, Durban, Oct 1994.

The evening was conceived as a ‘multiple happening’, with many activities and performances occurring simultaneously throughout the building. In one hallway, four amped performers including Marrins made ‘noise’ by scratching sand-paper against different surfaces while beating on various percussive instruments. In front of them, Barry meticulously and methodically cleaned the floor for the entire evening. As he removed the dust, his cleaning efforts eventually produced a shiny (medical) cross in the centre of the floor. Martyn participated by sleeping on a mattress for the entire show. Mansfield, who was nowhere to be found for most of the evening, had been hidden in a box. He suddenly appeared out of the box, his body painted gold.

In a small room under the stair-case, Marrins had created a disturbing installation from pornographic material, and in another room, painting students covered each other with paint. They then ‘painted’ a large canvass with their bodies, recalling Yves Klein’s performances. In another space, two composition students played ping-pong, while recording and projecting the sound. Scholtz in a space adjacent set up a ‘jazz-rock’ band and played a number of his noise-jazz-rock-fusion pieces reminiscent of the work of John Zorn. Pre-recorded and augmented sound bytes, composed by Paterson and Schneider-Hollek, also filtered throughout the entire space.

Other than my ‘interview’ recordings, Paterson’s minimal compositions for voice remain the only surviving document of the event and appear on the CD - *FLAT Recordings*. In a later interview with Paterson, I asked him about this work:

**Allen:** Can you describe your input into this event?

**Paterson:** I made an installation about the monotony of process art and music.

**Allen:** Could you talk about the ideas you were working with in this text/audio piece?

**Paterson:** The piece just followed the structure of any audio or written text. “One thing after another”. Even if I tried to deviate from this pattern one thing still followed on from the next.

**Allen:** Is it significant that the text is read by people other than yourself? Like a composer.

**Paterson:** I think you are getting the picture, Siemon. The work echoed its surroundings, the goings on etc. I think in the context of the event the work disappeared, which I personally enjoyed. Very much like my ‘thought houses’. It worked quite well although I felt that by having the performance in a sequence, it drew attention away from the anonymity of the art-work. Draw your own conclusions.

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**Allen:** What was the piece's function in relation to the rest of the stuff going on? Was all the audio principally your work or were there others?

**Paterson:** Simon and Jay worked on the audio, I just gave them a rough idea of my piece and they came up with the rest. I did however ask for it to be repetitive in nature.<sup>182</sup>

Paterson's work, which was composed with a number of texts, was recorded by Schneider-Hollek. The recording begins with some of Hollek's electronic works and then proceeds to Paterson's compositions. Comprised of words sampled from mathematical or philosophical concepts, these compositions are intended to be highly minimal and only slightly suggestive. The voices in the actual recordings are not that of Paterson, but rather other people including some music students and Horsburgh.

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<sup>182</sup> Paterson, Allen; Interview 7, snail-mail, April 1998.

***JEFFREY BRANDT***  
***A Menagerie of Broken Thoughts Disciples***  
***October 26, 1994***

Jeff Brandt, a second year student at Technikon Natal, presented an exhibition titled *A Menagerie of Broken Thoughts Disciples*. Shown were a collection of recent works in steel, stone and wood.

***RHETT MARTYN***  
***November 23, 1994***

Martyn, although heavily involved in the FLAT's more 'ephemeral' projects such as the audio recordings and performances, had always expressed reservations about mounting a solo exhibition at the FLAT. At the time that he conceded, he had been working on a series of extremely rough figures in steel and plaster, and these became the basis for his exhibition. The jagged steel infrastructures violently jutted through the plaster and gave these life-sized humanoid, forms an expressive quality. In the interview with Frost, she spoke about the work:

I would read them as expressions in an expressionistic language - of angst, anxiety, dread. The metal structures coming through the skin are reference to skeleton and bodily perforation. But the inside is so sore that it must penetrate to the outside.<sup>183</sup>

***SCULPTURE WORKSHOP EXHIBITION***  
***December 2, 1994***

Organized by Kim Goodwin, an artist who instructed at the Technikon; this show marked the final exhibition at the FLAT. Goodwin approached us on behalf of the students in his night-time sculpture classes, and when we agreed these students mounted an exhibition of portrait busts made in his class.

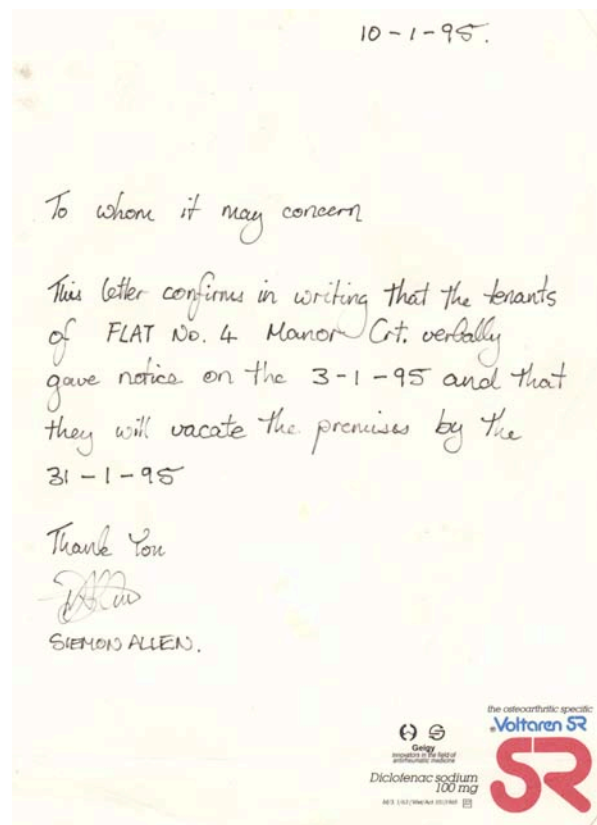
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<sup>183</sup> Frost, Allen; Interview 12, Richmond, Feb 18, 1999.



## ***FLAT BURN-OUT*** ***January 18, 1995***

Though the FLAT was beginning to quietly wind down, the strain of the constant demand on its occupants beginning to take a toll, its ending was characteristically dramatic. By the 3<sup>rd</sup> of January 1995, we had already given notice to vacate the flat at the end of January. Barry had moved to an abandoned house near Crart Avenue, and I into Berea Court. Horsburgh was leaving Durban and had planned to remain at the FLAT until his flight to Cape Town. About one week before the final date on our lease and one day prior the flight, he left a candle burning while going out for drinks. Barry and I drove past the FLAT just in time to see the fire engines and the firemen putting out the last of the flames. It was quite a finale. Ironically, all that remained of Horsburgh's belongings was his passport, something he regarded as a divine act.







## ***THE Post-FLAT CONTINUATION A TEMPORARY CONCLUSION***

The burning of the FLAT marked the end of the ‘informal’ space as it had grown over the 16 months that it ran. Shifts had occurred over the course of its development and changes in our lives directly impacted on the character of the FLAT programme. Towards the end we had moved out of the space and had begun to operate in a manner that increasingly resembled a more conventional gallery. This included more advance programming and less direct and spontaneous interplay between living and exhibiting. Though we remained committed to our original mission to “provide a free and open space for all” the nature of the exhibitions in the last months were more conventional in format. Indeed ironically the FLAT began to contract just as it had begun to expand.

Just as there is no single clear reason for the FLAT’s beginning, so too the reasons behind its end are multi-layered. Life is always in flux and ‘alternatives’ by their nature reflect the changing circumstances of their participants. The constant burden of living in the chaos of a ‘public space’ was impossible to sustain, and the opening of South Africa to the world led many of the participants to seek new experiences outside of Durban.

It is significant to consider, however, that the FLAT operated during the transition into democracy in South Africa. Indeed, the symmetry is remarkable, with the gallery opening eight months before the elections and closing eight months after. The importance of this historical junction was discussed in conversation between Technikon Lecturer Lola Frost, Kendall Buster, a lecturer from the United States, and myself. Frost’s insight that the FLAT “articulated a utopian moment” spoke to the transitoriness of such ventures and the significance of the times in which it operated:

**Frost:** I keep on saying to students now, for God’s sake get out there, go do it in the mall. And they look at me in amazement. I don’t see the sense of adventure now. I think what I am saying is that the FLAT Gallery existed historically between two periods – at the end of apartheid, and at the beginning of a new era. It actually existed in that gap. **The FLAT Gallery was an articulation of a utopian moment.** The very fact that you and Ledelle, who ran it, are now here in Washington also says something. Your interest isn’t in the new South Africa. Your leaving signaled the end of

this hole that corresponds with this gap time. I don't know what Thomas would have to say about that.

**Buster:** The FLAT though, and this is my reading of it, started to collapse on itself. And it is parallel or is not so unlike what happened to alternative spaces in the United States. You would have an alternative space that would start lean and mean, very direct; and then over the years, the word gets out... It is almost like something becomes a victim of its own success. What happened with the FLAT, Siemon saying that towards the end, they started scheduling ahead of time. The word got out and so more and more people wanted to have shows. And of course they had an open door policy. And towards the end, the whole thing started to lose some of that spirit. They moved, they were no longer living there, and so it was more like a proper gallery. So there wasn't that same blurring of art and life. It changed... it was over.

**Frost:** I would say it slightly differently. When it started, it was filled with excitement at a) the running of the gallery, b) the implicit recognition of this moment, with all of its potential freedoms. The FLAT Gallery was an articulation of a utopian moment. The problem is that it started like that, and then other people started to see this and wanted to get in on the act, so to speak. But the minute other people get in on the act, it is no longer an 'installation' with utopian possibilities. It gets to be a 'business' that needs to be organized. It needs to be run and managed. And these artists were not about that. I remember thinking: "Oh, this was too much of a bother." I remember speaking to you and you said that you were bogged down in bureaucracy and forward planning. And I thought: "Oh well this won't last." And it didn't last much longer than that.

**Allen:** I always thought it was an interesting paradox that as soon as we started reaching our aims and goals, we lost interest.

**Frost:** But you see, you lost interest because I think there was a fundamental contradiction, and understandably so. A contradiction between an operation that was basically intimate and very located in a particular community; and its sense of responsibility towards the larger community. This responsibility was at odds with the intimacy and the locatedness that was actually driving it. And so you got strung out on policies which you felt you had to implement, in the name of avant-gardism – which were inclusive, non-racial and non-commodifiable. Those are hefty projects. I remember thinking: "Oh this is highly improbable." At the same time though I would have censored that opinion. I would have said to myself that I am not allowed to think of these things in the new South Africa. It is a new moment, everything is possible. The fact that it didn't continue shows how over-ambitious it was.

**Allen:** I like what you are saying about connecting the FLAT to those ambitious times. The new South Africa, the new constitution - anything is possible.

**Frost:** Well at the time everybody was working out the new constitution. It was only settled by 1994 and the FLAT gallery started in 1993. That's the FLAT's architectural frame.

**Allen:** The elections happened at the height of the FLAT gallery's success. It was right in the middle. The gallery opened eight months before the elections, and closed eight months after them.

