

**Culture's "In-Betweens": Diaspora and artistic practice of
Gavin Jantjes, Marlene Dumas and Moshekwa Langa.**

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By **Olga Speakes**
Student ID: spkolg001

Michaelis School of Fine Art
Faculty of Humanities
University of Cape Town

Supervision: Andrew Lamprecht
 Professor Barbaro Martinez-Ruiz

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Culture's "In-Betweens": Diaspora and the Artistic Practice of Gavin Jantjes, Marlene Dumas and Moshekwa Langa.

Introduction.

In 2017, the term "diaspora" is ubiquitous in any form of engagement with contemporary art and artists from Africa. Whether we scroll through the titles of the latest contemporary art exhibitions on the continent and outside, learn about the buzzy new additions to the annual art fair calendar, leaf through the pages of art publications, hear of the new museums of contemporary African art being inaugurated or engage in the theoretical discourse through art history conferences, catalogue essays and scholarly monographs, the talk is no longer about African art or even contemporary African art, but about contemporary art from Africa and its diaspora (s). The term "diaspora" is certainly not new, and originated in the discipline of history and, particularly, in Jewish studies. Its current omnipresence in the fields of art history and theory, however, is the result of a number of new critical, theoretical and curatorial tendencies that have gained particular momentum since the last two decades of the twentieth century.

Among the more recent tendencies that have brought the term "African diaspora" to prominence and into the general public domain are a growing interest in and recognition of the creative and theoretical contributions of the art practitioners from African countries by the academic institutions and commercial structures of the art world. These are still largely centred in Europe and North America and continue, despite numerous and continued challenges, to dominate the production of the contemporary art discourse and to determine visibility in the art market. This interest and recognition are the result of both the enduring, uncompromising and persistent work of academics, curators and other art professionals from Africa and its diaspora to achieve visibility (Oguibe, 1999: 31) and the economic, political and social developments that shape our realities at the beginning of the twenty first century. Globalisation is one of the key such processes, and is set to impact on each of us. Stuart Hall described one of the key underlying questions posed by globalisation, as follows:

There are many multicultural strategies that have been adopted in different societies with varying degrees of success. I am not interested in the many 'isms' because I think they are all addressing the same emergent problem of this historical moment, which I call the multicultural question. The multicultural question is whether it is possible for groups of people from different cultural, religious, linguistic, historical backgrounds, to occupy the same social space, whether that is a city or a nation or a region – applied by circumstances. What are the terms on which they can live with one another without either one group (the less powerful group) having to become the imitative version of the dominant one – i.e. an assimilationism, or, on the other hand, the two groups hating one another, or projecting images of degradation. In other words, how can people live together in difference? It is the underlying question of globalization.

(Hall, S. quoted in Yuval-Davis, 2006: 6)

In addition, diasporic communities are increasingly being recognised as some of the key sites in which questions raised by globalisation and attempts to answer them are being played out, often placing diasporic artists at the centre of these debates. It is important not to equate the diasporic experiences of those who had little choice but to

leave their lands of origin for political, economic or even environmental reasons with the uprootedness and cosmopolitanism seen as characteristic of the post-modern condition (Clifford, 1997: 249). It is equally important not to see the position of a diasporic subject as somehow beneficial. Bearing this in mind, one of the questions that I will attempt to answer in this thesis, using examples of South African diaspora artists, is what it might be that makes the engagements with the artistic practice in the diaspora so relevant, resonant, poignant and enlightening for audiences in the twenty first century.

I will focus on three South African diaspora artists and their practice: Gavin Jantjes, Marlene Dumas and Moshekwa Langa. My choice of these three artists is partly personal and driven by my interest in the biographical and creative trajectories of individuals, who, like myself, found themselves in positions in which they have had to build and negotiate relationships with different cultures, ideas and frameworks of belonging at simultaneously¹. It is also motivated by the fact that, despite having a common place of origin in South Africa, geographically speaking, their journeys into diaspora and, in the case of Gavin Jantjes, into exile, started in what one might call, three different countries: the South Africa prior to 1994 in which people of colour were marginalised and disempowered under apartheid in the case of Jantjes, the South Africa of the white Afrikaans middle classes prior to 1994 in the case of Dumas, and the South Africa after the democratic elections of 1994 in the case of Langa. Despite different motives for leaving (exile on one hand, and the desire to pursue educational and professional opportunities as artists on the other), all three artists, have at some time or another, been seen and their respective artistic practices contextualised through the lens of diaspora. It is, however, the inconsistencies and ambiguities that transpire in the way the ideas about diasporic consciousness and belonging have been and are being applied to these artists and their practices that provided the original impetus for my research into their specific journeys and their artistic production.

Simon Njami, in his introductory essay to the exhibition catalogue for “Africa Remix” stated that ‘it is impossible to comprehend fully what Africa is’ (Njami, 2005: 13). Definitions of diaspora could be equally elusive, the term having developed as a palimpsest of uses and meanings over many centuries and having been theorised in terms of multiplicity and constant evolution and change (Mirzoeff: 2000). It would also be impossible, and beyond the scope of this dissertation, to account for the histories and artistic expressions of all African diasporas throughout the centuries. Nonetheless, it is important to investigate the definitions of the term that has played a key, if at times controversial, role in critical approaches to the work of the three artists discussed in this dissertation. It will also be an important focus of this thesis to see if and how their position within the space that has been defined as diasporic informed their respective artistic practices and careers. As such, it is necessary to summarise some key points in the historic trajectory of the term, which have unavoidably imparted various contents to the scope of its meaning today. In later chapters, I will examine these various connotations and the weight they might carry with regard to the definitions being applied to the artists’ practices in more detail.

The etymology of the term in its current form is derived from the Greek language (*Oxford English Dictionary*; Cohen, 1997: 1-6), and was initially used in around 800-600 BCE to mean “a complete sowing abroad” or a dispersion, and to describe in neutral, or arguably in positive terms, the processes of migration and colonisation of Asia Minor by early Greeks (Cohen, 1997, 1-6). It was then used in the Alexandrian Greek translation of the Bible to describe the displacement of the Jews exiled from Palestine after the Babylonian conquest and the destruction of the Temple in 586 BCE, turning

¹ Born and raised in Russia, I moved to the UK at the age of 26 and to South Africa eight years later. I am a dual national of Russia and the UK.

the neutral or even affirmative sense of the term into a negative one signifying 'oppression and victimhood' of societies dispersed geographically and culturally as a result of forced migration due to a traumatic event on a national scale (Peffer, 2003: 2). Thus, from the time it was coined, the term has been a palimpsest that evolved and expanded its repertoire of meanings and connotations with each new application. More recently, particularly since the twentieth century, it has been self-applied and used to describe other communities of dispersed peoples, such as Armenian, Palestinian, Irish, South Asian and African communities in the New World, especially in North America, that were formed as a result of the trans-Atlantic slave trade. Today, the term is being used increasingly loosely to refer to people based as much on their ethnic origin (marking them as Europe's Others) irrespective of their motives for migrations (economic migrants) as on their actual relationship with one of the historic Diasporas. Its use is even being extended at times to refer to professional associations – international sets of highly qualified professionals, mainly from the first world countries, who possess the privileges of largely unobstructed travel and form expatriate communities in their countries of temporary residence. As James Clifford put it, 'for better or worse, diaspora discourse is being widely appropriated. It is loose in the world, for reasons having to do with decolonization, increased immigration, global communications, and transport – a whole range of phenomena that encourage multilocal attachments, dwelling, and travelling within and across nations' (Clifford, 1997: 249).

From the earliest instances of its use, "diaspora" has been as much a geographical as a historical term. Geographically, it entails dispersal, dislocation and transnational movement, long distances and the multiplicity of locations, as well as 'separations more like exiles' (Clifford, 1997: 246). Historically, a number of common features of a diaspora have been highlighted. They include a past traumatic event that resulted in the dispersal from the original homeland, a collective memory or a myth about the idealised homeland, dreams of collective return, a troubled relationship with host societies, a shared commitment to the maintenance or restoration of this homeland, a sense of solidarity between members across different locations and a sense of collective identity (Cohen, 1997: 26; Peffer, 2003: 2; Safran quoted in Clifford, 1997: 247). This does not necessarily mean that all those who identify themselves as diasporic subjects or all groups to which this definition has been applied dream of a return to or have been exiled from their home countries. What seems to be generally at stake in the various definitions is the shared generational memory of the past disaster, often no longer spoken about, and a shared projection of the return to the now imagined place of origin historically situated beyond the point of past tragedy and the moment of loss. However, most of the authors writing about diaspora in the present agree that the classical definition provided above should be treated as no more than a 'starting point for a discourse that is traveling and hybridizing in the new global conditions' (Clifford, 1997: 249). They emphasise that 'a shared, ongoing history of displacement, suffering, adaptation, or resistance may be as important as a projection of specific origin' (Clifford, 1997: 250). I would argue that it is this history that creates horizontal connections across geographical and political borders, in addition to the one signalling centralised historical verticals that may provide a productive angle when examining the art of the African diaspora today. What also seems to be suggested in the various definitions discussed above is the shared *collective* identity that is *actively maintained* and expressed via different practices, including aesthetic ones. This is an important feature that has been noted by various diaspora theorists, and one to which I will return when assessing the validity and limitations of these definitions in the context of what is described as contemporary African art and its practitioners in Africa and in the diaspora.

For the purposes of this project, which is set within the discipline of art history and which investigates artistic practice specifically within African diaspora, it is essential, to locate the term in this particular history and context. Cohen suggested that the expressions “black or African diaspora” came into frequent use in the mid-1950s or 1960s, with some references dating back to the nineteenth century (Cohen, 1997: 31; Peffer, 2003: 15). Many potent parallels could be found between the Jewish and African historical experiences, with the trans-Atlantic slave trade serving as the defining history in the shared experience of collective trauma that was brought about by the forced removal of over ten million African people from their homeland and into slavery and forced labour in the New World. Until recently, inter-disciplinary African diaspora studies in North America, with their focus, in Paul Gilroy’s terms, on the Black Atlantic, have dominated the discourse on African diaspora in art history and other disciplines. The institutional power of the United States’ universities that ‘dictates the contours of African diaspora “centres” and “peripheries” has recently come under criticism (Ifekwunigwe, 2010: 325) and has been challenged. The emergence and growth of a contemporary African diaspora in Europe, rooted in the history of colonisation, processes of de-colonisation and globalisation, requires the expansion of the discourse and a focus on the experiences and conditions of production for diaspora artists from African and other countries of the Global South in Europe and other Western locations that are marked by ‘national expressions of racism, sexism, class discrimination, and religious intolerance’ as well as ‘political machinations of the nation-states of which they are part’ (Olaniyan & Sweet, 2010: 12).

On one hand, some authors see Afro-Europeans as ‘often divorced from the potent political formations that emerged out of the common American experience of the African slave trade’ (Olaniyan & Sweet, 2010: 12). On the other hand, and as has been discussed above, the more recent and current shared experiences of oppression, marginalisation and resistance are also valid, if not more important in the present political and economic climate, as the basis for self-identification as African diasporic subjects. What is also important to bear in mind when discussing African diaspora in any discipline and in any location is that its history is as much a history of Africa itself as it is of the host location, be it ‘Fortress Europe’ (Ifekwunigwe, 2010: 324), the United States of America or Brazil. In addition, just as ‘in all their specificity and complexity, the historical ideas, economic processes, and political projects of continental Africa and the African diaspora are (and always have been) mutually constituted’ (Ifekwunigwe, 2010: 322), histories of African diaspora art and artists could not be accessed meaningfully without consideration of histories of art, historical and contemporary, on the continent.