**Frost:** I think that is very significant.<sup>1</sup>

Though the FLAT as it had been was over, with time, this ending began to seem more like a transition or transformation for me. Not long after the burning and closing of the space, the FLAT was asked to participate in an exhibition documenting the heritage of art and cultural organizations in Durban. I continued FLAT activities without a space through the publication of a newsletter, the creation of an article for the newspaper under a pseudonym, and through the continued reworking of FLAT tapes in my own audio art projects. Moe, who was studying abroad at Virginia Commonwealth University, launched an exhibition in an empty warehouse space outside the 'official' gallery space reserved for graduate students. Later, under the name of *FLAT International* we presented installations in an unused store-front in Richmond, and she mounted a number of 'open studio' exhibitions in Baltimore and Washington, DC. Barry moved to Johannesburg to start working as a video-editor and became involved with the experimental music group, the Mud Ensemble and Horsburgh, after Cape Town, moved to London.



The FLAT contribution to the *What's Your Case* exhibition – a box of burnt paper, 1995

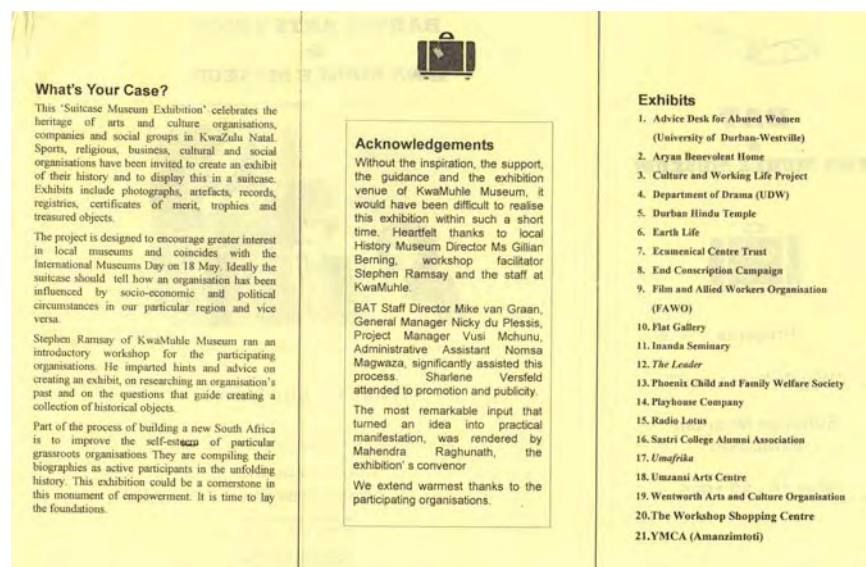
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<sup>1</sup> Frost, Allen; Interview 12, Richmond, Feb 18, 1999

***WHAT'S YOUR CASE, Suitcase Exhibition  
Kwa Muhle Museum  
May 16, 1995***

To celebrate International Museums Day (18 May), this exhibition was organized by the Bartel Arts Trust, at the Kwa Muhle Museum. Documenting the heritage of arts and culture organizations, companies and social groups in Kwa-Zulu Natal. A glance at the list of participants gives one a sense of the range of 'cultural' and 'political' voices that were involved, and highlighted the inseparable relationship between art and politics in South Africa. Though this was an 'art' show, with each organization being asked to submit a 'suitcase' for exhibition, most were not arts organizations. The list of 21 exhibitors included a broad range of venues that ranged from ecological organizations such as *Earth Life*; to the cultural working group - *Culture and Working Life Project*; *Umzansi Arts Center*; the anti-apartheid organization - *End Conscription Campaign*; *Umafrika*; as well as the *Durban Hindu Temple*.

The FLAT, regarded in this context as a 'historic' Durban organization, chose to present 'information' about its activities in a less straightforward manner than most of the exhibition participants. Each had been given a large trunk and invited to exhibit information about their respective organisations in the boxes, and everybody complied. We, however, chose to present a memorial to the FLAT's final burning, and in keeping with its subversive strategies filled our trunk with burnt newspaper. The charred illegible text was a symbol of information withheld and forgotten histories. It was indeed a "mysterious object", as one person commented, among the other presentations.



**FLAT**

P.O. BOX 47252  
GREYVILLE  
SOUTH AFRICA  
4 0 2 3  
031-2042268

Natal Society of Arts  
Overport City  
PO Box 37408  
Overport  
4067

7 April, 1995

The NSA Committee

**Re: Distribution of monthly art forum**

FLAT is a self-funded, non-profit organisation promoting art and art criticism in South Africa.

The degree of art criticism and discussion in KwaZulu Natal is seriously lacking. Thus it is FLAT's intent to create a monthly forum consisting of interviews with various artists, critiques of various exhibitions as well as discussion of contemporary issues in the arts. The forum's purpose is to highlight these issues as well as document the information which might otherwise be lost.

Although the forum is completely self funded, it is seeking assistance in the form of distribution. As the NSA mailing system is well circulated in KwaZulu Natal we ask if it is possible to insert this forum in the NSA's invitational mail.

FLAT, although being distributed through the NSA's mailing system, would like to remain independent of all organisations and institutions e.g. BAT; NSA; UDW; Tech. Natal.

FLAT looks forward to your response.

Yours faithfully



Siemon Allen  
FLAT

A request was sent to the NSA, asking if they would assist us by including the FLAT Newsletter in their mailing. They however declined the request, 1995.



## ***FLAT NEWLETTER***

### ***FLAT Issue 1***

#### ***GREG STREAK***

***April 1995***

Without a physical space from which to operate, FLAT activities required an alternative medium. Born out of the necessity to find a cheap option that would allow for continued dialogue - an art newsletter: *FLAT* - was created. With the DTP skills of Caryn Iseman, a Technikon Fine Art graduate, a monthly publication of 1000 copies was produced. This was distributed to a large audience without the requirement of any specific space. A request for distribution through their mailing was sent to the NSA, but this was declined.

In May of 1995 I approached Greg Streak, who had just returned from the United States, to do an interview for the newsletter. It was significant that Streak had neither shown nor been involved with the FLAT, and so in some sense represented a fresh perspective. The aim of the Newsletter was to look critically at cultural production in Durban, through the medium of the interview. As there was no other art press like this in Durban, it seemed most appropriate. It is significant that Streak spoke critically about the various arts organizations in Durban.

### ***FLAT Issue 2***

#### ***ESSEX ROAD GALLERY***

***July 1995***

The Essex Road artists, as mentioned earlier were in constant communication with the FLAT gallery and an interview with a group of its key participants followed the Streak issue. This document was published with text in both English and Zulu translated by Simon Manana. This interview was published to accompany an exhibition of Essex Road artists' work at the NSA.

At this time, Andries Botha assisted us in putting forward an application for funding for the newsletter from BAT. Vusi Mchunu, then director of BAT, saw this issue of the newsletter and he was extremely supportive. We were informed that we would receive a R1000 grant to continue the document, but due to unrelated circumstances, never drew this money.

***FLAT Issue 3***  
***MELISSA MARRINS***  
***August 1995***

In April of 1995, Melissa Marrins had organized two off-site installations at Chandon House, in what was an old operating theater in Mount Edgecombe. My interest in interviewing Marrins lay in what I perceived as a growth at that time in the use of non-traditional venues for site-specific installations in the greater Durban area.

The interview is presented here in its entirety for the first time; it was never published and distributed, as I had left the country before I could release it. At this time, I was given the opportunity for an artist residency in the United States. I chose to leave Durban and go to the Washington, DC area to expand my research into alternative spaces in the States, and to continue with my own artistic projects.



After the publication of the second issue of *FLAT*, the Bartel Arts Trust gave a R 1000 grant towards the production costs of the newsletter. However due to unrelated circumstances, the money was never used, 1995.

**SA** Greg Streak, you graduated from Technikon Natal with a Higher Diploma in 1992, what have you been doing since then?

**GS** Since I left Tech my primary concern has been to involve myself as much as possible with making art. I felt that when I was at Tech there was this very strong fear, and maybe this sounds a bit dramatic, that when you leave Tech you stop making art. This was compounded for me by the past track record of students who had left and who had subsequently disappeared into non-art related fields. I feel that this is due to a lack of infrastructure outside of the institution. So when I left, it became almost a self conscious mission to involve myself continually in creativity. Fortunately I was approached by Andries Botha to work as his assistant. Towards late 1993 I managed to have a three person show in Durban and a two person show in Johannesburg. During the early part of 1994 I spent four months overseas spread between the United States and Amsterdam where I worked extensively in the capacity of assistant to Boet. On my return I worked for three months as a technical assistant for the Durban Art Gallery. I am currently lecturing part time in sculpture at Technikon Natal, as well as completing my Masters Diploma. Although my apprenticeship with Boet is now over I now work along side him in his studio on campus.

**SA** Can you expand on your experiences overseas?

**GS** Quite extensively actually...When I returned I was initially extremely aggressive and angry, but in hindsight the experience was invaluable. To experience American culture first hand which had always existed for me as a stereotype has instilled in me an enormous sense of self worth. It is virtually impossible to engage the 'States' without some preconceptions, since it is

**FLAT IS A MONTHLY FORUM WHICH HAS BEEN ESTABLISHED TO LOOK CRITICALLY AT CONTEMPORARY ISSUES WITHIN THE ARTS IN SOUTH AFRICA.**

**IN THIS FIRST ISSUE SIEMON ALLEN INTERVIEWS GREG STREAK, ABOUT THE DIFFICULTIES OF BEING A YOUNG ARTIST IN THE CONTEXT OF DURBAN.**

**BOTH SIEMON ALLEN AND GREG STREAK ARE COMPLETING THEIR MASTERS DEGREES IN FINE ART, AS WELL AS LECTURING PART TIME AT THE TECHNIKON NATAL.**



always forced down our throats at any and every opportunity. I went feeling like the under dog from Africa and returned bursting with rage at having done so. The work which I experienced at institutions at the highest level, and here I'm talking about masters work, was incredibly mediocre and would certainly not get through second year at Technikon Natal. Even the main stream work in New York, which is international art at its prime was disappointing.

We in South Africa produce an exceptionally competitive edge with regards to anything that I

saw. We need to assume a far more emphatic stance and not start trembling at the knees and bowing down to anyone who emerges from overseas.

**SA** How do you feel about being a South Africa Artist at this point in time?

**GS** I think for a South African Artist it is an incredibly exciting time for two reasons: Firstly, due to our recent political transformations and secondly our inclusion back into the international art arena. In my opinion America and Europe are creatively saturated and are now looking to Africa, because of our isolation from them, to engage them with fresh ideas. We tend to be so absorbed by Eurocentric and Americano trends that we end up trying to emulate everything we see in 'Art News' or 'Art in America' because we think we are not good enough. The problem is however if South African artists insist on producing the next trend from wherever, it is always going to be out of context and depersonalised. When foreigners arrive to experience a 'breath of fresh air' they are consumed by the same garbage they have just escaped from at home and because the works are carbon-copies they will invariably never have the same clarity. In a nut-shell I really believe we need to tackle our own complexities in as a responsible and dignified manner as possible, and then place them within an international context - my bet is that they hold their own with ease...

**SA** Lets get back to local issues. How do you feel about the institution in which you were trained (Technikon Natal)?

**GS** Every institution has it's problems as inevitably they are fraught with bureaucracy. Disregarding that the Technikon Natal Fine Art Department has proved its worth in relation to other institutions and thus has a distinctive reputation especially in sculpture. However, I don't

think that post institutional realities are made clear enough nor are they emphasised enough. Within your study years there is an enormous infrastructure available to you. You become over-dependent on the facilities, the moral support, the collective energies, all of which I think are positive attributes but which can undermine your independence. Some further steps need to be introduced to soften the blow from Tech into the realities of the 'big-wide-world'...

**SA** Do you feel the infrastructure in Durban facilitates your art making?

**GS** Firstly, I don't think that there are enough infrastructures in Durban, if any. I have a space in which to work, I have the use of Technikon Sculpture Department facilities, but outside from that there is nothing in my opinion. Ideal exhibition spaces at the moment are restricted to the Technikon Gallery. Although I am aware that the Natal Society of Arts is anticipating new premises, the current set-up is not satisfactory. The commercial curio shop in front of the gallery impinges upon the clarity and ambiance of the exhibiting space. This particular gallery in my opinion is not discerning enough with regard to who exhibits there. It will never establish itself as a critical space which shows major artists unless it becomes more cut throat. Perhaps, on the other hand, it does not want this acclaim and is content with being a space for anyone. However this being one of only two spaces available in Durban, doesn't leave serious artists with much option. Perhaps if alternative spaces which ensured far more selective exhibiting were initiated it would enforce these with the monopoly to open their eyes and wake up.

**SA** How do you feel about making art in Durban?

**GS** This follows more or less from what I was talking

about. I don't want it to appear that I have an overall damning and pessimistic outlook on creativity in Durban. Despite it's problems, it does not have the overkill hype and continual melodrama of Johannesburg. There are sufficient tensions to ensure a conclusive environment for creativity. But again my regret is that if one wants a critical response or a degree of professional exposure one has to move the works into the appropriate spaces in Johannesburg. Johannesburg is also inundated with unprofessional space, but it does have the one up on everywhere else nationally, in that it



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does provide some acknowledged galleries. Cape Town seems too laid back and Johannesburg pathetically absorbed in superficiality, image and hype and so Durban seems the best place to work as it is somewhere in-between.

**SA** What is your opinion of the new up-and-coming BAT centre which is opening in Durban in June.

**GS** Bartel Arts Trust in my opinion, has probably the most significant role to play in creativity for Durban. With its significant fund base it can estab-

lish poignant infrastructures which are at the same level as those in Johannesburg, providing it can step outside its' current politically correct agenda's and endorse merit rather than mediocrity. I really believe that Bartel Arts has an incredible potential and will steer Natal creativity into the forefront, providing within each of the disciplines (visual arts performing....) pivotal acknowledged individuals are nominated to the call of duty.

**SA** Could you now talk about your work and what it is about?

**GS** My works deal with contemporary issues of gender, identity, social responsibility etc... and their intricacies. However, the works are highly personalised in that I confront issues relative to my own agenda's and not because this or that is the current trend or hype which I 'have to deal with' in order to be 'relevant'. I dictate what it is that I will pursue, not the art market, not anyone else. The works about confronting personal interests in order that I can make the next step forward in every sense of the term. If you pander to what the external art market dictates, you'll end up schizophrenic. That world is so fickle and contradicts itself every few months merely so that it may maintain its self-developed image and hype. The platform given to the artist is a unique one. We can virtually say what we want, how we want and get away with it. It is an incredibly responsible position, which is unfortunately abused by those with personal agendas and by ego-maniacs. Artists in a sense have historically been socio-political journalists, commenting on the specifics of each epoch manifest and made concrete by tangible objects. Its not merely about reflecting a given point in time but for me also attempting to influence what happens in the future. Much contemporary art is transient, overliteral, almost nihilistic in manner under the pretext of stating things as

they are. Agreed, society is hanging by a few tenuous threads, absorbed by technology and its depersonalised nature, but there are other ways of making the same comments, constructively - by attempting to invert this rapid degeneration. Because Cezanne painted apples during the Franco-Prussian war does not mean he was oblivious to the social crises of his time. His concern was with re-establishing values and value-systems. If you are on a ship that is sinking do you stand there and go down with it to your nemesis? I am one of those individuals with a bucket attempting to drain the water. It seems futile only when everyone else is standing on the otherside of the ship accelerating your demise, in other words its about collective energies made up of individual efforts.

Although my works engage technological advancements, it remains paramount for me to celebrate process as an acknowledgement of my own humanity. This human endeavour, this hands on approach is my final non-negotiable frontier against the dematerialistic debate in art. My works are a strong endorsement of craftsmanship. Labour intensity in my opinion is imperative within our society which is philosophically ill-equipped to deal with our rapid technological advancements. I'm not sure whether this has the clarity with which I would like to articulate my work. It is difficult to verbalise that which is multi-layered, partly intuitive and spontaneous. It may all seem romantic but then so be it.

**SA** Is there anything wrong with romanticism?

**GS** No, but it has developed negative overtones because it is seen as overly idealistic.

**SA** Your work in the past has been criticised for being too similar to that of Andries Botha. What are your feelings about this?

**GS** My response is that when I arrived at Tech a few years ago I had never made sculpture before. Boet was that person who taught me the fundamentals of sculpture according to specific techniques he had learned and developed. It seems perfectly logical that there will be some connections. My aim has always been to acquire as an extensive and diverse language as possible. If one is going to be childishly self-conscious about being influenced by some-one you only cut off your nose to spite your face. In my opinion there are no short cuts in life. If by some



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chance you have the opportunity to benefit from some one else's experiences, seize it. This will allow you in some way to cut one or two corners. Otherwise you spend your life in a futile attempt, trying to be individual when you don't have the language to be so. I have been taught to find materials which approximate that with which I am talking about. That is the relationship between Boet's work and mine. There is a utilization of material appropriateness with concept. The fact that I am intense and obsessed with detail and subtleties is a part of my character. You cannot be some-

thing you are not. You can't learn obsession or intensity. You either are or you are not. By people merely disregarding the work as the same as Andries Botha's, in one rash statement they undermine me as an individual, my personal complexities, the sacrifices and hard work. My response is look at the work and what it is confronting you with and stop trying to ignore its claims by alining it with something else. There is a distinct difference between influence and plagiarism. What intrigues me is how acceptable it is for artists to be influenced by, or more directly to rip off works from overseas, but it isn't 'kosher' to be influenced by an individual that exists within your own context. Very strange indeed.

**SA** What are your opinions (in this day and age) on assistantship bearing in mind your experinece in having worked with Andries Botha?

**GS** There are pros and cons. To be able to make sculpture everyday, even if it is someone else's, is far preferential to having to wait etc... I have learnt an enormous amount. Not merely the subtleties of making sculpture, nor embellishing my own technical skills, but for me the most important thing is having learned an incredible work ethic. It is all very well being talented, but if you don't know how to focus it, it is useless. I am not confused about what it is that I believe in or what it is I want to do. To have this sense of direction and with such clarity is something for which I will always be grateful. Obviously life has traps laid for me, I am not immune to its nuances but I am confident that I have the foil to them.

Obviously working as intensely as I did with Boet takes its toll. As a creative person, working on someone else's pieces while your mind wanders endlessly with your own ideas, is an incredible compromise to juggle. After two years full time I needed

some continuity and to focus on my own vision. However for me it was an essential compromise. For my energy I have been more than compensated in that I can now work articulately and with a fair degree of resolve. Assistanship in the arts, especially in sculpture is as old as the discipline itself. There must be something to it.

**SA** Has selling your work to a national collection (The Durban Art Gallery) and winning the Face to Face art competition (1994) affected you in any way?

**GS** I don't think either have affected me significantly. I understand that both are subjective decisions. Had there been a different set of judges at the Face to Face, I may not have won. I have worked hard and merely see the award as an acknowledgement of my commitment. A select group of people are saying that they feel that what you are doing is qualitative.

The work in the Durban Art Gallery collection at first was an honour. However, having now understood how works are selected, who initially selects them, and who makes the final decision, the honour now seems a little lack-luster. There are some beautiful works in the collection but there are also terrible works. I appreciate the acknowledgement but also don't think that it is always necessarily a reflection of quality. I think that both have given me a boost financially and psychologically.

**SA** Finally how do you feel about being a young artist and what are your plans for the future?

**GS** I have countless frustrations and laments about being young. I know that I have

a lot to learn but I also know through my selective interaction with specific people understand owe and enormous amount to. The problem is you are not taken seriously when you are young. There is this almost sadist, calvinistic mind-set in our society and especially in the visual arts in South Africa, where no-one wants to give you the credit that you deserve until you have a proven track record. The theory makes sense, yet it seems too extreme. Perhaps when you are 40 you will end up being endorsed. This is not good enough. There are certainly many talented young artists that just disappear because of a

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sense of alienation, as a result of a lack of support. We all know how different it is in South Africa to be a full time artist. This is due to our lack of infrastructures, lack of exposure, acknowledgement and the fact that our profession is regarded as a hobby for extremists and eccentrics. Our profession is fraught with wannabe's, attention seekers and charlatans. My point is that it is too easy

just to call oneself an artist, for example a lawyer who paints every Sunday, after some time exhibits these paintings at the NSA, and now feels that he too is an artist. My definition of an artist is someone who spends most of their time making art when they aren't is a means to facilitate it. I don't want to get caught up in that 'artist elitism' bullshit. Creativity is an escape for many people and so it should be. It allows a far more irrational, intuitiveness which is an essential escape from the tedium of every day life. However, to claim to be an artist as a result is incredibly undermining to those individuals who exercise enormous discipline, sacrifices and commitment in making art. If I administer to a person with a headache etc... Do I now qualify as a doctor... This may sound simplistic and extreme but so it should be otherwise the parallels are not clear enough. I see myself as an artist at the same level as society acknowledges doctors, lawyers, journalists etc... I would never assume doctor status for simple treatment merely because I can well understand and have respect for the intricacies, delicacies and subtleties of that profession. Likewise, I expect the same. It appears that being an artist engages you with a unique set of complexities and being young compounds it.

In the near future I expect to travel overseas to interview a Dutch artist, Marlene Dumas; as part of my Masters Dissertation. I am currently doing commission work for the Natal Maritime museum and I am also involved with a company which produces large inflatables for advertising purposes. This is all an attempt to create a financial base from which I can make my own work.

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IN THE LAST FEW YEARS, DURBAN HAS SEEN A RISE IN THE PHENOMENON OF THE INFORMAL GALLERY. ARTISTS HAVE CONVERTED THEIR LOUNGES, PATIOS AND IN SOME CASES THEIR ENTIRE RESIDENCES INTO EXHIBITING SPACE FOR ART.