The history of slavery and of the original forced removal of Africans into the diaspora still needs to be considered when discussing the more recent, often voluntary, and at times temporary and flexible (fluctuating between two or more locations as sites of artistic production) migrations of art professionals from the continent to the centres of the Global North. Such movement, which positions the diaspora artist within the centres of former colonial powers, cannot be fully accounted for without understanding the histories that made such journeys necessary and which enabled art professionals to seek opportunities, fulfilment and career growth. The drivers behind such transnational migrations, economic or political, are imbedded in the histories of slavery, colonisation and imperialism that shaped the relationship between the former colonial powers and countries in Africa. This unequal relationship has shaped the structures underpinning art institutions and markets, access to which is still central to the advancement and attainment of visibility for artists anywhere in the world.

However informative the histories and trajectories of contemporary artists from Africa living and working outside of their countries of origin or descent may be, narrow,

essentialising identity-based approaches to their practice could be a dangerous double-edged sword. Such views are becoming increasingly rare and difficult to justify, but I will argue that their residues, are still heavily present in the way in which the artistic practice of African artists in the diaspora is often positioned and afforded visibility. One of the leading theorists, critics and champions of contemporary African (particularly African diasporic) art and artists, Okwui Enwezor, claimed that

the term diaspora is a misapprehension of a historical term and is, therefore, misapplied because, as far as we know, there does not exist any network – outside of the historic African diasporic community in Europe and the Americas – of expatriate Africans that can be said to have molded itself into a visible collective community and that distinctly fashions itself as such’ (Enwezor in Enwezor & Okeke-Ogulu, 2009: 24-25).

The issue of agency in designating certain artists as diaspora artists, particularly African diaspora artists, and locating their practice in the diasporic space is a critical one. It appears to indicate a bigger power structure that operates via the mechanisms of the contemporary art canon. For the purposes of this thesis, the term “canon” is understood to mean the underlying pattern of assumptions and values involved in the selection of a body of artworks deemed to be of indisputable quality and worth within Western civilisation and its art history. The term also refers to a complex of structures and processes that ensure the production and maintenance of the criteria necessary for this selection, and for their positioning as universal (Perry, 1999: 12; Edwards, 1999: 3). Steve Edwards noted the role of the canon as the structural condition for art history, with its genealogy dating back to the foundation of the discipline by Johann Joachim Winckelmann (1717 – 1768) and Heinrich Wölfflin (1864 – 1945). He also drew attention to the role the canon plays in the constitution of knowledge and to the importance of contestations of the canon’s priorities, closure, erasures and silences (Edwards, 1999: 1-15). Edwards’ position seems to be to emphasise the importance of these contestations in making the canon and its mechanisms visible while maintaining that the canon’s structures, which are imbedded in the hierarchy of value implicit in the capitalist system, do not have a viable alternative (Edwards, 1999:13). Professor Raimi Gbadamosi of the University of Pretoria highlighted the key mechanisms that are responsible for the survival, resilience and continued hegemony of the canon (Gbadamosi, 2015). These include the canon’s flexibility – its ability to evolve and to expand while maintaining the power structures that underpin it. The challenges that are posed to the canon are resolved through the accumulation of the subversive practices in the canon, but, significantly, on the power structure’s own terms. The canon has been expanded, but the process of assimilation does not threaten the power relationship balance, which remains largely the same. The expansion of the canon takes place at the expense of the subversive content posing the challenge to its structure. One example of such appropriation from the past could be the ‘assimilation of the challenges posed by the so called “primitive art” to the twentieth century European Modernism by confining the historical repercussions of their encounter mostly to formal effects and formalist aesthetic analyses’ (Enwezor, 2003: 68). Another example is the assimilation of the early twentieth century avant-garde artists into the art history canon and into the history of modernist formalism at the expense of their radical politics. I will examine how this process could be applicable to the challenge that is posed to the Eurocentric canon of art by artists from Africa and its diaspora(s) through specific references to the artists at the centre of my research. Looking at issues concerning authenticity and the Western canon will allow me to trace some of the mechanisms that have been at work in the ways in which art by African diaspora artists has been positioned and allowed a particular kind of visibility in the art history canon, or rather, on the margins thereof. This approach will be

informative when examining specific case studies of art practice and self-positioning, and will simultaneously allow for the examination of parallels and differences in general approaches to art practice originating in the Global South.

As mentioned in the opening paragraph, the term diaspora originated in the disciplines of history and Jewish studies. Due to the nature of this term, as outlined above, tracing its origins in relation to histories of artistic production from the African continent requires interdisciplinary engagements with a number of fields, including post-colonial studies, sociology and anthropology. I will draw upon these sources when necessary in order to access some of the tools and vocabulary needed in the discussion of art production by the diaspora artists and, more specifically, the context in which their practices operate. The study of art history has been enriched by interdisciplinary enquiry and insights, and I will utilise this methodological approach in this thesis, while maintaining the art historical focus on the artists, their practices and artworks that came to be regarded in some instances, for reasons to be explored, through the diasporic lens. My investigation of the artistic practices will also be framed by the question of diaspora aesthetics. In Chapter I, will address the use and applicability of such terms as double consciousness, hybridity and intervisuality, as proposed by W. E. B. du Bois, Homi K. Bhabha and Nicholas Mirzoeff, and will examine how Mikhail Bakhtin's theories of aesthetics could be productive in investigating cross-cultural practices and diasporically located art practices.

It is worth noting that recently, in the context of art history and discourse, the focus on the diasporic seems to be more readily and frequently applied to contemporary art and artists from the African continent than it is to other cultural practitioners from the Global South, whose communities may be defined as diasporic in other disciplines. These definitions do not seem to be carried with the same frequency into contemporary art discourse in their case. We do not hear nearly as much about the art of contemporary Chinese diaspora or the art of the Russian diaspora; even the art of the South Asian diaspora is used as a term of reference much less frequently. As mentioned earlier, the evocation of diaspora seems inevitable whenever contemporary art from Africa is mentioned. Whatever the reasons for such singling out might be, the art of the African diaspora has been treated increasingly as an attractive commercial and academic commodity. Possible mechanisms, reasons and implications of this process for the artistic practice of individual artists will also be explored and remain in focus throughout this thesis.

The foregrounding of the art of the African diaspora within different disciplines, and particularly in art history studies, may raise questions regarding the supposed contradiction between the privileging of this kind of identity-based approach, even for the purposes of ensuring visibility and entry into the mainstream discourse, and the involuntary reinforcement via this process of the same age-old hegemonic structures, which allow for such a field of study to exist within the constraints of centre/ periphery type of relationship and Eurocentric or Western-centric power dichotomies. The existence of this unequal structure is, unfortunately, still a reality; however, the process of dismantling it cannot move forward unless the visibility of this area of artistic production is ensured. Even though the study of African diaspora art and artists may seem to be supporting the same relational paradigm at this stage, it is a necessary first step as long as it remains self- reflexive, aware and critical of the processes, structures, conditions and motives involved in the gaining and granting of this visibility.

Literature Review.

The field of diaspora studies, which provides the theoretical foundation for my research, is, by its nature, an interdisciplinary domain. Engagement with other areas of discourse has played an important role in the development of art history as a discipline, particularly since the second part of the 20th century. While remaining focused on the artworks, processes and artists, my research into diaspora art and artists requires engagement with texts, ideas and discourses originating in other disciplines. Many of them have a history of profound and mutually beneficial engagement with art historical research.

Located within the domain of social sciences, Robin Cohen's *Global Diasporas: An Introduction* (1997), provides a thorough foundation for any research into the condition that has often been described as symptomatic of our age. Cohen examined the history of the concept from its origins to the present highlighting, in separate chapters, histories and specifics of major historic diasporas (Jewish, Armenian, African and Palestinian). The author also aims to expand this definition to include other kinds of diasporas, such as trade, imperial, labour and cultural ones, offering a more nuanced understanding of the term as it is applied today. He opens up the field to recognise the variety of relationships that exist between the nation state and its migrants and minorities, leaving room for a variety of possibilities that result in different types of diasporas overlapping and changing over time. His typological descriptions are valuable and are referenced by most key writers on diaspora, as he offers some historical definitions of diaspora, accounting for the differences between different types of diasporas he identified and between individual diasporas within these major groups. His description of imperial diaspora, for example, is likely to be valuable for my research when I consider the work of Marlene Dumas in the context of her relocation from the settler culture of South Africa (an example of imperial diaspora) to Europe.

Cohen's ideas about the relationship between diaspora and globalisation are also of interest, as he examines different aspects of globalisation that influence the study of diaspora in detail, such as world economy, forms of international migration, the development of 'global cities', the creation of cosmopolitan and local cultures and the de-territorialisation of social identity. He concludes that diasporas are well positioned to benefit from these developments. While bearing this positive take on the position of diasporas today in mind, I intend to ask questions about how individual artists navigate these spaces and relationships, particularly when associations with diaspora lead to reductive and essentialising definitions that contradict the view of diaspora as a particularly powerful and productive site for creativity and discourse.

Okwui Enwezor commented on the importance of post-colonial theory in art history in the following way:

If I recommend the postcolonial prism as the lens that can illuminate our reading of the fraught historical context from which the discourse of modernism and contemporary art emerged, it is only to aim toward the maturity of the understanding of what art history and its supplementary practices can contribute today towards our knowledge of art (African Literatures, 4-34-2003: 57-82).

Whilst *The Post-colonial studies: the key concepts* (2000) edited by Bill Ashcroft provides a useful resource and guide to the essential terminology utilised by the authors included in this review, it is the work of Edward W. Said that provides, particularly in *Orientalism* (1978), the foundational understanding of post-colonial theory and key ideas such as the discourse of the colonial Other, the colonial gaze and the mutually constituting

relationship between the colonial centre and its peripheries. More specifically, his essay *Reflections on Exile* (2002) provides important insights that are valuable for my own research. Although the diasporic spaces are, in a sense, larger than the site of exile, and exile refers more directly to the condition of banishment and inability to return to what is seen as home with its attachments and close knowing or familiarity, the essay still provides an important personal and highly evocative description of the condition that constitutes the diasporic space. It also warns against the tendency to eulogise exile as something that is almost beneficial, particularly with regard to creativity, although it does provide entry points to the understanding of the potentialities thereof, its characteristic of resilience intertwined with despair, and the potential to contribute to the understanding of the condition of the wider world today. The essay allows me to begin to apprehend the many sites within the site of diaspora: diaspora's multiplicity and complexity, its many faces and some of its potentialities.

One of the ideas suggested by Said in *Reflections on Exile* is that nationalism and exile operate as mutually dependent and constituting categories. In a similar vein, the discourse on diaspora is also linked, historically, to the discourse on nationalism. In this regard, Franz Fanon's *On National Culture* (1959) provides an important early example of complex engagement with the idea of culture and cultures within the colonising project in Africa - how it operates in the hands of hegemonic Eurocentric power discourse as a way to claim and affirm the cultural superiority of the coloniser. It also provides an important warning against the 'unconditional affirmation' of any culture, either European or African, and against the tendency, albeit historically understandable and, at a particular point in the history of the black consciousness movement, strategic, to view the culture of the entire continent as one monolithic phenomenon rather than as nation specific. This approach, closely linked to the racialisation of culture, is still echoed in some of the tendencies to group and to represent/ position the works of artists from the continent or its diaspora in continental, monolithic terms. Fanon reminded us that 'culture abhors simplification' (Fanon, 1959: 39), and this thought will guide me throughout my thesis.