THIS SECOND ISSUE OF FLAT FEATURES A DISCUSSION AMONGST VARIOUS ARTISTS RECORDED AT ONE SUCH VENUE 38 ESSEX RD GALLERY.

THIS ISSUE HAS BEEN COMPILED AS A COMPLEMENT TO THE EXHIBITION, AT THE NSA GALLERY, OF ARTISTS INVOLVED WITH THE ESSEX RD. PROJECT.

THE ARTISTS INCLUDED IN THE DISCUSSION ARE KENDAL BUSTER, A VISITING ARTIST FROM THE USA; THAMI JALI; JOSEPH MANANA, BOTH INITIATORS OF ESSEX RD GALLERY; ISAAC SIKHAKHANE, A SECOND YEAR GRAPHIC DESIGN STUDENT AT ML SULTAN TECHNIKON; SIEMON ALLEN, AND THOMAS BARRY, BOTH CO-ORDINATORS OF THE FLAT GALLERY (ANOTHER INFORMAL SPACE).

EMINYAKENI EMIBALWA EYABLULE, IHEKU LIBONISE UKU KHULA NGOMSUKISO ONGAMILEKAHLE. AMA-ARTISTS AZISHINTSHA IZILMI ZAWO, NGOKWEHLUKANA KWAZO, NENBAWO ABAHLALA KUYO BAYENZA UMBUKISO YEMISEBENZI YEZANDLA.

LENDAYO YAPHINDE YAMISELWA UKUHLANGANISA IZINGXOXO EZAHLUKENE ZAMA-ARTIST, YABA YI: 38 ESSEX RD GALLERY. LOKHU KWAMISWA KAHLE NJENGOMBUKISO; OSE NSA GALLERY, YAMA-ARTIST AKHONA KU-ESSEX RD.

AMA-ARTISTS AYEXILONA ENGXOXWENI UKENDAL BUSTER, NE-ARTIST YASE USA; THAMI JALI; JOSEPH MANANA, NABANYE ABABUNGULI BASE-ESSEX RD GALLERY; U-ISSAC SIKHAKHANE; OWENZA UNYAKA WESIBILI E-ML SULTAN TECHNIKON; SIEMON ALLEN NO THOMAS BARRY ABASUNGULI BASE FLAT GALLERY.



**KB** Could you tell me how 38 Essex Rd. Gallery got started?

**TJ** It started in about July of 1994 when I come back to Durban from Johannesburg and got a room in Essex Rd. commune. I suggested to the artists here that we use this central common space (pointing to the lounge) for something as it was not being used.

**TB** For me 38 Essex Rd. represents the voice of a group of artists who have established a space in which they can view and show art in a gallery context in short, people who have dealt with a crisis because having to produce and present work in a confined (living) space speaks to me of crisis, ultimately there aren't adequate channels for the artists in question to have their work promoted and appreciated, I say innovative because I think for a group of (black) artists to create a dynamic art space in white suburbia is innovative to say the least.

**KB** Who were the original artists living with you at the time?

**TJ** Joseph Manana, Isaac Sikhakhane, Simon Manana and Ilse Mikula... We were concerned about the fact that there wasn't really any communication between the artist and the public especially within the black middle class. Those are the people we wanted to pull into this set up

**KB** Ungangitshela ukuthi i-38 Essex Rd. Gallery Jagala kanjani.

**TJ** Yagala. Ngabo july ka -1994 lapho ngifika eThekwini ngivela eGoli nganikezwa ikamelo lokuhlala. E-38 Essex Rd. commune - ngabeka umbono wokuthi lenbawo isethsenziwe (ekhomba indlu yoku phumula) ngoba yayingasebenzi.

**TB** Yayingasebenzi. Kimina i38 Essex road imele izwi lama artist asusa lenbawo ngengengabonisa futhi itshengise i-art embukisweni eyahlukene ngoku fishane abantu asekebamelana nalesisimo ngembelela yokusungula ngithi isimo esingesihle ngoba uku khiquiza nokubeka umsebenzi embaweni yokuhlala kusho isimo esibucayi ; ekuguneni yayi ngekho inugulu efanale yama artist ukuthi konje imisebenzi yawo yayinga nikezwa kanjani amazinga ayo ngikhuluma ngoku sungula ngoba ngicabanga ngedlanzana labamnyama abangama -artist ukwakha indawo endaweni yabamhlophe.

**KB** Obani ababengama - artist ayehlala nawe ngalesikhathi ?

**TJ** Kwaku - uJoseph Manana, Isaac Sikhakhane, Simon Manana, kanye no Ilse Mikula... Sasimelwe iouniso lokuthi kwakungekho ukuxhumama phakathi kwama - artist kanti futhi nomphakathi osemazingeni athle. Yibo abantu ababefuneka ukuba babonselwe kulento ngoba

because black people don't really go to galleries. There isn't that culture.

**SA** Why?

**TJ** First of all I think the level of art education at school is bad, and secondly most of them are poor. Instead of buying a painting they would buy something else. People just don't have money for art. So we decided to start a gallery that was non-commercial because our aim was to get people to come here and see what we do. The main objective was to educate people rather than sell work.

**JM** Black people tend to think that artists make art for fun - just something to keep themselves busy. So our idea was to show them what the necessity of art is.

**KB** To that end what kind of things did you do when you first started living here?

**TJ** We organised an exhibition! (laughter) The artists exhibiting were myself, Joseph Manana, Terry-Anne Stevenson, Ilse Mikula and Trueman Myaka. We organised some live music because we thought people would be attracted by this.

**SA** Yes, I found the nicest thing about coming to exhibitions here was that you came to look at art but the environment wasn't 'stiff'. Everyone was relaxed, there was music and people jammed...and there was alcohol...(laughter).

**TJ** I think that that atmosphere came about because our real objective was to socialise (laughter).

When people came here we wanted them to feel at home - we didn't want to impose our ideas on them. We wanted a forum where people can actually talk about art and things in general to let them know that artists are ordinary people. Because in the townships for instance, people think artists are freaks (laughter) or lazy...

**SA** Why?

**TJ** Because people believe in getting employed. People think you are working only if you are employed somewhere with a constat salary each month. And again there are no galleries in the townships. many people have not seen a gallery nor even our own work.... Most of my work

abantu abamnyama abanyama abayi ema Gallery.

**SA** Yini indaba?

**TJ** Okokudlala ngicabanga izinga lemfundo esikoleni alilihle futhi okwesibili iningi liyahlu pheka okunokuba bathenge opende bengathe nga oku nye abantu abanayo imali ye art. Ngakhoke savumelana ngokuba sivule indlu yemibukiso inhloso kwaku ngekhona ukubane sakhe imali kodwa kwaku ukufundisa abantu ukuno kuba dayisela .

**JM** Abantu abantu abamnyama bacabanga ukuthi i -art yenzelwa ukuthi umuntu azi uthele isi zungu - ukuthi kube khona akakwenzayo. Imbono yethu kwaku ukubatshengisa okubalule kile kwi-Art ukuthi yini isidingo se-Art.

**KB** Kulokho kwaba iziphi izinto enazenza ngesikhathi niqala ukuhlalapha.

**TJ** Sahlela umbukiso! (Ehleka). Embukiweni kwakuimina (Thami), Joseph Manana, Terry-Anne Stevenson, Ilse Mikula and Trueman Myaka. Sahlela umculo ngo kucabanga ukuthi abantu bazobeka ilokho.

**SA** Ya; ngthola into emnandi ngokuza. Lapha embukisweni ikhona ukuthi nanifuna abantu beze embukiseni we art, kodwa umphakathi wawulukhuni kulokho. Wonke umuntu waye khululekile engathi umcimbi kuneziphuzo ezishsayo (uyahleka).

**TJ** Ngicabanga ukuthi lokho kwavela nogkuthi inhloso yethu kwaku ukubanbawonye ngezimpilo (uyahleka). Ngesikhathi abantu befika lapha sasifuna bazizwe besekhaya-asithandanga. Umuveza imibono yethu kubona. Sasifuna imlela lapho abantu bezokhuluma nge art nezinto. Ezinye ngokujeyekile ukuze bazi ukuthi ama artist . Abantu abajwayelekile, ngoba emalokishini abantu bacababga ukhuthi. Ama artist abasemoyeni (uyahleka).

**SA** Ngani?

**TJ** Ngoba abantu bakholelwa ekugashweni abantu bacabanga ukuthi osebenzayo oqashiwe nbawotihle. Ethola inani elithile leholo genyanga. Futhi azikho izindawo zemi bukiso emalokishini. Abantu abaningi abakaze bayibone





has been shown here in the city.  
To them artists are some kind of mystery.

**SA** Have similar informal set ups like Essex Rd. existed in the townships?

**TJ** Ja...Ja (kettle boils)  
In fact in 1989 in Claremont Township, I used to do something very similar with my kiln firings. Because I wasn't using an electric kiln, I would construct my own kilns; Invite people over in the evening and actually demonstrate the whole process like setting up the kiln, packing it, lighting it and then show them other uses of the kiln. For instance we would just have a braai on it (laughter). Educate people while they are relaxed! (Laughter.) I would then display the work on the verandah and people were not intimidated. Formal Galleries do intimidate people.

**KB** In the townships, if a young person is inclined to say draw or paint, is he or she encouraged to pursue this seriously?

**IS** It is not encouraged!

**JM** You find people who can see that you are talented. Sometimes, someone will ask you to do their portrait for maybe R10. But on a whole it is not taken seriously. It is not seen as a career option.

**IS** Like me for instance. I grew up with a talent for art in the township. But I wasn't encouraged. My parents didn't know what art was. When I finished std 10 though some people did say that I should contact an art institution or something. It was then that I decided to embark on this career but up until then it had not been in my mind!

**KB** So Essex Group is providing a support for you.

**IS** Ja. I remember visiting this place before I went to Tech. (ML Sultan).

**TJ** It has always been like that here.

**JM** Some years ago if one came to town for an exhibition from the township and you could not get transport back home then you knew that you could come here and stay overnight (laughter).

**TJ** That is the whole spirit of Essex Rd. Gallery.  
The FLAT Gallery also played a role in a sense because when we went there we thought well

indawo yemibukiso noma nje imisebenzi yethu. Eminingi yenysebenzi yami yaziwa lapha edolobheni lasethewini. Kubona ama artist olonyeuhlobo lokubuka emswaneni.

**SA** Zukhona ezinye izindawo ezifana ne 38 Essex Rd emalokshini?

**TJ** Ya...ya... (ezisafufusa)  
Empeleni ngo 1989E-Clermont Township. Ngangijwayele ukwenza izinto ezifana ne kiln firing. Ngoba ngangingasebenzisi i-Electric kiln, ngangizakhela eyami i-kiln; ngimema abantuntamba. Ngibathsengise imblela okwenziwa ngayo i-kiln, ngiyitake, ngiokhele bese ngibathswengisa ezinye izindlela ikiln esebenza ngazo. Ngengokuthi sing -sa inyama kuyo (uyahleka) sifundise abantu ngesikhathi bezikhululekele (ehleka). Ngizowubeka -ke lomsebenzi phandle abantu babengahlulahlutho. Imibukiso esemazi ngeni aphambili iyabakhathaza abantu.

**IS** Ayikhuthazwa

**JM** Uyabathola abantu ababonayo ukuthi unesiphilwo. Nyesinye isikhathi omunye uzofuna umbwebe bese ukunikeza R10, kodwa kukho konke. ayithathwa njengoku baluleka kwayo, nanje ngomsebenzi ongawenza impilo yakho yonke.

**IS** Ngengamingakhula nginesiphilwo se-art kodwa angizange ngikhuthazwe umuntu. Abazali babengazi ukuthi iyini i-art. Ngesikhathi ngiqeba ibanga leshumi yize abantu babenga sho ukuthi ngiye esikoleni se-art. Yilaphomina engaphetha ngokuthatha lomsebenzi.

**KB** Iqembu laze Essex lakuxhasa kulokho?

**IS** Ya. Ngiyakhumbula ngivakashela kulendawo ngaphambikokuya E-Tech.

**TJ** Kwakubanjalo pahon ngasosonke isikhathi

**JM** Eminjakeni elule uma noma imuphi umuntu eza embukisweni edolobheni aqhamukaelokishini. Mangabe usuya emuva ungasenayo into yokuphindela emuva ubuzalapha uzocela indawo yokulala (ehleka).

**TJ** Iyo yonke imimoya yase Essex Rd Gallery. Le Flat Gallery beyibhala indawo masizalapha besicabanga ngokuthi nansi la ikhona. Ienziwe ngokuykho. Sifune ukuthola eminye imisebenzi efanayo neyase ndlini yemibukiso. Noma iFlat ihlala abantu abancane abehlukile kulowomaom-

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here it is: a very similar set up! Straight away we wanted to find some working relationship with the FLAT gallery. Although the FLAT was catering for a more or less different target group but the essence of our ideas overlapped.

**KB** How did they overlap? What would you say you guys had in common?

**SA** Well the fact that we knew that each other existed is important. We would complement each other, go to each others exhibitions.

**KB** The idea of the artist wanting to take back a certain amount of responsibility for exhibitions seems do be positive. To say that "we are not going to wait for someone else to say that we are legitimate" - that for me is significant. (Pause.)

**TJ** One thing I have always been concerned about in Durban is the general lack of interest or energy. People are really apathetic! In Johannesburg people get up in the mornings and want to do something (laughter). Here people are laid back and this worries me because this is my region. I grew up here. Over the last 15 years I have lived in Johannesburg for a number of long periods and I see things happening. And it is not just white artists exhibiting or organising something, but people of all racial groups. Here in Durban people tend to wait for other people to organise exhibitions for them.

**KB** Why is that?

**TJ** I think the reason is two-fold. Firstly there is a lack of facilities or good infrastructure and secondly geographically we are scattered here. Claremont township is west of Durban, KwaMashu north, Umlazi south, etc... To go from township to township you have to go through town whereas in Johannesburg Soweto is made up of a whole lot of townships so here we just don't have the culture of working as a group. That is also one of the reasons why 38 Essex Rd. is centrally placed in the city.

**KB** So in a sense what is happening here is a site for a gathering of people from different regions. Bringing those people together to exchange ideas and to create a network.

**TJ** Yes, in fact we don't see 38 Essex Rd. as a project that should only happen here. Some people have come forward and asked us to have exhibitions in their houses in different for example, as an event or something.

**SA** What are your feelings about exhibiting at the NSA, a non-commercial gallery in a commercial space?

bo kudwa owethu oba ngaphezi kwalokho.

**KB** Benza kanjani ukugunzela. Usho kanjani ukuthi abantu ebeninabo benine nhloso eyodwa?

**SA** Ngoba. Besazikhale ukuthi omunye uyaphila kubalulekile. Besibungaza omunye siye umangabo enombukiso.

**KB** Umbono wama -artist wokunfuna ukuthatha emuva okunje umuntu okumele akwenze enzela umbukiso bewu sekwa. Ukuthi asilindi noma ubani ukuthi sikhona ngokufanele - lokho kuwuphawukimi (athule).

**TJ** Okukodwa engihlala njalo ngikusho ngethu uku uku shoba kokusi misela nomfutho. Abantu abanawo lomuzwe. Egeli abantu bamengezi nyawo, bavuka ekuseni bafune ukwenza umsebenzi (ehleka). Lapha abantu baselele emuva lokhu okungikphatha kabi ngova indawo yangakithi. Ngakhula khona. Eminyakeni emgaphe zu-kuka 15. Ngihlale eGoli izikhithi eziningi. Ngibona izinto zenzeka. Kanti futhi akusiwona umsebenzi wabamhlophe kuphela obukiswayo kodwa owabantu bazozonke izinhlanga. Abantu balapha ethekweni balinda abanye okuba babahle lele umbukiso.

**KB** Yini kunjalo?

**TJ** Ngicabanga ukuthi isathu. Okoixuqala ukushoda kwezidingo noma kwezakhnvo. Okuesibili ngokwesimo senhlalo sihlakazekile lapha i-Claremont isentishonalanga netheku, kwanlashu enyakatho, Umlazi eningizimu, kunjalo kunjalo... uku ya emalokishini ehlukeneyangamula. Kanti eGoli, iSoweto ihlanganise onke amalokishi. I-Soweto ihlanganise onke amalokishi. Lapha asinayo inquboyoku sebenza njengeqembu. Yikho i-38 Essex Rd. Ibekwe maphakathi nedolobha.

**KB** Edininsweni okwenzekayo lapha indayo lapho kuhlangukela khona kuahanyukwa ezindaweni ezahlukeneyo. Ukuhlanganiswa kwabo bonke labobantu kushintshamiswe umiqondo ukuze kwakhiwe into eyodwa.

**TJ** Yebo; equinisweni asiyiboni i-38 Essex Rd njenge ngqalabutho okufanele yenzeke lapha kuphela. Abanjy abantu sebeqhamuke futhi bahole thina ukuthi kube nombukiso ezinbaweni zabo ngokwehlukama.

**SA** Injani imizwa yakho ngemibukiso ese NSA: Indawo yemibukiso engadayiswa endaweni efanele engakubayisekwa kuyo?

**TJ** Empeleni ngijabule. Ama-artist amaningi asebenzi lapha awazange abenakho ukubonakala ebukisa endawe eneomlanado nje

**TJ** Well I am excited. A number of the artists who have worked here have had no significant exposure and for them to exhibit in a place with a long history like the NSA is exciting. The work can also reach a different audience. That is people who might not come to or know about Essex Rd. Gallery.

**SA** And it is also an opportunity to sell work.

**TJ** Yes, it gives us a sense of moving on. It is the culmination of all the things we have been doing here. And also after this exhibition we are going to get a lot of new artists interested in coming here and working with us.

**SA** How does someone like Philemon Sangweni who lives far away deal with Essex Rd?

**TJ** Well, he normally come here with a whole lot of work and leaves it here. If any work is sold we keep the money for him. I guess it's convenient for him to have a place like this. Some people like to use this place like that because they are unable to sell it in the rural areas. In fact this place is becoming a collection point for other exhibitions too...

**SA** How do people find out about exhibitions?

**TJ** Mainly through word of mouth. But we made invitations and posters too which we placed at places like the African Art Centre or the Durban Art Gallery etc...

Bartel Arts Trust (BAT) allowed us to use some of their facilities as well like the fax and photocopying machine.

**SA** What are your views on the Bartel Arts Centre.

**TJ** I think its going to be like another Market Theatre. We haven't really had anything like this here in Durban. I Johannesburg people are able to push forward because of a place like the Market Theatre. If there is one thing that worries me it is not being able to see Joseph for 12 months when I know he is around here in Durban. BAT will provide a forum for artists to meet. It will give us a sense that we are a community of artists. Without that you are working in a vacuum.

**SA** Your invitations always have the words "Cultural Eve" or "Bridging the cultural gap" on them. Can you talk about these?

**TJ** We saw our exhibitions as an evening of culture, art, music and even alcohol played an important part. People could express themselves in any way - singing, dancing. If they wanted to stay all night, till the morning they could.

ngo NSA kuya jabulisa. Umsebenzi endawe enomlando njenge NSA kuya jabulisa. Umsebenzi uzobukwa abantu abehlukeni abantu abangakaze beze noma bazi nge Essex Rd. Gallery.

**SA** Futhi kuyithuba lokudayisa umsebenzi.

**TJ** Yebo. Kusinikeza umuzwa wokuya phambili. Isebenzanjenge siphetho sakho konke ebesingakho lapha. Okunye emva kwalo mbukiso sizokhola amaArtist amaningi enogqozi lokuza lapha ezosebenzisaban nathi.

**SA** Wenza kanjani umuntu onjengo. Philmon Sangweni ohlala kube nalapha Essex Rd.

**TJ** Cha. Uvamise ukuze namsebenzi ominigi awusihye lapha uma kukhona okudayisiwe siyayigcina imali. Ngiya cabanga nzisa kanjalo lendawo ngoba abakwazi ukdayisa Emaphandleni. Eqinigweni lendawo isiphenduke njenge umbukiso futhi.

**SA** Abantu bazi kanjani ngengombukiso

**TJ** Siyamemezela ngokukhuluma ngabo ngomolomo kuphela. Futhi senza izimend nama pheshana liwe sibeke ezindaweni ezifana ne-African Art Centre noma Durban Art Gallery nyokunjalo.

IBartel Arts Trust (BAT) isivumela nkusebenzisa okunye okudinga umasikhipha isimemezelo njenge. Fax, iphoto copying machines.

**SA** Ithini imibono yenu nge Bartel Arts Centre

**TJ** Ngicaba nga izokuba njengenywe iMarket Theatre asikaze sibenakho okunena lapha eThekwini. EGoli abantu bayakwazi ukuthi baphumele ngoba kunendawo enjenge Market Theatre. Uma kunento engikhathazayo akungakho ngoba ngikwazi ukubona uJoseph izinyanga eziwu-12 umangazi ukuthi ukhona lapha ethekwini. IBAT izonikez indlela elula yokuhlangayela. Izonikeza umqondo wokuthi singama -Artist amdawonye. Nqaphandle kwalokhosiyozizwa sisebenza ngayedwana.

**SA** Isimeme senu njalo siba negama. "Cultural Eve" noma "Bridging the cultural gap" kusona ungakhuluma ngalokhu?

**TJ** Siwubone umbukiso wethu nje ntambama lenqubo mpilo. IArt, umculo kanje neziphuzo ezishisayo. Kudlala indawo ebalulekile. Abantu kumele bazi khombise ubona ngayo yonk indlela-ukucula, ukudansa uma befuna ukuhlala ubusuku bonke kuse kuse bengakwenza.