Among the more recent important contributions to the field of post-colonial studies, especially as they concern culture in its various manifestations, are the writings of Homi K. Bhabha. In particular, his theories regarding the Third Space and concerning hybridity will be important when analysing the specifics and particulars of the diasporic spaces that artists of African descent living and working in the West are presumed to occupy. Diaspora, seen as having replaced the colony as the primary space of encounter in the post-colonial period, is evoked in a number of essays that form Bhabha's influential book *The Location of Culture* (2004), as well as in the interview with the scholar in the journal *Third Text. Third World Perspectives on Contemporary Art & Culture* (1990). As such, it is seen as a quintessentially hybrid, 'in-between' space, a space in which cultural differences are articulated, cultural transformation occurs and new identities that go beyond the essential cultural binaries of the West and its Others are produced. These theories are important for my research because they allow me to investigate what is at stake when the linking of the diasporic spaces, diasporic subjects' identities and art production is claimed. They also provide some foundation for understanding the significance of diaspora studies in all their different applications, including their impact on art historical research. In Bhabha's writing, diasporic spaces characterised by hybridity are positioned as some of key manifestations of the post-modern condition. In addition to Bhabha's texts, Sarat Maharaj's influential essay from 1994 '*Perfidious Fidelity*': *The Untranslatability of the Other* will be another source of ideas about hybridity and the grey areas that are created by the process of cultural translation.

Given the fact that, until relatively recently, African diaspora studies focused predominantly on the histories and cultural production of the descendants of the African

slaves who settled in North America and the Caribbean as a result of the transatlantic slave trade, Paul Gilroy's influential book *The Black Atlantic: modernity and double consciousness* (1993) is of interest for my research, as it allows me to trace the genealogy of the idea of the hybridity of Black Atlantic culture. It is also a seminal text in the unsettling of the idea of history as progress that has been dominant in the West that has shaped the understanding of modernity from Western centric point of view. Although the artists whose works are the subject of my research are not direct descendants of those whose destinies had been shaped by the trans-Atlantic slave trade, the spaces that they occupy in their home countries and in Europe, geographical and conceptual terrains that they and their practices transverse have been shaped by the histories of slavery and slave trade in many ways. Understanding this context would certainly enrich my project.

The collection of essays *Reading the Contemporary: African Art from theory to marketplace* (1999) edited by Olu Oguibe and Okwui Enwezor is an influential publication that addresses the reception of contemporary African art and the enduring tendency to position artists from Africa in identity-bounded terms, fashioned as an exotic Other located in the permanent past, defined by colonialism, ethnography, collectivity and anonymity and as invariably 'displaced from normativity' (Oguibe & Enwezor, 1999:18). The authors highlight the issue of authenticity as a disguise for a demand for identity and for the signs of difference and 'cultural distance' (Oguibe & Enwezor, 1999: 27). They demand critical engagement with the work of African artists, wherever they are from or happen to reside, which goes beyond identity and sub-normativity. Kwame Anthony Appiah, in his contribution to the book entitled *The Postcolonial and The Postmodern*, brilliantly illustrates how questions of aesthetic value are bound up with market values and are often mutually constituted. He demonstrates how African art operates as a commodity and positions the cultural production of artists from the African continent against the post-modern and post-colonial discourses. In *African Art and Authenticity: a Text with a Shadow*, Sydney Kasfir focused on how curatorial authority operates in defining African art 'both as a commodity and as an aesthetic object' (Oguibe & Enwezor, 1999: 88). This calls for the analyses of how value judgments are structured with regard to contemporary African art. The text offers useful ideas with which to approach curatorial framing strategies (both in exhibition and in catalogue making) that have been shaping the positioning and reception of the art production of South African diaspora artists. It also highlights the relationship between such strategies and the ways in which the Western/ Eurocentric artistic canon operates. These two essays provide a useful model that I am hoping to expand and to consider with regard to African diaspora art and its relationship with the canon, as well as with the market.

As one of the leading cultural theorists writing about the post-colonial condition, Stuart Hall published a number of essays that have influenced my thinking about African diaspora as a particular cultural site. *Cultural Identity and Diaspora* (2005) is arguably the most important among his essays that either touch upon or deal directly with issues surrounding diasporic identities and their cultural expressions. Although rooted in specific examples of the Caribbean cultural diasporic identities and black cinema, Hall proposes some key ideas about diasporic identities in general and conceives of them as 'defined not by essence or purity, but by recognition of a necessary heterogeneity and diversity,...by hybridity' (Williams, 1994: 235). Here, he not only echoes some of Homi Bhabha's ideas, but also provides a potentially productive avenue for my research. This way of thinking defines diaspora and diasporic identity as a process rather than as a static given, a site of constant production and reproduction tightly bound to and constituted 'within representation' (Williams, 1994: 235). In this thesis, I will expand upon the way in which the diasporic identity is becoming increasingly commoditised examining, those instances in which it has become fixed within the boundaries that are defined by the

same hegemonic power structures that controlled representation and positioning of African art unilaterally until recently.

The objective of *Diaspora and Visual Culture: Representing Africans and Jews* (2000) edited by Nicholas Mirzoeff is to investigate the connection between diaspora and its representations in visual culture, as well as to examine the rich complexity of diasporic art and its potential to transform the way we look at ourselves and at others. In his introduction, Mirzoeff asserted that studying the cultures of diaspora allows us “to understand and embrace the new modes of post-national citizenship” (Mirzoeff, 2000:1). Both the introduction and the following essays provide a number of ideas with which I will engage when positioning the diasporic artists within my research in relation to the contemporary political, economic and post-modern structures and discourses. While the book is mainly concerned with Jewish diaspora and African diaspora in North America and opens up the discussion about queer community as a type of diaspora, it does provide useful frameworks for examining other diasporas and their subjects. Here, the author also positions diaspora subjects against the nation states and examines the ways in which marginalisation takes place via museum structures that serve as a means to visualise national culture. By examining the implications of diasporic discourse for visual art, he provides an interesting reference to Powers and his conception of “style” in art as ways of projecting identities and the tendency to stress the national and personal elements of style as a visual counterpart to some internal essence (Powers, 1995:384). I will investigate these claims when discussing diaspora aesthetics in the first chapter of my thesis.

In his book, Mirzoeff also outlined his theory regarding the nature of the diasporic image, and suggested that diaspora generates “a multiple viewpoint” (Mirzoeff, 2000:6) in any diasporic visual production. He introduced the concept of intervisuality as a tool to be used in the study of visual diaspora images, explaining that “a diasporic image can create multiple visual and intellectual associations both within and beyond the intent of the producer of that image” (Mirzoeff, 2000:6). What still remains uncertain for me is to what degree this multiple view point and hybridity within the diasporic space, which he also evokes, is different from hybridity, multiplicity and multiple viewpoints that are now seen as part and parcel of any cultural production (the result of the rejection of the idea of the singular, pure and uncontaminated, and therefore superior, cultures championed by post-colonial writers). The author connects the sense of multiplicity of diaspora to the revision of modernism manifested via post-modernism; this connection is of interest for my research as I am attempting to locate the work of South African diaspora artists in relation to what is often called the post-modern condition. The selection of essays in the book addresses what such multiple viewpoints in reference to diaspora look like at present, and how they appeared in the past. Margaret Thompson Drewal’s *Nomadic cultural production in African diaspora* and Simone Osthoff’s *Helio Oiticica’s Parangoles: nomadic experience in endless motion* are of particular interest, as they introduce the idea of the nomadic into the discussion about art and culture within diaspora and offer another avenue for thinking about the diasporic condition and sensibility. In his more recent book *The right to look: a counter history of visibility* (2011), Mirzoeff expanded on the concepts of visibility and counter visibility, or ‘the right to look’ (2011: 473), tracing their genealogy and using them as modes of analyses of the process and power relations involved in the writing of history and when inventing or encountering the Other.

Two more edited volumes are important to include here, as they take an interdisciplinary approach to the theme of diaspora and enrich the art historical research on diasporic artistic production with insights from sociological, cultural and other scientific domains. These are *Theorizing Diaspora: a reader* (2003), edited by Braziel and Mannur, and *The African Diaspora and the Disciplines* (2010), edited by Tejumola Olaniyan

and James Sweet. Brazier and Mannur's introduction is particularly important in cautioning those studying diaspora against privileging it over differences of race, class, gender and sexuality, despite being interrelated with these categories (2003:5). I am hoping to draw on the examples that address diaspora presented in these volumes by a close and specific examination of individual, historically situated examples of diasporic experiences, while remaining focused on their connections and disconnection with art works and art practices in this rich and complex space. The second volume mentioned above takes a specific discipline-based approach to the field of diaspora studies. In this regard, Moyo Okediji's contribution offers a critical examination of the existent structures and methodologies in the discipline of art history that are complicit in the silencing of expressions of slavery, colonialism and immigration in African art, and calls for their replacement with new approaches and methodologies that would provide a balanced and fair representation of the African and African diasporic artistic production. As I intend to look critically at the ways in which African diaspora art and artists are included in and represented via various art historical discourses and power structures such as museums, collections and exhibitions, this essay could be useful both in terms of its analyses of the current state of affairs and regarding the alternatives that it proposes.

The final collection of essays devoted specifically to the theme of the diasporic in art practice that I will consider in this literature review is *Exiles, Diasporas and Strangers* (2008), edited by Kobena Mercer. The introduction by the editor, entitled *Annotating Art's Histories*, offers an extremely useful overview of the key texts that inform the theories and ideas that underlie the contributions in this book, by addressing the 'life-changing journeys that transplant artists and intellectuals from one cultural context to another' (Mercer: 2008:7). The historical approach that questions the tendency to locate cross-cultural aspects of the visual arts mainly in the contemporary is of interest for my own inquiry into the rise of the diasporic as a type of privileged subject position within the category of African art. The chronological approach in the introduction is complemented by a wide geographical overview necessitated by the nature of the project that investigates the nature, manifestations and outcomes of travel and migrations of different kinds, while simultaneously clarifying differences in the notions of migration, exile and diaspora.

By taking a broad historical view, Mercer provides a nuanced and, it could be argued, alternative view of the development of visual arts in the 20th century and the role of migration and other types of displacement and estrangement within the visual arts of modernity. This provides a very useful background against which to begin my own investigation into the work of artists whose practice spans both centuries. Mercer provides a concise evaluation of the contributions made by Edward Said, John Berger, Stuart Hall, Paul Gilroy, Rey Chow and James Clifford to the wide-ranging subject of diaspora cultural production and the impact and importance thereof. Other theorists, such as Franz Fanon and Julia Kristeva, and the painter R. B. Kitaj, are mentioned and their ideas are summarised as having been influential for specific approaches represented within specific essays in the book.

Diaspora aesthetics are specifically addressed in the two essays in the abovementioned volume, namely *Diaspora Aesthetics: Exploring the African Diaspora in the Works of Aaron Douglas, Jacob Lawrence and Jean-Michel Basquiat* by Sieglinde Lemke and *Conceptualizing 'Black' British Art Through the Lens of Exile* by Amna Malik. These provide useful examples of how cultural, sociological and other discipline-based theoretical approaches to diaspora are utilised within close visual and conceptual analyses of specific artworks and art practices. I intend to interrogate and, in some instances, to challenge some of the claims and definitions presented by the authors, particularly where claims to

generally applicable and unambiguously direct connections among diasporic themes, diasporic aesthetics and diasporic subjectivities are made.

Of particular interest are Mercer's references to Mikhail Bakhtin's ideas about 'outsideness'. I will be investigating Bakhtin's ideas concerning the dialogical and their potential in the discourse surrounding the role of the diasporic consciousness in art practices of the artists seen as located in or locating themselves in spaces of diaspora. This will be addressed in my first chapter that discusses the concept of diaspora aesthetics. Mercer's essay on *Tropes of the Grotesque in the Black Avant-garde* (2007) offers further useful ideas regarding ways in which Bakhtin's theories could be applied to the art of the African diaspora.

A number of books and essays by Bakhtin scholars offer an exciting opportunity to investigate Bakhtin's considerable influence on many contemporary thinkers writing about diaspora. In Chapter 1, I will argue that many of Bakhtin's ideas are referenced philosophical developments in the field of aesthetic theory, particularly when it is applied to the works of artists who bring together, investigate or reflect on cross-cultural influences within their practices. The two primary sources of information about and interpretations of Bakhtin's theories are books by Deborah J. Haynes, *Bakhtin and the Visual Arts*; and by Michael Holquist and Vadim Liapunov, *Art and Answerability. Early Philosophical Essays by M. M. Bakhtin*. While Holquist and Liapunov provide an important introduction to Bakhtin's writing during the period when the philosopher developed a number of key ideas addressing creative activity and self/ other relationships grounded in physical and social being, Haynes's essays and books provide invaluable tools and approaches to the practical application of Bakhtin's ideas in the field of aesthetics, art history and criticism, with specific examples of how these theories could assist us to make sense of specific works of art. Robert Stam's essay on the usefulness and visionary nature of Bakhtin's theories in the context of post-modernist cultural criticism provides another angle from which to approach the symbiotic relationship between Bakhtin's ideas and diaspora theory and aesthetics.

A number of history-making exhibitions, which set out to address the themes of diaspora, migration and exile in some way, will also form part of my inquiry via an examination of their related catalogues. These examinations played a vital role not only in making the art of the artists from Africa living and working in Western metropolises visible, but also in generating critical perspectives, public interest and, ultimately, the emergence of a new, if often controversial, category or designation within contemporary art discourse, which, it could be argued, challenges, expands and affirms the existing art historical canon. Historically, the exhibition *The Other Story* curated by Rasheed Araeen and Rasheed Araeen's book *Making Myself Visible* (1984) are important landmarks for the beginning of my inquiry. Some more recent catalogues that are worth mentioning are *Unpacking Europe: towards critical reading* (2001), edited by Salah Hassan and Iftikhar Dadi, *How Latitudes Become Forms* (2003) edited by Michelle Piranio, *Looking Both Ways: art of the contemporary African diaspora* (2003) edited by Ann Farrell, *A Fiction of Authenticity: contemporary Africa abroad* (2003) edited by Orlando Britto; *Fault Lines: contemporary African art and shifting Landscapes* (2003) edited by Gilane Tawardos, *Africa Remix: contemporary art of a continent* (2005) edited by Simon Njami, *Diaspora, Memory, Place* (2008) edited by Salah Hassan, and *Afromodern: journeys through the Black Atlantic* (2010) edited by Tanya Barson and Peter Gorschluter.

Chapter 1. Diaspora Aesthetics.

The presence of the diasporic artist from Africa in the heart of the Western metropolis in the second half of the twentieth century posed a challenge to the singular Eurocentric discourse of Modernism and problematised difference as a criterion for acceptance into the art historical canon (Enwezor, 1999: 273). As discussed in the Introduction, operating from the margin, African diaspora artists' struggles for visibility and inclusion were political and subversive. Having made considerable progress in this regard, as evidenced by the proliferation of exhibitions by African diaspora artists collectively and individually, their inclusion into important international art festivals such as biennales and museum collections, the contemporary art of Africa and its diaspora(s) has achieved much greater visibility as a distinct category within the structures of the international art world. As I argued in the introductory chapter, art of the African diaspora artists is now being included increasingly in the expanded definition of the contemporary art canon, and is often framed as a challenge to it. Such inclusion still seems to be predicated on the position of subordination as a subcategory locked in its own space, an obvious extension of what is perceived as central and normative in the canon. This category is marked by difference and is based on identity defined in geographic, historic and racial terms. Moreover, the long and expressly political and subversive project of making African diaspora art practice matter seems to have been subsumed by the canonical structures, its revolutionary pedigree at times obscured by the singular and reductive focus on the formal aspects of artists' practice and the all-defining relationship between those formal expressions and artists' identities, seen through the binary juxtaposition of the Western-centric self and its Other. As they are subjected to the process of commodification, diasporic experiences are commonly packaged as universal and, at times, even desirable to those contemporary Western subjects whom Julia Kristeva described as 'unbalanced, wanting everything, dedicated to the absolute, and insatiable wanderers' (Kristeva, 1997:41). As mentioned previously, the position of African diasporic artistic production is often shaped by power systems and power relations that are unequal. In this chapter, I will examine how the idea and the theoretical notion of aesthetics are implicated in such systems, driven by the recognition that diaspora aesthetics are used to define artistic expression within diasporic spaces as special and different, often relegated to a distinct category within the art historical canon².

The term 'aesthetics' was initially introduced by Alexandre Baumgarten (1714-1762) in the 1730s, and was the product of the Enlightenment project in philosophy. Although tracing the evolution of this term is outside of the scope of this dissertation, it is worth noting that the meaning of the term has been redefined continuously throughout the centuries and has remained ambiguous; however, on the most general level, it has been used to describe human sensory perception of the world and has tended to include, again broadly speaking, discussions of beauty. Baumgarten and Emmanuel Kant (1724- 1804), one of the founders of Philosophical Romanticism, aligned aesthetics with sensory knowledge or sensory cognition. In broad terms, Bakhtin's philosophical ideas fall within the same general definitions; thus, he contested them in a number of ways. Raymond Williams suggested that 'our modern ideas of the *aesthetic* developed over time as a systematic retreat in philosophy from understanding the social and historical meanings of representational practices' (Williams as cited in Rodowick, 1994: 89). This

² For the definitions and role of the canon in the context of art history, see the Introduction.

retreat has not gone unchallenged. Importantly for the field of research concerning diasporic cultural production, a number of theorists have investigated the role of aesthetics within the historical and present day systems of power relations, as the art historical canon is theorised as being one of the mechanisms integral to such systems. I will discuss different ways in which aesthetic theory plays a part in the theorisation of artistic expression by artists in the African diaspora, and will test different theoretical approaches with the aim of finding a balance between formal and socio-historical approaches to diasporic artistic production by those artists in the African diaspora who are the subjects of this dissertation.

Nicholas Mirzoeff is one of the theorists who highlighted the role of aesthetics within the system of power relations, both historically and in the present. He introduced the use of the term 'visuality' to refer to systems of this type in the field of visual culture studies (2013: xxxi)³. According to his theory, aesthetics is one of the three component techniques (the other two being classification and separation) that form any complex of visuality. Examples of such complexes are the plantation complex (16 century-1850), the imperial complex (1857- 1947) and the military-industrial complex (1947- the present). Each complex of visuality had or has its own aesthetics that are instrumental in reinforcing and making the status quo of the power relations within it '...seem pleasing, almost beautiful' (Fanon, 1963; 2008:3, cited in Mirzoeff, 2013). In his later work, Mirzoeff used Derrida's ideas concerning the right to look⁴ as a challenge to the authority of visuality (the totality of all visual images and devices that legitimise authority). He positioned the right to look as a rejection of an imposed 'interpretation of the sensible first as law and then as the aesthetic' (Mirzoeff, 2011: 477). This position illustrates Mirzoeff's view of aesthetics as, at least, capable of being used as a mechanism of oppression.

Considered in this light, the search for diaspora aesthetics as a unifying and collective attribute in the works of artists working in the diasporic spaces could be interpreted as a reflection of the process of the canonisation of African diaspora art within the power structure of the currently dominant contemporary art discourse. Such inclusion in the canon is based on the terms that privilege these existing power structures and serve to reinforce them. This takes place at the expense of the agency of the artists in determining their subjectivity and its role in their practice. It restricts their practice in terms of what is expected and appreciated (as canon does). It ultimately uses the power to define as the power to control.

At the same time as highlighting the co-opted role of aesthetics in various systems of power, Mirzoeff further attempted to question aesthetics (seen as capable of the compromising role described above) in terms of its relationship to diaspora theory. He recognised the difficulty of describing or defining the diasporic visual culture, as 'diaspora cannot by its very nature be fully known, seen or quantified' (Mirzoeff, 2000: 2); in contrast with the nation, it cannot rely on representation through 'one-point perspective' (Mirzoeff, 2000:2). He introduced the notions of multiple viewpoint and interdependent modes of visuality that he called 'inter-visuality' and, later moved on to 'counter-visuality'. Both the discussion of multiple view point versus the one-point perspective and of intervisuality rely strongly on the ideas of double consciousness suggested by W. E. B. Du Bois, and have direct or mediated references to Bakhtin's aesthetic theory throughout, as can be seen in the use of such terms as dialogical,

³ Mirzoeff discussed the genealogy of the term and its long history, emerging in English in the work of Thomas Carlyle in 1840 in his *On Heroes, Hero-Worship, and the Heroic in History*. Carlyle used the term 'to refer to what he called the tradition of heroic leadership, which visualizes history to sustain autocratic authority' (Mirzoeff, 2011: 475).

⁴ The phrase was coined by Jacques Derrida in 1985 when describing Marie-Françoise Plissart's photo-essay (Mirzoeff, 2011: 473).

polyphony and intertextuality (the last term was coined by Julia Kristeva following her own research and investigation of Bakhtin's theories). Mirzoeff defined the diasporic image as one that 'can create multiple visual and intellectual associations both within and beyond the intent of the producer of that image' (Mirzoeff 2000: 7). There is no doubt that many images created by diasporic artists and discussed in this dissertation would comply with this definition. The question that begs to be asked is whether such complexity is the result of their diasporic condition, of a particular diasporic sensibility/consciousness that these artists are often said to possess. What remains somewhat unclear in this definition is the way in which it could be unique to diasporic art practice compared to non-diasporic art practice. After all, complex and multiple visual and intellectual associations are sought in any art practice seen as deserving of our serious consideration, while the intent of the producer has long been considered only a small component in the audience's reception of the works. It could be argued that what Mirzoeff seems to be implying here are the multiple temporalities that are involved in these interdependent multiple visualities. The idea of multiple and different temporal moments as generative of complex situations giving rise to artistic movements such as the Modernist movement in the twentieth century was suggested by Perry Anderson, and applied effectively by Nestor Garcia Canclini to his discussion of the rise of the avant-garde and Modernist art in Latin America (Mosquera, 1996: 27-28). The generative potential of the clash of different temporalities could be what Mirzoeff is referring to here.⁵ It would be logical to suggest that, in addition to the elements of time and history, there must also be a cultural component involved in the coming together or, rather coming into contact of, subjects within the diasporic space and of the encounter of diasporas and host nations' cultures. This cultural component and the multiplicity of cultures, particularly when these cultures could be characterised as "inhabiting" different temporalities, is that which is specific to the diasporic space and its manifestations.