**SA** IFlat lalivihle kulo kho kokunye laliphenbu-ka indawo yezinhlanga (Ehleka).

**SA**

The FLAT was also pretty much like that sometimes it turned into complete madness (laughter).

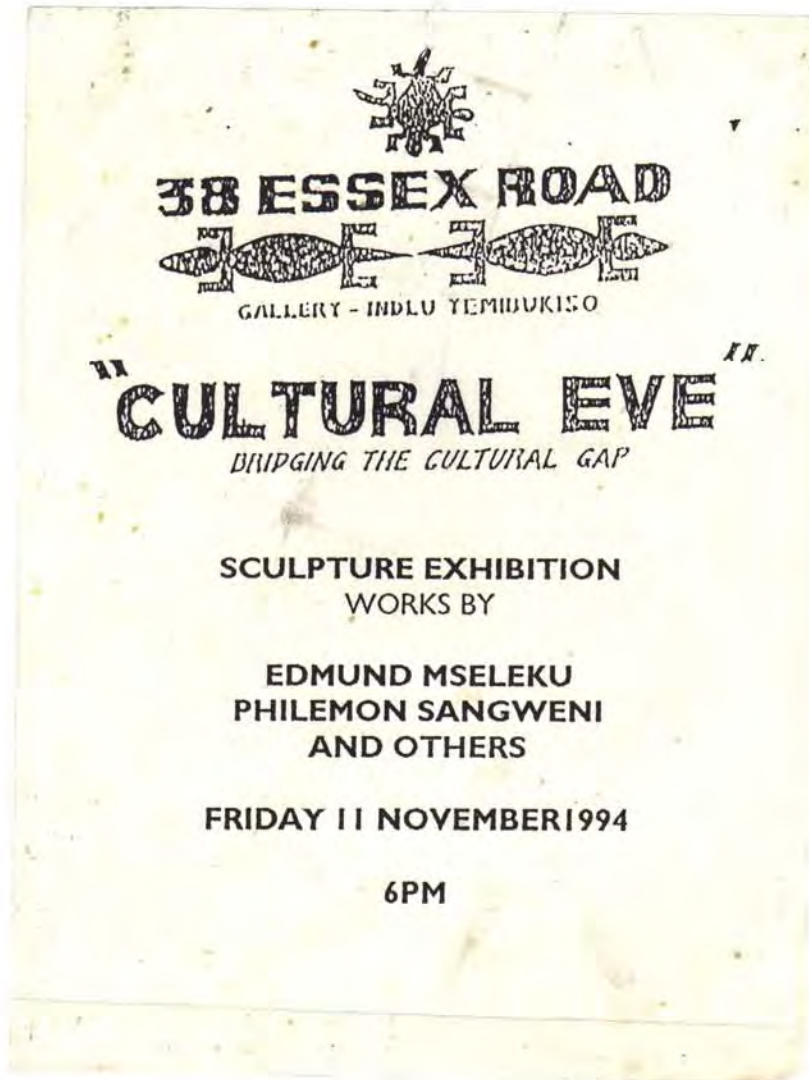
**TJ**

And its ok to have someting like that. Some of the friendships that started between the two galleries were very good I think. Thats what we need. Even if we were to interpret this as some sort of political statement.

**TJ**

Futhi kuhle konke ukuba nento enjalo anye abangani obunye ubungani baqala pakathi kwalendawo yembibukiso; kuhle ngiya phakathi kwalendawo yembukiso; kuhle ngiya cabanga ukuthi ilokho esikubingayo. Noma besingakuchaza lokhu njenge nye yemibhalao yepolitiki.

*We apologise for errors in the Zulu translation.*



**FLAT**

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If not, cut this out and use as a bookmark.

**AUGUST 1995 ISSUE 3**

**IN THE LAST YEAR, MELISSA MARRINS HAS EXHIBITED A NUMBER OF SITE-SPECIFIC INSTALLATIONS IN THE GREATER DURBAN AREA.**

**IN THIS THIRD ISSUE OF FLAT, SIEMON ALLEN DISCUSSES WITH MARRINS, THE NATURE OF HER WORK, AND THE RISE IN 'POPULARITY' OF THIS RELATIVELY 'NEW' MEDIUM.**

**MARRINS IS A HIGHER DIPLOMA CANDIDATE IN THE FINE ART DEPARTMENT OF TECHNIKON NATAL. ALLEN IS A FACUTY MEMBER OF THE SCULPTURE DEPARTMENT AT TECHNIKON NATAL.**

**SA** I am interested in your use of alternative space for two reasons: 1) The nature of your work requiring such spaces, and 2) The lack of infrastructure in Durban to accommodate such work.

**MM** 1) Part of the reason that I make use of alternative spaces is that I feel my work has entered into a far more public and visible realm. The type of work that I am making at the moment requires a kind of interaction and response from the viewer that would be inadequate within a gallery space. In other words, I would like the viewer to question my choice of venue and its surroundings (as in the Mt. Edgecombe installations.) The pilgrimage to the site is also part of the meaning in the work. On a personal level I am fired by the challenge to transform and give new meaning to a space. To bring my own meanings, metaphors and symbology to an otherwise 'mundane' space is an integral part of the art making to me - in other words the space is my canvass. 2) Unfortunately there is no infrastructure within Durban's galleries to facilitate installation work. The FLAT gallery was promising, and hopefully the new BAT centre will be far more open-minded in its approach to what constitutes 'art' and its

context. Durban seems to me to be the 'home-industries-shop' of galleries. They are mainly run by middle-aged women who know more about home perms than art. Of course no-one is going to allow young blood or new ideas to infiltrate their cozy little curio shops as this might prove to be to much of an upheaval. I would urge young artists to find alternative spaces to exhibit in, as this in itself, constitutes another facet to the actual work, which is often lacking in a gallery space.

**SA** A number of young artists in Durban are working with the medium of installation. Could you talk about this and why you have chosen to work in this fashion?

**MM** I do not believe that 'many' artists are actually working within the installation medium. In my opinion most of the installations I have seen here are generally of poor quality. I think it is a very disciplined medium and one in which I am certainly learning very quickly the difference between a 'good' or 'bad' installation. Internationally I think it has become the 'mainstream' form of art-making due to a fulfillment of a number of criteria: a) It engages all the senses of the participant. b) The viewer becomes a participant and has to engage with

the work. c) The use of space seems to fulfill the artist's desire for layered metaphors. I think one is able to create far more complexity in a space which allows for levels (both physical and symbolic).

d) I think the installation space (for myself, at any rate) is a physical manifestation of the soul/interior being.

**SA** Why did you choose the *Mt. Edgecombe* and *Face to Face* spaces for those particular installations?

**MM** I chose the *Mt. Edgecombe* space because it used to be an old hospital and the operating theatre and x-ray rooms were perfect for my metaphors - which are involved with the



surgical as well as the religious and the esoteric. The operating theatre in particular appealed to me because it was a transition area - people had actually died and lived there. So it was a room of souls, sad memories, entrapment and also liberation. I chose the *Ascetic's Dream Room* space at the Technikon (*Face to Face*) for two reasons: a) Practically I needed to be on campus for the *Face to Face* competition (And we all know what a fiasco that was. Although the sum of the parts did not exceed the size limit, the size of the piece was taken to be the size of the room and therefore not accepted.) b) Secondly, I liked the shape of the room (coffin shaped) and the fact that being on campus, it was accessible to a wide audience.

**SA** Do you still want to exhibit in galleries and if so, why?

**MM** Yes, I will when my work demands it. For instance the performance piece, *Extended Performance*, at the NSA gallery would not have worked in any other space besides a gallery. *A Woman's Space* and *Randoee* needed a theatre space. Until such time as I find a suitable space for an installation in a gallery, I will continue to use alternative spaces for that particular medium.

**SA** How do you feel about the attendance at your *Mt. Edgecombe* installation?

**MM** I was disappointed at the attendance as I had spent a lot of money on that installation. At first I was pretty resentful that people (and this includes so-called 'friends') did not make the effort to come. I could not believe the student attendance, which was literally zero. I feel however that it is those people's loss if they do not support art and artists and I am generally very tired of excuses and the apathy of our (Durban particularly) art community.

**SA** Do you think this apathy reflects on the nature of the interests of the community or the

nature of alternative spaces?

**MM** I think it reflects on a little of both. People in S.A. are not accustomed to the idea of alternative spaces, and instead of celebrating it they ignore it. If it is not in a gallery it is not 'real' art, you know. I think that the apathy levels in Durban are particularly high at the moment and I think the standard of the work being produced (both at the Technikon and generally) is very low. I don't know why this is, when there is a small contingent of Durban artists who consistently produce superior work.

**SA** How did you publicize the event?

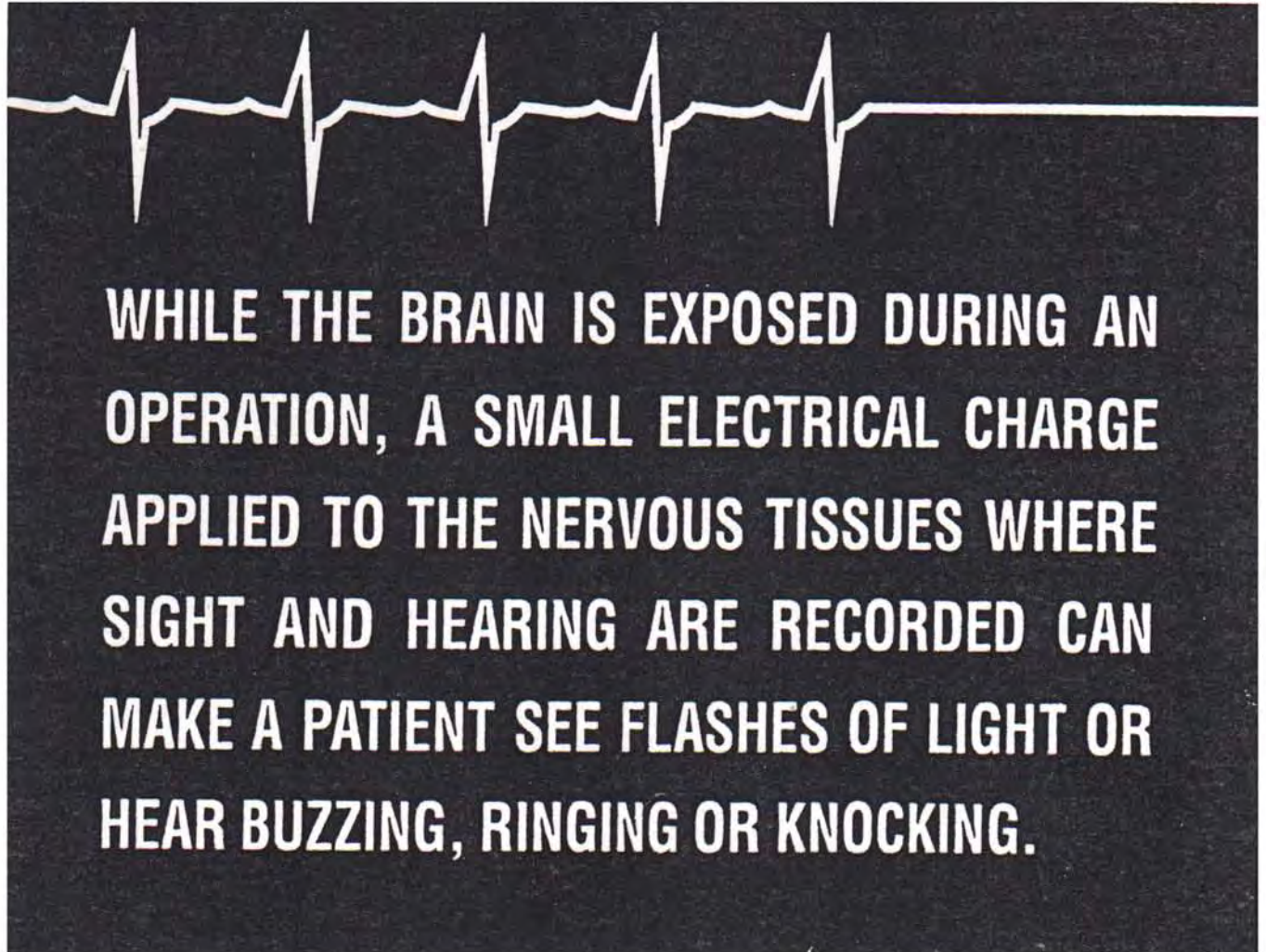
**MM** I sent out invitations via the Technikon's and the NSA gallery's mailing lists (roughly 2000). It was also in the newspaper, and posters were placed in the galleries, universities and art shops.