As mentioned above, the concept of double consciousness, as discussed W. E. B. Du Bois (1868 - 1963), remains one of the most important and influential in the history of attempts to define diaspora subjectivity. In his essay of 1897, *Strivings of the Negro People*, and in his book *The Souls of Black Folk*, published in 1903, Du Bois used the term to refer to a number of issues, including 'first, the real power of white stereotypes in black life and thought and, second, the double consciousness created by the practical racism that excluded every black American from the mainstream of the society, the double consciousness of being both an American and not an American' (Du Bois as cited in Dickson, 1992: 301). His main reference, however, was to the internal conflict in the African-American individual between what was "African" and what was "American" in her or him. He associated "African" with placing importance on the spiritual in life, while "American" with the materialism of white America's way of life (Dickson, 1992:301). In his privileging of the spiritual over the materialistic, Du Bois draws on the philosophical precedents of both European Romanticism and American Transcendentalism, especially on Emerson (1803-1882); such associations were familiar to his readers⁶ but, being bound to the other consciousness, there is lack of resolution of this conflict. In this regard, it is interesting to note the origins of Bakhtin's theory of creativity in his critical engagement with Kantian and neo-Kantian philosophical traditions.

It is important at this point to clarify that my initial interest in Bakhtin's ideas and

⁵ Anderson suggests that the modernist movements arose in continental Europe not where *structural* modernisation took place, but where *complex* situations were created by 'the intersection of different temporal moments' (Mosquera, 1996: 27) and hence the proliferation of avant-gardes in Russia, Germany and France, but not in England in the early 20th century.

⁶ Another connotation of the term 'double consciousness' that would have been familiar to Du Bois' audiences comes from the field of psychology and well-known cases of split personalities discussed at the time (Dickson, 1992: 304).

their use and usefulness in understanding the artistic practices of African diaspora artists was triggered when I realised how many theorists writing about diaspora, and about African diaspora in particular, cited Bakhtin or mentioned his ideas as being fruitful and influential for their thinking about diaspora. Salah Hassan, Kobena Mercer, Homi Bhabha and Stuart Hall are among the most important writers on diaspora and diaspora art who evoked Bakhtin's contributions to theories of creativity. Certainly, Bakhtin was not the only and not the most influential source for these writers when considering the entire body of their work but, when it comes to discussions of the diasporic cultural production, consciousness and aesthetics, their references to his work are notable. In the following sections, I will discuss their use of and notable parallels with Bakhtin's philosophical ideas as part of my investigation of possible tools that can help us to approach and understand the creative production of diasporic artists in general and of the three artists discussed in this dissertation in particular. I will also examine the aspects of Bakhtin's thought to which these writers turn, and how his approach to aesthetics and his primary interest in the creative process as opposed to the aesthetic object or its audience could help to further our understanding of their practices.

Kobena Mercer argued that Bakhtin's idea of double voicing, which he introduced in his writing on dialogic imagination in *The Dialogic Imagination* (1975), provides tools to address the multiplicity of voices 'that are entangled and compete', creating linguistic hybridity as a result of slavery and colonialism while also offering 'a template for the study of cross-cultural dialogism in the arts as a whole' (Mercer, 2007: 137). Mercer not only found the analytical tools offered by Bakhtin's ideas useful when discussing W. E. B. Du Bois' concept of double consciousness addressed above, but also turned to them when tackling the notion of hybridity.

With regard to the idea of hybridity, Homi Bhabha also recognised the processes of merging and contesting of cultural spaces and the instability resulting from these processes as generative. He saw hybridisation as an on-going process, with cultures defined 'as consequences of attempts to still the flux of cultural hybridities' (Huddart, 2006: 7). Bhabha theorised that culture was essentially hybrid, and emphasised the "mixedness" within the very form of identity. Giving priority to the liminal spaces (those defined as being on the border or threshold), he described them as 'in-between', suggesting that these are the spaces in which new cultural meaning is created and thus where 'the proper location of culture' is to be found, as opposed to its familiar official and sanctioned forms (Huddart, 2006: 7). He therefore conceived of the diasporic space as that liminal space, a space characterised by hybridity, in which the process of cultural translation results in subjectivities that are 'neither the one nor the other' and where art practices (among other cultural acts) are engaged in the refiguring of different temporalities coming into contact to create an 'in-between' space that radically redefines the present cultural moment (Bhabha 1994:7). A number of his ideas align with and could be better understood when we approach them using Bakhtinian approaches to self/ Other relations, the access of seeing and dialogism. Bhabha seems to rely on the idea of foreignness (with echoes of Bakhtinian "outsideness" discussed later in this chapter) being present within the concept of translation, including cultural translation. He also makes use of the concept of the border and borderline "quality" as necessary for artistic practices to be generative catalysts for the production of difference. Bhabha writes:

Through the notion of translation, 'foreignness' is embedded in the very syntax and temporality of cultural signification and communication... It is no longer adequate to think of cultural difference simply as an artistic or critical practice

determined by external historical events such as migration or diaspora. Subaltern or minority cultures introduce this disjunctive notion of translational time into the very process by which artistic practices inscribe fundamental processes of social transformation deploying the dimensions of difference: inside/outside; past/present; difference/ similitude; specificity/ generality. Social differences are not homogeneous under the sign of a 'reigning' category: race subsumed into class, gender into labour; sexuality into the ethics of a good life (Bhabha, 1993: 27-28).

I would argue that Homi Bhabha's hope for the 'conceptualizing an international culture, based not on the exoticism or multiculturalism of the diversity of cultures, but on the inscription and articulation of *culture's* hybridity' (Bhabha, 2006: 157) is close to Bakhtin's idealistic, if not utopian, desire for a dialogic world in which the relationships between self and Other are configured and understood as mutually generative and mutually formative, as well as equal and cognisant of each party's irreplaceability and uniqueness.

Sarat Maharaj's focus on the limits of the cultural translation and the ultimate 'untranslatability of the other' (Maharaj, 1994: 28) provides further insights into the concept of hybridity. Maharaj warns us against the triumphalist approach to hybridity and draws out attention to its limitations, which serve as an important measure of its criticality and subversive power. The spaces of the untranslatable on the margins of hybridity and the losses of sustained in the process of translation and merging are important. They keep the concept of hybridity from turning into the dichotomous side of cultural purity sustaining its power (Maharaj, 1994: 34-35).

Stuart Hall does not mention Bakhtin directly in his seminal text *Cultural Identity and Diaspora* (1990). Instead, he refers to Jacques Derrida's ideas and his concept of Différance as potentially productive, at least in its ability to address slippages and "in-between" spaces in meaning. Looking closely at some of Hall's ideas expressed in the essay, however, reveals a number of parallels and links to Bakhtinian ideas in his writing:

The diaspora experience as I intend it here is defined, not by essence or purity, but by the recognition of a necessary heterogeneity and diversity; by a conception of 'identity' which lives with and through, not despite, difference; by *hybridity*. Diaspora identities are those which are constantly producing and reproducing themselves anew, through transformation and difference (Hall, 1995: 235).

If we understand difference as a boundary dependent or a boundary implying concept and if we consider transformation as the process of change resulting from dialogue, we can see some basic Bakhtinian concepts lurking between the lines. This should not be surprising, particularly as Hall quoted Kobena Mercer in this essay by including Mercer's words from the essay *Diaspora Culture and Dialogic Imagination* (1988). This text refers to Bakhtin directly by quoting the title of one of Bakhtin's most famous and influential collections of essays, *The Dialogic Imagination* (first published in complete form in 1975). In his introduction to *Exiles, Diasporas and Strangers* (2008), Mercer finds grounds for his reflections on the role of diaspora in cultural production and, I would suggest, for his hope for a better understanding and theorisation of difference, in Bakhtin's and other Russian avant-garde formalists who came from the Bakhtin circle in the 1920s (ideas about self/ Other relations, cultures' interactions and understanding). He is particularly interested in Bakhtin's epistemological treatment of self/ Other relations that go beyond their treatment as a synonym of cultural difference. Bakhtin's theorisation of outsideness, seen as a prerequisite for both moral and aesthetic acts, finds its place within Mercer's approach to diasporic cultural production. He quotes:

In order to understand it is immensely important for the person who understand (sic) to be located outside the object of his or her creative understanding... It is

only in the eyes of another culture that foreign culture reveals itself fully and profoundly... [but] without one's own questions one cannot creatively understand anything other or foreign...Such a dialogic encounter of two cultures does not result in mixing or merging. Each retains its own unity and open totality, but they are mutually enriched (Bakhtin, 1970).

Salah Hassan is another writer who proposed the use of Bakhtinian concepts in order to move away from Eurocentric models to understand and define contemporary African art in general and to address the imposed dichotomy of the traditional and modern within contemporary African art practice in particular:

An alternative model for understanding and defining contemporary African art, and in fact all other forms of African art, is urgently needed. Within this model, African art forms must be perceived as expressions of a more complex African reality. Within this reality these forms can be seen as existing in one contemporary space and interacting with each other in a "dialogic" manner. Invoking the Bakhtinian concepts of "intertextuality" and "dialogic" principle in relation to the study of literary genre, this dialogic relationship is assumed to exist on temporal as well as spatial and historical levels (Hassan, 1995:32).

It is clear from the references discussed above that Bakhtin's ideas provide an enriching possibility when approaching cultural production from Africa and its diasporas. My examples above demonstrate that a number of theorists central to the discourse on African diasporic art and cultures turned to Bakhtin's philosophical propositions when delving into aesthetic principles and epistemological questions emanating from the inter-cultural encounters in diasporic spaces, particularly when considering them as indicative or representative of wider processes of cultural exchange and human engagement in the contemporary globalised world. Although Mikhail Bakhtin did not provide a specific definition of aesthetics, nor did he attempt to deal with the idea of beauty in its own right, he was nonetheless 'concerned with how humans give form to their experience: how they perceive an object, text, or another person, and how they shape that perception into a synthesized whole' (Haynes, 1995:4). He also wrote extensively on creative activity, as well as on the role of art in society in his early essays, returning to and developing these ideas throughout his life.

Mikhail Mikhailovich Bakhtin was born in Oryol, Russia, in 1895. The history of how his contribution to philosophy, and to aesthetic theory more specifically, gained recognition in his home country and beyond its borders is not straightforward, and reflects the complexities of the wider historical and political context of the twentieth century. Having been nurtured by the tremendously fertile, creatively explosive and tradition-breaking Russian avant-garde milieu in St. Petersburg, Nevskiy and Vytebsk in the 1920s, he later suffered the loss of his friends to the Stalinist purges and personally endured repressions and exile. Lucky to survive, he was not able to publish his work for many years (not only due to his status as a political exile, but also as a result of the Second World War and his own idiosyncratic attitude towards authorship and manuscripts), only receiving recognition for his enormous contribution to philosophy and literary theory in later life and posthumously. The authorship of some of the texts attributed to Bakhtin by some scholars is still in dispute, but these disputes do not affect the texts that are relevant to the discussion of visual arts and aesthetics pertaining to my area of research.

Scholars identify four main periods in the development of Bakhtin's ideas and theories, the first being the early period of 1919-1924 when Bakhtin addressed concepts of aesthetics (directly and explicitly), the nature of the embodied act and radical

particularity. This period was also the period of prolific debates, lectures, publications and other cultural activities of the so-called Bakhtin circle (participants in the circle included P. N. Medvedev, V. Z. Rugevich, I. N. Solernitsky, V. N. Voloshinov, B. Zubakin, M. Yudina and others in Nevel and Vytebsk). Aleksandra Shatskikh wrote a book about the Vytebsk phenomenon – the small provincial town of Vytebsk becoming the epicentre of Russian avant-garde activities in different cultural spheres, from visual arts and theatre to philosophy and cultural policy. With regard to the Bakhtin circle and its impact, she concluded that “the interaction and cooperation of the young people in Nevel, which continued into their Vitebsk years, affected not only their daily lives but also their very essence, and was reflected in the writing of each of them” (Shatskikh, 2007: 289). It was the re-discovery and the publishing of Bakhtin’s works from this period after his death that proved his aspirations and self-identification as a philosopher. Bakhtin’s early essays enabled and compelled Bakhtin scholars to re-evaluate his position not only as a philologist or scholar of language and literature, but also as a philosopher and cultural theorist with influential ideas in the field of aesthetics still pertinent in the twenty-first century.