**SA** What are your views on the documentation of these pieces?

**MM** On one level I feel that documentation is important, although it does not portray the experience of the work. Documenting an installation is very different to photographing a painting for instance. I would like to see people making an effort to view this work and not rely on the documentation. Unless purchased an installation only exists for a prescribed time, and then it is over. If it is set up again it will be different. So the actual experience of viewing and participating is crucial.

**SA** Coming back to your *Mt. Edgecombe* piece could you discuss the 'journey' to the work and how this contributes to the 'nature' of the work?

**MM** Yes, *Faucal Instinctions!* The journey to the site is integral to the meaning of the



above: MELISSA MARRINS, invitation to the Faucal Instinctions Installations at Mount Edgecombe, 1995

left: MELISSA MARRINS, *Your Place or Mine?*, 1993, mixed-media, FLAT Gallery, Durban



**work, for one is making a pilgrimage to a creation site. The actual journey gives one time to prepare oneself for what one is about to see and the journey back gives one time to absorb what one has just seen. The Mt. Edgecombe area has a particularly 'small town' feel to it - this is the kind of off beat, uncomfortable feeling I wanted the installation to have. I am working on a series of installations called the *Red Rooms* Series which are derived from the same awkwardness of the *Twin Peaks* series. The *Red Rooms* represent that queasy 'non-space' which can usually only exist in small towns.**

**SA**

You spoke about intuition in making your work. Could you expand on that?

**MIM**

Well when I started working on *Faucal Instinctions*, I had no idea how I was going to progress. I worked from gut reactions with the space and made the components of the installation as I needed them. The way I work is to allow an idea to evolve and take its own direction. I suppose we call this 'intuition'. I think its about plugging into your own nebulous creative soul/persona where a wealth of ideas and imagery exist. I try to keep in contact with my gut feelings continuously and I have learnt to trust them.

**SA**

You have spoken about the theme of 'healing' in your work. What do you mean by this and how do you make it work for you?

**MIM**

This aspect of healing in my work has become a very challenging area for me. I am working on a way to visually represent the aspects of healing, creativity and artmaking, which I believe are completely interlinked. As well as the art work being a healing process for me, I would like to find a way that it can heal and restore the participants, much in the same way as three of my most admired artists: Marina Abramovic, Lugia Clark and Rebecca Horn. I see all my endeavours in art making up till now as informing and feeding my desire to heal / be healed through making art.

**SA**

Some people find your work shocking, do you think it is? If so, do you think that the shock element provides a 'tool' for people to question their own taste?

**MIM**

This is an issue that I cannot understand. I do not find my work 'shocking', nor do I deliberately attempt to shock people. If I need to convey a particular feeling (and yes I deal with 'uncomfortable' feelings) then I will choose an image that for me adequately conveys that emotional state. Perhaps the

'shock' element lies in my juxtaposition of elements - a rotten penis with syphilis next to a portrait of Jesus for example. I can only surmise that the 'shock' people feel comes out of an uncomfortable realisation that they can relate on some level to my imagery This is obvious. If they did not recognise some kind of understanding or manifestation of the image within themselves then they would not be shocked. I am not here to make things easy for the viewer. I would like them to re-assess their realities through questioning mine.

**SA**

On a more general note, what are your feelings towards the 1<sup>st</sup> Johannesburg Biennale and the work exhibited there?

**MIM**

I felt the Biennale was wonderful in some way and bad in others. It provided a relaxed environment to meet and interact with other artists, both locally and foreign. The actual art works are completely subjective. I felt that some works were brilliant and others tacky and unprofessional. One of the biggest issues for me was the exclusion / inclusion of certain artists. This is something that I hope will be addressed. On the whole I feel that it was a successful undertaking in this country and long over due.

**SA**

What are views on eurocentrism in the South African context?

**MIM**

If somebody could nutshell the meaning of 'eurocentrism' for me, I'd be extremely grateful. It has become an exceedingly dirty and un-PC term. Let's be honest, 'eurocentric' refers to any art that is not 'black' in this country. It is unfortunate that some people feel the need to label art in this way. I am sure that most practicing artists do not categorise their work in this way. They just make it according to their vision (and yes, I know that vision is constructed etc, etc...). Quite frankly I am bored with anal retentive theory.

**FLAT**

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## ***The FLAT COMPACT DISKS & MEREDITH VIE 1995 - 1997***

Once in the States I continued to research alternative spaces and make work, exhibiting a number of large-scale ‘architectural’ installations. I also began the preparation of two compilations of FLAT audio materials for inclusion in the *FLAT FILE* document. This effort resulted in two sets of limited edition compact disks. On one was a compilation of purely FLAT audio material, and on the other a document of my own audio work made at the FLAT, as well as some post-FLAT material that came out of the original FLAT tapes.

As had been the case with Nella Nomeis, my pseudonym used for the ‘invented’ band review some years back, I also created a persona, this time, “Meredith Vie”, to author a ‘review’ of this audio material. On returning to Durban, in 1996, I wrote this ‘review’ of these two ‘limited edition’ FLAT CDs, and submitted it to the *Mail and Guardian* (November 7). Interest from then editor, Charl Blignaut, led to a number of ‘calls’ to Meredith Vie, who of course did not exist. Jenah McCarthy, a young artist who had been researching alternative art spaces in Durban, agreed to my request to ‘be Meredith Vie’ and participated in the ‘intervention’ by returning Blignaut’s calls. Various communications ensued between them, and the document was edited a number of times with promises made for a publication date. However, for some unknown reason, perhaps ‘Meredith’s’ elusiveness, the article was never published.

26 November 1996

ATT : CHARL  
WEEKLY MAIL AND GAURDIAN.

As requested, the edited version of the article Alternative...  
alternative to what?

Please forward correspondence to : P.O. Box 47252, Greyville, Durban,  
4023. I can also be reached by fax (031 - 221482) or by e-mail  
(ntuntane@iafrica.com )

Yours sincerely

  
.....  
MEREDITH VIE

**Subject:** gottit  
**Date:** Thu, 28 Nov 1996 17:04:10 +0200 (SAT)  
**From:** arts@mg.co.za (Mail & Guardian Arts)  
**To:** ntuntane@iafrica.com

Hi Meredith

Found the story, thanks  
Charl

The Lovely Charlene

**“ALTERNATIVE! Alternative to what...?”  
By MEREDITH VIE**

The now defunct FLAT Gallery, Durban’s experiment in alternative ‘living’ and ‘visual display’ celebrates its third year of surreptitious activity with the release of two eponymous CDs. Initiated in 1993 by the then occupants; Ledelle Moe, Thomas Dry Barry and Siemon Allen: the FLAT operated out of a second story apartment and cultivated an inner-city context for Durban’s avant-garde. “We needed a site for inter-disciplinary activity to combat Durban’s overwhelming apathy in the arts,” says Moe (now teaching at the Maryland Institute for Fine Arts in Baltimore, USA.) This tough militaristic description is sharply contrasted by the more elusive Barry who says: “We actually just wanted anything to happen.”

Defying definition, the FLAT’s ‘everything-including-the-kitchen-sink’ attitude towards performance and installation has been influential, if nothing else, on the programming of more established art venues such as the NSA (Natal Society for Arts) and the Durban Art Gallery. At the opening of the Volkskas 1994 regional show then president of the NSA, Mike McMeekan cited the FLAT as an important influence in the development of new art in Durban.

The FLAT and Johannesburg ‘cousin’ FIG Gallery join an international resurgence in alternative spaces, particularly in Los Angeles, Chicago and London. These spaces typically artist run, flexible and transient operate out of cheap, less conventional spaces, including: store-fronts, hotel rooms (for 24 hour stints), or various lounges and/or dining rooms (as in the case of FLAT). Though loosely fashioned on the ‘alternative space’ movement of the 70’s, these contemporaries claim no association to the former, “avoiding the now popular clichés of empowerment and tokenism.”

New York’s White Columns and Johannesburg’s Market Gallery are some of the 70s prototypes developed by artists feeling institutional neglect, and discontent toward the commercial galleries’ preoccupation with object and profit. Alternative spaces in the US, funded by a young and ambitious NEA (National Endowment for the Arts) flourished in the 80s boom into the ‘bureaucratic monoliths’ of today. But in recent times these spaces have witnessed their style, appearance, policies of franchising the

statistically underrepresented and support for progressive and experimental art; be adopted by the larger institutions and the mainstream. In the 90s this crisis of assimilation along with an ever-increasing deficit in NEA funding has prompted the question: “Exactly what are alternative spaces alternative to?”

It is precisely the flexible nature and cavalier approach of the more ‘light-weight’ contemporary hybrids that has induced their reinvention of the alternative movement. FLAT for example has fragmented: Moe has established a warehouse (FLAT International) in Baltimore, while the South African contingent is satisfied to dabble in non-space activities including information retrieval and audio-production.

Though thoroughly adept in the conventions of installation, the members of FLAT are perhaps most notorious for their uncritical consistency in low-fi audio documentation and it is out of these unorthodox sound files that the two compact disks make their debut. “The principle is that it does not matter what you have to say - but it is vitally necessary that you say it,” says Jay Horsburgh (aka Yaj Marrow) in a flyer propagating the situationist inspired event: *The First International Theatre of Communication*. And indeed he eats his words as the entire three-hour FLAT extravaganza in information transformation and audience participation is canned into a seven-minute track on the first CD. Speaking of the recording Allen points out that “it is the entropic nature of the performance, which is captured on the disk, and not the information traded at such an event...”