In the later periods, Bakhtin’s focus shifted to literary theory, but his insights into different areas of creative production provide many of the ideas that found their way into theoretical contributions to contemporary art discourse, in relation to diaspora and beyond, as discussed above. Interdisciplinary approaches in art history and contemporary art discourse enable us to take advantage of the findings and to use the tools from the related fields of literary theory and criticism. In order to contextualise the applicability and usefulness of specifically Bakhtinian early writings to visual art in general and to diasporic art in particular, it is helpful to provide a brief outline of the other three periods identified in his scholarship. The second period, from 1924 to 1930, saw the development of his ideas about language as dialogue in his work on Dostoyevsky and the novel. During the third period, between the late 1930s and early 1950s, he published a series of essays entitled *The Dialogic Imagination* and his book on Rabelais and carnival, which became the most widely recognised and celebrated among his contributions to the analyses of cultural artefacts, particularly with regard to literature. I will return to the idea of the dialogic in my discussion of the diaspora aesthetics later in this chapter. In his fourth period, from the 1950s until his death in 1975, he revisited some of his early themes and ideas related to genres, time and creative understanding^{7 8} (Haynes, 1995: 8).

The work that was published and that made Bakhtin famous during his lifetime – his work on Dostoyevsky and Rabelais – initially became available in translation outside of Russia in the 1980s. His earlier essays, now seen as no less important, only came to the attention of Western scholars later and include *Art and Answerability* (1919), *Author and Hero in Aesthetic Activity* (ca. 1920- 1923) and *Supplement: The Problem of Content, Material, and Form in Verbal Art* (1924). The English translations were added to his known creative output relatively recently. These three essays were written early in Bakhtin’s career and before he began to focus on the word (printed or otherwise) as the primary object of his

⁷ For detailed discussions of Bakhtin’s specific works see Haynes, 1995; Holquist and Liapunov, 1990.

⁸ It is important to mention that all authors writing about Bakhtin noted that his own approach to his writing was never consistently logical or systematic (Holquist, Haynes, Kaplan, Liapunov). It is argued that this is not just a personal characteristic peculiar to Bakhtin, but that this approach was reflective of his position with regard to non-linearity, un-finalizability and polyphony of learning and cognition (the terms *un-finalizability* and *polyphony* being among those central to his thinking). Similarly, the lack of publications and concerted efforts to leave a clearly identifiable and attributable body of intellectual capital behind was not purely a matter of the repressive political situation to which the philosopher was subject in Stalinist Russia. As Shatskikh noted, ‘Bakhtin’s indifference to asserting his authority in the public consciousness can certainly be explained by causes much more serious than lack of ambition or lack of desire for influence. In all likelihood Bakhtin had a singular relationship to the printed word; he seemed not to trust it or need it; his love was not text (which is located in space) but voice (that is sound, located in time)’ (Shatskikh, 2007: 306).

analyses. Deborah Haynes and Michael Holquist suggested that this makes these early essays particularly rewarding and useful in discussions of visual art practice in which 'logocentric' approaches to analyses have certain limitations, despite the fact that many contemporary artists use the word and language effectively in their practices (Haynes, 1995). It is in the early works that Bakhtin set out some of his key thinking on the issues of creativity and aesthetics, and which I see as relevant and potentially fruitful for the field of visual art and creative practices of artists in the African diasporas.

There are several compelling reasons for turning to Mikhail Bakhtin's writing when considering the issue of diaspora aesthetics, or when discussing art and artists who see themselves as working in the diaspora or whose practice is framed as responding to the diasporic condition. In the following paragraphs, I will consider some of Bakhtin's ideas that could be instrumental when approaching such artists and practices, and will provide examples of how these theoretical tools could be of use when engaging with specific works and careers.

One of the reasons is the structural openness of his theory and its foundation in the everyday and the mundane, the uniquely personal and the individual. It is my contention that finding a kind of schema or definition into which most or all diasporic works would fit aesthetically and be compliant with conceptually is an impossibility. I have addressed the multiplicity of diasporas and the openness of the definition of the term itself in my introduction. Looking at specific works by artists such as Moshekwa Langa, Marlene Dumas and Gavin Jantjes, or at exhibitions that attempted to address issues surrounding diaspora art like "Looking Both Ways: Art of the Contemporary African Diaspora" (2003) and "A Fiction of Authenticity: Contemporary Africa Abroad" (2003) make the sheer diversity and variety of concerns and forms of expression within African diaspora clear; they are not formulaic or reducible to a specified set of features. Furthermore, they cannot be so because individuals' journeys into the diasporic spaces, as well as their experiences of them, through them and beyond them, are unique. Even when we think about the artists' practices as expressing or responding to the diasporic condition, which they may or may not claim, these expressions and responses, or even rejections, are highly individualised, are grounded in unique individual experiences and resist generalisations. With this in mind, approaching diaspora art would require an interpretive framework that is flexible, itself grounded in the individual and the specific, and which is itself open, inherently extendable and permeable. In her discussion of the role of theory in art history and criticism, Deborah Haynes suggested that 'all scholars, whatever their disciplinary background, would do well to heed Bakhtin's warning that when theory is cut off from the deed, and from practice generally, it loses its meaning' (Haynes, 1995:44). An examination of the individual histories and journeys that the three artists who are discussed in this dissertation undertook from their countries of birth to their new homes in Europe highlights the diversity of their experiences and the complexities of their diasporic subjectivities that would not be possible to accommodate within a theory or interpretative framework that does not account for and make space for such diversity, complexity and nuance, or that does not 'acknowledge how the polyphonic nature of experience impacts theory' (Haynes, 1995: 44).

In fact, Gavin Jantjes, Marlene Dumas and Moshekwa Langa left South Africa at different times and for very different reasons. It is crucial to recognise that Jantjes' experience, unlike the other two artists, was that of an exile. Jantjes grew up in District Six in Cape Town, but was one of very few people of colour allowed to study at the University of Cape Town's Michaelis School of Fine Art (1966-1969) during apartheid, which enforced policies of segregation. After completing his undergraduate degree at Michaelis, he was offered a scholarship to undertake his master's studies abroad, at the Hochschule für Bildende Künste in Hamburg, Germany, in 1970. While in Europe,

Jantjes not only consulted the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, he relentlessly pursued anti-apartheid activism, both through politics and in his artistic practice. Jantjes' works produced in the 1970s were banned in apartheid South Africa and the artist was forced into exile in the UK in 1982.

The experience of exile, with its forced departures or/and the impossibility of return, are very different, as Edward Said and Stuart Hall remind us, from the journeys into diaspora undertaken through choice, even though the boundaries between forced and chosen routes are seldom clear cut when considering journeys between the formerly colonised countries or oppressive regimes and the metropolitan spaces of the West, the former imperial centres. Marlene Dumas' experiences of the evils of apartheid were certainly different from those of Jantjes due to her position as a privileged white South African from the Afrikaner community. She participated in some anti-apartheid student activism while at university (1972-1975) and, as many of her later works demonstrate, she was deeply affected by the violence of the apartheid structures inflicted on her country's citizens. After completing her undergraduate degree at the Michaelis School of Fine Art in 1975, she also chose to pursue further studies abroad and went to the Netherlands to the Ateliers '63 in Haarlem, an independent artists' institute founded in 1963. Dumas has maintained close links with her home country throughout the years of living in the Netherlands and, unlike Jantjes, she was able to return on visits. As a white South African with ancestral links to Holland, her relationship to the country of her settlement and to the European artistic community would have been framed and experienced differently from that which Gavin Jantjes would have experienced. Her position as a Dutch or European artist, and her practice as part of the mainstream (that is Western) art world, although not always consistently expressed, was not particularly problematised.⁹

Moshekwa Langa's journey to the Netherlands took place after the end of apartheid and the 1994 first democratic elections in South Africa. However, this is not to say that either the country that he was leaving behind or his experiences of growing up in Bakenburg and attending school in Pretoria would not have been shaped by the brutalities and oppressions embedded in the overturned regime's structures. Unlike Jantjes or Dumas, Moshekwa Langa did not have formal art education beyond high school in his home country. His early successes in the South African art world were intimately interwoven with the processes of change that overtook the country and its art community following 1994. Langa was invited to pursue his art studies at one of the most prestigious European art schools, the Rijksakademie in Amsterdam. He took this opportunity and, having completed his studies, remained based in the Netherlands and Germany with frequent trips to and stays in South Africa. Langa has experienced considerable success internationally but, of the three artists on whom I am focusing in this dissertation, he is the one whose practice has most consistently been associated with African diaspora and African diasporic practice via his inclusion in relevant exhibitions, catalogues and reviews. This is despite the fact that, in a well-known interview with Kobena Mercer in 2003, Langa explicitly rejected the potential reductive nature of such an association¹⁰.

Despite the fact that all three artists could be and have been described as related or relating to the wider African or specifically South African diaspora in some way, it would be extremely difficult to make any kinds of generalisations about their diasporic subjectivities and experiences. The differences and peculiarities are almost more prevalent than are the commonalities except, of course, that all three of them were forced and/or chose to live in countries other than their countries of birth while

⁹ In 2013, when visiting Venice Biennale of Contemporary Art, I was told by a guide at the Punta della Dogana museum that Marlene Dumas' works exhibited there were by a Dutch artist.

¹⁰ Please see my discussion of this interview in the chapter on Moshekwa Langa.

maintaining close cultural and personal links with them referenced in different ways and to different degrees in their respective artistic practices. The presence of both South Africa and their adopted homelands (to different degrees) in their consciousness is something that is evidenced by their own statements that I am going to examine. To what degree their positions impact their practice is something I am going to investigate in the following chapters.

Thinking about the tools that I choose to use in my research, Bakhtin's approaches to aesthetics are appealing when considering the work of such artists because he criticised unified and ordered systems that were not open to transformation, expansion and change, and because of his rejection of what he called "theoretism". He understood "theoretism" as any kind of system or action isolated from action in real life, and delved into the inadequacies of such a system in his book *Towards a Philosophy of the Act* (published in Russian in 1986 and in English in 1993). Bakhtin criticised the kind of approach to theory that extrapolates abstracted rules and systems from everyday reality and considers these abstracted systems to be complete and whole, and the only correct basis for creating rules that govern everyday life. According to Bakhtin, there is no and never could be a system or theory that could be complete and stable and that would be capable of accounting for every single situation, experience or action in real life. Any concept of diasporic aesthetics that would not incorporate such an instability and would not embrace its own incompleteness would be not only reductive, but would also tend towards epistemological violence in terms of the power relations that it would impose. Bakhtin would have considered such a system of thought or theory "monologic"¹¹. The resistance on behalf of many artists from Africa working in spaces of diaspora to being defined through the diasporic aspect of their subjectivity or experience could be seen as the result of the perception of the term diaspora as part of such an inflexible, stifling, reductive and, at times, degrading monologic system, which supports the power status quo in the international art world that remains Western-centric. Another example (in addition to Moshekwa Langa's interview with Kobena Mercer) of the frustration expressed by artists in the African diaspora is the reaction of the Cameroonian artist Barthélémy Toguo to a discussion with a European curator, as described by Orlando Britto Jinorio in his contribution to the catalogue *A Fiction of Authenticity: Contemporary Africa Abroad*:

...There would have been nothing odd about all of this, were it not for the increasingly loud and indignant tone of Toguo's voice, until he burst out with: "In my art, I work with and reflect on problematics that have to do with peoples all around the world; it's *not* just about the African diaspora – I am talking about the diasporas and migrations of all peoples, about the exile and diaspora of the human being..." (2003:71)

It seems that the use of African diaspora as a particular marker that could be commoditised and used to ghettoise contemporary art by artists from the continent is another manifestation of a monologic system, which Bakhtin criticised, at work.

The resistance on behalf of artists in the diaspora to being described as diasporic reflects their frustration with attempts to define, in flat and generalised terms, such aspects of their practice that are inextricably tied to experiences that are unique to each individual, and which are not reducible to a general rule or definition. Bakhtin insisted on the uniqueness and individuality of human acts and behaviour, on the uniqueness and unrepeatability of each human experience and action, and on each individual's being in

¹¹ Bakhtin saw ideology as an example of monologic thinking. Having personal experience of the Stalinist regime in the Soviet Union and its state ideology would have made Bakhtin particularly sensitive and critical of monologic systems of thought and approaches to practice.

the world. Even though writing theory was an attempt to provide a system of reference, Bakhtin insisted that he could not and would never be able to consider this a completed task. Such openness in his theories and his firm grounding in the everyday, mundane, personal, individual and individually unique makes his theories appealing when considering very fluid ways in which the artistic practices of artists in the diaspora have been shaped and understood by the artists themselves, and the ways in which they manifest themselves in their practice. If we consider, for example, Nicholas Mirzoeff's definition of diasporic art in the example I discussed above, we would be able to see the difficulties of trying to generate monologic definitions. It is my contention that finding a schema into which all diasporic works would fit aesthetically is an impossibility. Bakhtin's ideas provide us with an open and flexible interpretative framework, or a set of interpretative tools, which are flexible and grounded in the individual and specific, as well as embodied examples that do not always fall neatly into its structures.

An important feature of Bakhtin's writing is his focus on the embodied nature of his aesthetics. Experiences of exile, immigration and diaspora are not only unique and individual in the ways I have discussed, they are also inextricably and physically linked to the intersection of place and time in which the subjects find themselves. These experiences are tied to the physical selves and to the conscious selves, with the boundaries of selfhood being tested and contested through the process of estrangement, among other important factors within the diasporic spaces. Bhabha noted that these 'in-between' spaces provide the terrain for elaborating strategies of selfhood - singular or communal - that initiate new signs of identity, and innovative sites of collaboration and contestation, in the act of defining the idea of society itself (Bhabha 1994). One of the ideas based on the notion of embodied-ness in Bakhtin's writing is that of outsideness (or outsideness according to some translations from the Russian 'vnenakhodimost'). For Bakhtin, the idea of outsideness was the cornerstone of not only moral action in life, but also an inalienable characteristic of an aesthetic event or activity. As Deborah Haynes summarised, according to Bakhtin, a work of art is an aesthetic event that depends on the ability of the person/ artist to, on one hand, experience 'living-in', a total empathy with the other (person or object or event) and, on the other hand, the ability to retreat from this total empathic identification and to return to the boundaries of oneself, to re-experience one's own unique position. Only after such a retreat into the self, and 'with clear boundaries between self and other, one is able to consummate the experience derived from projecting the self into another's position' (Haynes, 2013). Only then is a moral action or an aesthetic/ creative activity possible. It is important to note that, for Bakhtin, aesthetic activity and ethics in real life had to be intimately connected, as elaborated in one of his earliest known essays, *Art and Answerability* (1919).

Bakhtin's insistence on the necessary involvement of at least two "act-ors" in a creative or aesthetic activity is another reason that his theories may be helpful when approaching the productions of artists who recognise multiplicity of identity and cultures as fundamental for their work. Of course, Bakhtin considered this dual presence and mutual authoring applicable to any creative activity, not only to a diasporic one. His approach, however, does create an open structure of discourse that can help us to understand how multiple cultures, both as factors in the creation of an aesthetic work and in the encounter between an aesthetic object and its potentially multi-cultural audience, might operate. As Haynes pointed out,

The uniqueness of Bakhtin's approach to aesthetics is that it is based not on categories such as the aesthetic (the aesthetic attitude or aesthetic object) or aesthetic values (truth, goodness, or beauty), but on the phenomenology of self-other relations, relations that are embodied- in actual bodies- in space and in time (Haynes, 1995:5).

This strikes at the core of the debates regarding what diasporic aesthetics might “look like”, as Mercer put it (Mercer, 2008: 22).

It may be interesting to see how this insistence on the embodied nature of the creative process could be helpful when looking several Polaroid photographic series produced by Moshekwa Langa in 1998 during his first stay in Amsterdam while studying at the Rijksakademie. *True Confessions: My Life as a Disco Queen*, *When I left the Couch* and *Far from the Scenery He Knew or Understood*, all from 1998 (Figure 1.1) convey the then young artist’s experiences of finding himself in a foreign country, away from friends, family and the safety of the familiar; of searching for himself in art and in the art world outside of South Africa while being forced to face questions about identity, race and belonging (Walker, 1999). The images capture Langa himself, his head either cropped out or made semi-present as his face is averted or covered, his naked torso stark against the plain backdrop of an empty wall and black leather couch, his blue jeans or pair of white briefs reflecting the harsh artificial and focused lighting, his brown skin in reflective conversation with the camera while his eyes are elusive, looking away or intentionally hidden. The contrast between the harsh white light and the body, contorted in its attempt to either escape or to submit to the camera’s relentless interrogation with a sense of despondency, make the viewer feel implicated in this cruel game of hide and seek, this amateur performance of what feels like the last song. The sense of the gaze that is implied is bordering on the unbearable, the loneliness and despair are palpable. The viewer is denied the option of averting his or her eyes in the same way as the protagonist denies himself the option of escape, except perhaps, in the titles of the series. The active role and the presence of the audience in these images are premeditated to the degree that makes them akin to performances (and some of the series did also exist as video works - *The Confessions*, for example). The embodied nature of being and of the creative act is made perfectly explicit in these works, while the direction, focus and stringent lighting draw attention to what existence is like at the border. We are forced to consider the border between the self and other implicated in any engagement with identity, about the confines or borders of one’s body and one’s psyche. One may suggest that the position of an outsider, a foreigner located within a different culture, makes the experience of the border more acute and heightens the awareness of oneself as existing through such borders.



Fig. 1.1. Moshekwa Langa. *Far from the Scenery He Knew or Understood*. 1998. Giclee print on watercolour paper.

In these works, Langa seems to emphasise not just the implication of the other, the audience or the onlooker, but his need for them in the completion of his artwork and, by extension, in the completion of himself as an embodied being trapped within a particular place and time. Here, Bakhtin's concept of the excess of seeing, which is central to his theory of creativity, might be helpful. Bakhtin maintained that, as human beings and individuals, we are unique and exist within a specific chronotope, an intersection of a specific place and a specific time and, crucially, our perception of the world is limited by the embodied nature of our vision. We are not able to see the entirety of the world or even of ourselves. We need the other to complete our picture of ourselves and of the world, as well as of things within it. In the same way, the other, who is equally a unique, specific and embodied self, needs us to complete the image of him/herself and the world because s/he is not able to see the whole of him/herself and the world. Our visions are both unique and valid, but they are not complete; they are complementary. Thus, we possess an excess of seeing towards the other while the other possesses an excess of seeing towards us. The relationship of self and other, in Bakhtin's view, becomes a mutually authoring, creative relationship; this relationship makes the creative process an open-ended one that has to involve at least two participants. It is also 'unfinalizable', as it is constantly open to being completed by an other with an excess of seeing. The palpable presence of the gaze in Langa's photographs in these series, I would argue, makes this access of seeing acutely felt, both by the protagonist and by the viewer. However, and here the limitations of Bakhtin's ideas come to the fore, this mutually authoring process that seems to be captured in the works is neither neutral nor loving, as envisaged by Bakhtin. In the context of this particular artist's experience as a young black artist from South Africa arriving at a European art institution in the heart of a former colonial power and experiencing alienation, the vulnerability that we are made to witness and the process of looking that we are co-opted into in these images could be seen as a reference to the violence of the gaze to which the artist feels subjected in his new environment. However, the relationship that Langa articulates in these works is highly nuanced. It would be wrong to limit the reading of these bodies of work to the expression of violence directed at the Other via the Orientalist gaze, as discussed by Said and Hall. The artist acknowledges and makes explicit the imbalance of power within the creative act with regard to both his subjectivity and his art, but he also renders bare, literally through the images of his semi naked body, and conceptually, his own vulnerability. By allowing the viewers to implicate themselves in the images, he thus touches on their vulnerability too and reminds us all how precariously human we are.

The acute sense of embodiedness that strikes the viewer in these works, coupled with a sense of despair and the compulsion to act, strangely and awkwardly, as if the artist's entire existence is at stake, evokes another reference to Bakhtin – his idea of the non-alibi in being. For Bakhtin, to exist fully meant to act, and the obligation to act arose out of one's recognition of unique individuality and acceptance of responsibility for one's existence:

It is not an abstract obligation that obliges me, but my *signature* on an act, my signature that acts like a confession. I, as it were, sign my acts just as an artist signs a work of art. The source of the deed, and of obligation (oughtness) lies in that fact that I *am*, that I participate in being in my unique and unrepeatable form. "I occupy in singular existence a singular, unrepeatable, irreplaceable and impermeable place [in relation to] the other" (KFP, 112). No other was or could be situated in my unique time and place. "That which can be accomplished by me, can be accomplished by no one else, ever (KFP, 112). This singularity constitutes my "non-alibi in being". Recognition of my uniqueness and singularity, my non-

alibi in being, is the real basis of my being and acting in the world. Values such as truth, the good, or beauty are only possibilities until one acts (Bakhtin cited in Haynes, 1995: 58).

At this point, it is worth mentioning that, in this instance, the use of Bakhtin's ideas could be reinforced by Deleuze's notion of *haecceity*, the intersection of bodily materiality and social circumstance, or the conditions of one's identity (Sutton & Martin-Jones, 2008: 142). Deleuze and Guatarri's idea of identity, as always in the process of becoming, is contingent on the idea that we are responsible for what we do with that becoming, or 'how we move' (as cited in Sutton & Martin-Jones, 2008: 49-50). Similarly to Bakhtin's non-alibi in being, Deleuze and Guatarri stated: 'We know nothing about a body until we know what we can do.' (as cited in Sutton & Martin-Jones, 2008: 50).

The strange, awkward and compulsive performance that seems to be captured in Moshekwa Langa's Polaroids seems to suggest an attempt at reclaiming the self and restating one's non-alibi in being. It is through this awkwardness that we become aware of the boundaries of the physical and conscious being for ourselves and for the protagonist in the work. It reminds us of the sense of 'present-ness' that also accompanies Bakhtin's focus on the embodied nature of aesthetic experience or practice. The form of the work unfolds from this embodiedness - another of Bakhtin's ideas. The somewhat transgressive nature of the aesthetic that is evoked by Langa through the elements of costume and the semi-naked body, as well as by the home-made and intentionally crudely staged set, which draws attention to its own home video quality, points to the conflict with what is considered normative in society, be it culture, race or sexuality. The inequality and violence stemming from the inequality of the self/ Other relations are made present. The impact on the viewer is so powerful that it makes the audience feel uncomfortable about looking. However, there is also a sense that the artist understands that he needs the audience to be present and to look in order to complete his seeing of himself. The inevitability of this relationship (which Bakhtin believed to be inherent in any creative act) is what gives particular poignancy to the series of the photographs and makes them relatable on a universal level.