Other contributors to the first CD include Walker Paterson, Samkelo Matoti, Brendon Bussy and Rhett Martyn whose scatological outbursts (from the multi-media performance *Aural Hygiene*) evokes John Zorn’s *Mikhail Zoetrope* of 1974. While the second CD is a somewhat subdued compilation of Allen’s examination of the banality of social discourse. Monotonous at times it includes the provocative *Sell Your Body (After Reich)* a self-styled parody of Steve Reich’s *It’s gonna rain*.

In closing it is Barry’s final words on disk one that reveal the FLAT attitude towards these cultural documents – “as much as the recording is capturing the tradition, it signifies its disintegration...” These limited edition disks are not recommended for those not attuned to subversion, banality, monotony or the erroneous manipulation of language.

The CDs included material that had been made in 1995 after the FLAT had closed, but in a continuation of the *Miracle Filter* process, this material was constructed out of the earlier FLAT recordings. This included works using segments from the *Internotional*, the 1993 New Year's Eve gathering, as well as some German simulcast recordings from TV2000. One of the more developed pieces was a work created from an early recording that featured Moonlight's voice called *Sell your Body (After Reich)* (1995).

In 1997, a debate had been ignited in South Africa over the representation of the 'other', specifically around the work of Candice Breitz, Minette Vari and Penny Siopsis. It began when Okwui Enwezor, the curator for the 2<sup>nd</sup> *Johannesburg Biennale*, wrote an essay in a Norwegian catalogue for an exhibition on South African art, criticizing these white artists 'use' of images of black women. Kendall Geers echoed these sentiments in a review for *The Star*, and an extensive response from Breitz followed. With this, an aggressive debate was catalyzed, and Breitz, along with Brenda Atkinson invited artists to contribute their perspectives on this critical topic for a collection of essays titled *Grey Areas*.

I chose to submit an essay that dealt with the issue through reference to the recording of Moonlight's voice at the FLAT Gallery, and my subsequent use of this in a sound work. My attitude about the use of his voice in this particular audio work was at that time extremely ambivalent, and so this catalyzed in me the effort to try and articulate some of my thoughts on both the work and the question of representing the 'other'. It is unclear whether *Gray Areas* was ever published and thus I conclude with this essay. *A BLACK VOICE* was written in November of 1997.

## ***A BLACK VOICE***

It has been with great interest that I have followed the recent debates around the issues of representation. I believe that cultural production within the particular historical conditions of post-apartheid South Africa throws into sharp relief issues that have broader relevance in a post-colonial world. More directly, as a South African artist I have found myself confronting these issues in my own work. This was most apparent when I created a sound work that involved the appropriation (both metaphorically and literally) of the 'voice' of a black African man. I was forced to address the complexities and contradictions that arise when one begins to speak across what was once an impenetrable wall. And then, in an effort to build on that 'conversation' one finds oneself engaged in what can easily become a form of suspect representation of the 'other'.

The roots of this particular work began in 1993 at the FLAT Gallery in Durban, South Africa. A group of artists, including myself, were obsessively recording all social interaction that took place at the FLAT. These recordings were made without censure or specific intention, only the urge to record (as neutrally as possible) the 'found sounds' of this environment and so produce a 'purposefully' uncritical social document. Often, the resultant tapes would be used as raw material for further sound pieces. While many of these works were built with ordinary sounds or words reduced through manipulation to pure sound, the most interesting were those created when the recorded words were not (at least initially) unhinged from their signifying function. This brought to the constructed sound piece both meaning and a definite speaker's voice. Though the subjects were aware of being recorded (so that this was never a surreptitious enterprise,) the very act of using and reusing voices other than my own was problematic in terms of (mis)representation, permission, ownership or even coercion.

At that time the FLAT had evolved into a space where artists gathered to work and exhibit. It had a free-flowing atmosphere with people coming and going. In apartheid South Africa it was not insignificant that this included a diverse group of participants. One conversation recorded among many took place during a typical late night session. Four men (all South African) engaged in what was a rather 'ordinary' late night activity for young men - drinking too much and talking about politics and women. What was not ordinary by apartheid era South Africa was the fact that one of the men, Moonlight, was black.

A grounds-keeper at the Natal Technikon, Moonlight had befriended one of the FLAT occupants, Thomas Barry. In a recorded conversation, Moonlight expressed this opinion on the subject of prostitution:

Black ladies, just stopping to sell your body!  
White ladies just stopping to sell your body!  
Indian ladies, just stopping to sell your body!  
Er... Colored ladies, just stopping to sell your body!<sup>1</sup>

I was struck by these phrases. I would not presume to know what Moonlight ‘meant’, and our meeting was the result of such a rare contingency that we have not met again. Rather I seek to elaborate on the thoughts that his words provoked for me.

That the speaker, a black man, in speaking to women - all women - would address them as Black, White, Indian, Coloured seemed to me to reveal how thoroughly entrenched in one’s consciousness was apartheid’s notorious classification programme. In a system where any single individual was identified first by racial group, it was not surprising at the time that Moonlight would address each group separately. However, it also seemed significant that this ‘roll call’ put special emphasis on the fact that all women were included, and that no woman, whatever her race, was exempt from his warning. Such an admonishment to women from a man might imply respect, yet such a statement also begins to speak for women. The implication is: “Women should not...” and so reveals the complexity of a man speaking for women (his ‘other’).

That Moonlight had spoken to women and addresses each group separately revealed a complex dynamic of relationships across gender and racial lines; however the repetitive patterns of these phrases also asserted themselves on a purely formal level. Some months later, when I began to use the collected raw audio material to generate sound works, I revisited this conversation with Moonlight and ‘looped’ the above quoted sample. The original audio information was subsequently superimposed upon itself numerous times to produce a work that began with recognizable words and then progressed into a cacophony of sounds.

My initial influences for this process were the technical experiments of American composer Steve Reich, in which he constructed a ‘new music’ entirely from recorded words. More significant was the fact that he too appropriated voices in his work, and in two very important pieces, the voices of black men. They were a Pentecostal street preacher named Brother Walter, and a youth accused of murder in the Harlem Riots of 1964, Daniel Hamm. In the recording of

Brother Walter, Reich used words from a sermon on the Biblical Story of the Great Flood (“Its Gonna Rain”) and by superimposing repeated sounds created a cyclical ‘wash.’ He described the work by calling it “controlled chaos... appropriate to the subject matter - the end of the world.”<sup>2</sup> In this way he participated in the original message of the sermon. And Brother Walter is given credits in the liner notes.

The second example operated in a very different way: it also appropriated the ‘voice’ of another, but was originally produced, in part, for a benefit on behalf of the individual whose voice is heard. Reich describes the sources for the work *Come Out* in the liner notes of the CD:

Composed in 1966, it was originally part of a benefit presented at Town Hall in New York City for the retrial, with lawyers of their own choosing, of the six boys arrested for murder during the Harlem riots of 1964. The voice is that of Daniel Hamm, now acquitted and then 19, describing a beating he took in Harlem’s 28th precinct station. The police were about to take the boys out to be ‘cleaned up’ and were only taking those that were visibly bleeding. Since Hamm had no actual open bleeding he proceeded to squeeze open a bruise on his leg so that he would be taken to the hospital. “I had to like open the bruise up to let some of the bruise blood come out to show them.”<sup>3</sup>

Both the appropriation of another’s ‘voice’ and the formal manipulation of that voice are problematic. When words are reduced to pure sound there is risk of losing the potency of their original content. Yet it is significant that Reich’s work has overtly ‘political’ content and function created in the spirit of a ‘protest’; it is done for the benefit of another whose voice is ‘taken’. While work of this kind protests the suffering of another, it unintentionally reveals the divide between the experience of the one who ‘speaks’ (the artist) and the experience of the one ‘spoken of’ (the subject.) Is there merit in a work which allows the voice of another to be heard, but does so through manipulation. Is that merit somehow negated when formal manipulations ‘aestheticize’ these words into abstract sounds? Do such efforts speak accurately for the appropriated voice and if so with respect? Are these concepts ‘speaking for’ and ‘respect’ mutually exclusive? Reich’s abstracted sounds, appropriated from the voices of others, may be problematic, yet what would have been accomplished by leaving these voices silent?

These questions are resonant with the contradictions that were inherent in the so-called ‘resistant art’ of South Africa (from the 70s and 80s). The fact that the work of many White artists of this period was produced at a time when to remain silent, or not to speak of the ‘other’ in the

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<sup>1</sup> Moonlight; ‘New Years Eve 93’, *FLAT Recordings*, Tape 2, Durban, FLAT, Dec, 1993

<sup>2</sup> Steve Reich; Liner notes from the CD: *Early Work*, Elektra Nonesuch; 1987.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

face of outrageous injustices, would have been immoral. The alternative, to retreat into academic formalist abstraction or sanitized images, would have been unconscionable. Though justifiable at the time, some of these strategies may have been outgrown. Perhaps they now require a sensitivity to the complexities of ‘speaking for’ and ‘speaking of’. Clive Kellner addresses this when he points out that “speaking from one’s own position, not through that of the Other, will contribute to a heterogeneous, yet cohesive social politik.”<sup>4</sup>

And yet I wonder if it is possible (particularly in race-obsessed South Africa) to speak solely ‘of oneself’ *without* implicating the ‘other’? How can any self-critical process not make reference to that which is intrinsically present in its critique? Indeed, to deny individuals who occupy any particular ‘side’ (across gender, race or economic lines) access to representation of the ‘other side’ is to obliterate their mutual interaction, (even if that interaction be problematic.) The issue is perhaps not a question of ‘who has the authority to represent whom’ but rather, a need for more voices in the debate.

In exposing the contradictions that lie in any construction of ‘self’ and of ‘other’ we may begin to understand the dynamics of ‘otherness’ operating in a changing society. For this ‘otherness’ may reveal itself as a relative thing, not always rigidly located in one’s race, gender, or economic status solely. Rather, the complex composite of factors that make up each ‘individual’ shift with each social interaction and with each formation and reformation of affinities within a group.

The original recording of *Moonlight* was a document of an authentic social interaction between a black man and three white men. As with many FLAT tapes, the conversation revealed how awkward our efforts can be when we seek to communicate. I look back on that work without any clear resolution as to the ‘correctness’ of such an act, but I am certain that the encounter was significant in its implications. Both the original recorded materials and the resultant sound work are resonant with larger ‘conversations’ that are now taking place. Did I appropriate *Moonlight*’s voice ill advisedly? To have excluded him from the number of voices that I used (and still use) to create sound works would have been to remove a valid ‘voice’ from the FLAT documents.

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<sup>4</sup> Clive Kellner; ‘Cultural Production in Post-Apartheid South Africa’, *Trade Routes: History and Geography; The 2nd Johannesburg Biennale Catalogue*, 1997, p. 30.







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