Another example in which Bakhtin's idea of the access of seeing and its role in the creative co-authoring of works of art (and of ourselves as social beings) could be helpful is the analyses of artistic practices that use photographic images as their source and/ or inspiration. A photograph could be viewed as a trace or reflection of someone else's seeing frozen in the moment. A photographic image may be limited in its scope, but nonetheless offer the viewers a perspective or vision that is not their own, irrespective of whether the viewers have or have not seen or experienced the captured material in real life.

Marlene Dumas is famous for using found photographic or digital imagery as inspiration for her drawings and paintings. Taking someone else's seeing and processing it or reworking it through her own experience, her own excess of seeing, sets a dialogic relationship with the subject and the material into motion, which results in a creative practice that is both open and polyphonic. Through her practice, she seems to be giving physical form to this excess of vision, exploring the materiality of that excess of vision through painting. Bakhtin's assertion that the form of a work of art enfolds from its content also seems to be applicable here. Dumas said the following regarding her work - or rather her inability to work - with live models:

Although I work alone and with printed matter as my models, I've always been attracted to photographers who work with real people. But it does not seem to bring out the best in me. It's the same with live models (whatever their occupation). I worry about what they think of me and I get even more worried

about what they think, I think of them. And then I lose the freedom of the amoral touch which for me is a prerequisite for making a good painting (2014:105).

The ‘amoral touch’ to which the artist refers may be understood as analogous to the retreat into oneself, into the boundaries of one’s own unique and embodied self that is a necessary pre-condition (alongside empathy) that makes creative action or aesthetic activity (and moral action on behalf of others) possible, according to Bakhtin. This kind of understanding of the artist’s statement also allows us to understand and not find contradictions in her statements on ethics and aesthetics, which she made in a conversation with Chris Dercon in 2011 around the time of her exhibition “Tronics” at the Haus der Kunst in Munich. Dumas said, ‘there is ethics in aesthetics’ (2014:4), and that they should not be seen as separate or mutually exclusive. It seems important for Dumas to emphasise the separation of the artist’s ethical self and ethical impact on the world from aesthetic impulse or action (Dumas, 2014: 104), which seems far from what Bakhtin stated in his first known essay, *Art and Answerability* (1919), and continued to explore throughout his life, namely the relationship between art and life and the answerability of art to life. However, the mutual implication of ethics and aesthetics, together with their necessary separation, allows for the dialogue between Bakhtin’s ideas and Dumas’ approach to her art and her creative writing. What seems to be common to both is, while acknowledging the ethical in the aesthetics, they insist on it not being a monologic relationship that imposes limits and demands on the artistic expression, but rather a quality that is inherent in aesthetic act itself (Haynes, 1995:67).

Marlene Dumas rejected what Bakhtin would call (and also criticise as) a monologic approach to works of art, both in her interviews and in her writings. In her discussion of one of her early exhibitions “Mis Interpreted” of 1992 (restaged in 1993), she discussed her painting *Waiting (for meaning)*, 1988, (Figure 1.2), in the context of the relationship between her works and their audience. She commented about interpreting the work instead of trying to understand the work as problematic and reductive. In her view, to interpret is to find and assign final meaning, while to understand is a much more open-ended and mutual process, which Dumas specifically highlighted. The idea of waiting implies the presence of another, but also reveals the precariousness of that relationship, which is necessary, anticipated and, at the same time, threatening and potentially closing. The waiting is not resolved, leaving both the protagonist and the work itself not completed, which allows for the tension to remain, but also for the potential crisis of closure to be averted. The work captures this tension and the never-ending negotiation with powerful directness and force.



Fig. 1.2. Marlene Dumas. *Waiting (For Meaning)*. 1988. Oil paint on canvas. 50 x 70 cm. Kunsthalle zu Kiel collection.

Mikhail Bakhtin's understanding of culture and the interaction of cultures offers useful perspectives when approaching the works of artists of African diaspora. I have previously discussed the development of Bakhtin's ideas in the work of Homi Bhabha and his articulation of hybridity. While not writing about the cross-cultural encounters in art specifically, his notes on cultural encounters, cultural diversity and the role of culture in identity and consciousness offer fascinating perspectives on the diasporic artistic production, as the diasporic spaces are some of the most potent sites of cultural interaction, formation and contestation. The notes come primarily from his interview with the Russian literary and philosophical journal *Novy Mir*, entitled *Response to a question from Novy Mir Editorial Staff*, which was published in English long after his death in the book *Speech Genres and Other Essays* (Bakhtin, 1979 (in Russian); Emerson & Holquist, 1986). Bakhtin asserted that 'a text lives only by coming into contact with another text (with context)' (Haynes 2013: 27):

In order to understand, it is immensely important for the person who understands to be located outside the object of his or her creative understanding—in time, in space, in culture. For one cannot even really see one's own exterior and comprehend it as a whole, and no mirrors or photographs can help; our real exterior can be seen and understood only by other people, because they are located outside us in space, and because they are others (Davis, 1993).

The inability to see the entirety of ourselves culturally, which is his concept of outsideness, determines the dialogical nature of cultures, namely their reliance on the Other and the dialogue with the Other in order to be; 'In the realm of culture, outsideness is a most powerful factor in understanding. It is only in the eyes of *another* culture that foreign culture reveals itself fully and profoundly' (Emerson & Holquist, 1986:7). These dialogic interrelations take place on the boundaries between cultures and are the sites of 'the most intense and productive life of culture' (1986:2). Again, it was extremely important for Bakhtin to insist relentlessly on equality and multiplicity within the dialogue, in which there is not a right or a wrong, a superior or inferior participant or point of view. As Haynes described it, 'both self- perception and artistic representation are possible because of the excess or surplus of seeing that is a function of the different horizons so crucial to Bakhtin's formulation of outsideness' (Haynes 1995:76). Bakhtin described this surplus of seeing using the following metaphor: that it is a bud, which enfolds form. 'The form of a work of art unfolds from the surplus of seeing like a blossom from a bud' (Haynes, 1995:76). When we bring the diasporic perspective and artistic production into this framework, I would argue that the surplus of seeing for a diaspora artist is also a cultural surplus of seeing and, to use Bakhtin words, it enfolds the form. It would then be possible to argue that a diasporic artwork or practice takes its form and expression from this kind of cultural surplus of seeing, although it is not reducible to it. It is important to recognise that a surplus of seeing is applicable to all artistic expression that is dialogical (according to Bakhtin, only dialogical creative works are truly creative and viable). In the case of diaspora artists, however, this surplus of seeing is also a cultural surplus of seeing and actually comes from occupying spaces in which cultures realise their outsideness in relation one another, in spaces which their interactions are also embodied experiences of individuals, of artists themselves. The dialogical understanding of culture for Bakhtin also implies the dialogical understanding of self, where the internal micro-dialogue of self is a building block within any dialogue of cultures. Outsideness, on the self/Other level, is part of the outsideness of cultures that enables the notion of culture to exist.

Such an ontological understanding of culture could help us to understand the profound implications of Gavin Jantjes' painting *Untitled*, completed in 1989 (Figure 1.3)

when he was living in exile in the UK, which now held in the Arts Council Collection at the South Bank Centre. The painting, depicting an African mask linked by an umbilical cord to the central fragment of Picasso's iconic image *Les Femmes d'Alger* of 1907 (considered one of the founding works of European modernism), was one of the key artistic statements in the exhibition "The Other Story" of the same year. "The Other Story", curated and organised by Rasheed Araeen, became one of the key milestones in the fight for recognition of black British and diaspora artists in the cultural narratives and contemporary art world. The African mask depicted by Jantjes is thought to be the one that Picasso used as his prototype for the face of the figure to the right of the central one in his famous painting. The background of the work that combines sand, tissue paper and acrylic on canvas, is the depiction of a deep blue, starry night sky. This is a reference to the cosmos, astronomical and cultural, boundless and supposedly shared by all. The artist, a descendant of African ancestors and a contributor to the new narratives of art history, seems to be referring to the tensions and complexities in the relationship between African art and artists and the canon of art history that celebrates Picasso's achievement while neglecting the contribution of those who inspired him and other European modernists to change the course of art history.¹² The umbilical connection that loops back and forth between cultures symbolised by their most precious and narrative-defining cultural icons is enveloped by the all-consuming, limitless cultural universe that cannot be divided or even fully known or seen. Even though the mask and the figure face in the same direction, they seem to remain at a distance, while the artist claims his own connection to both. This work is not only a statement about the genealogy of European modernism via African artistic forms, as the work seems to suggest that it is the presence of each that generates a space for these forms within the cultural universe. The formal elements of the work, particularly the quality of the line used in the creation of the silhouette of Picasso's female figure and the umbilical cord, convey an unmistakably modernist and even more specifically Cubist sensibility. The line meanders back and forth, fragments and suggests, confuses and defines - the female figure seems to grow out of this line not just thematically, but also formally, through its medium.



Fig. 1.3. Gavin Jantjes, *Untitled*, 1989. Sand, tissue paper, acrylic on canvas. 200 x 300 cm. Arts Council Collection, UK. Photo credit: Arts Council Collection, UK.

¹² See the chapter on Gavin Jantjes for further discussion of this artwork.

Bakhtin's theory of aesthetics, although addressed mostly in his earlier works, seems to be speaking directly to the ideas that have been long debated within discussions on diasporic aesthetics after his death. Although he did not address the issues of diaspora or diasporic aesthetics as such, it seems that Bakhtin's theory had the inherent potential to address them and to stake out a place for them within the field in advance. The sometimes uncanny applicability to and compatibility of Bakhtin's ideas with diasporic art production and the diasporic condition more generally points, in my view, not only to the depth and breadth of Bakhtin's influential thinking that prefigured the dilemmas and debates of our post-modern world, but also to the way the diasporic condition and its creative expressions have become symbolic of the general condition of our age, with its fragmentations, displacements, extreme uncertainty and strife. In this way, not only does his aesthetics theory embrace the diasporic productions and expressions, but the diasporic expressions also speak back to the general aesthetic theory and shape it actively in return – in a Bakhtinian dialogic way.

Bakhtin's theory of creativity and his ideas about aesthetics have a number of limitations of which we need to be aware, particularly when dealing with fields of practice that have been marginalised for such an extended period. Despite decrying any kinds of monologic relations and structures (such as any kind of ideology) that force a one-point perspective or deny the other equality or the right to exist, Bakhtin 'does not include a clear articulation of how structures of power and authority delimit the ability of a person to author or create. Nor does he discuss how such structures delimit the ability of a person to be fully self-conscious self, capable of living and acting in an answerable or dialogical relationship with any other' (Haynes, 2013:17). Nonetheless, Bakhtin's theory allows us to hope that the power imbalances within the discourse engaging the artistic practices of African diaspora artists are not inescapable. Whilst remaining aware of the idealism of the Bakhtinian worldview, we are able to turn to some of his theories in a productive discussion of works and practices by such artists without reducing their reading to identity politics or to formalist analyses that deny their particular experiences and the contextual relationships of their works. Bakhtin's theories allow us to explore differences and self/Other relationships as an epistemic generative force within any set of relationships and expressions, particularly those that emerge from the diasporic spaces in which different cultures come together and where we all gain the opportunity to become acutely aware of the unfinalizability of whom we really are.

Chapter 2. Gavin Jantjes.

The axiom that there is no identity without history and no history without pictures rings true when one considers a country with a history as tumultuous and culturally complex as that of South Africa (Jantjes, 2009:8).

In this chapter, I will examine the artistic practice of Gavin Jantjes and the evolution of his aesthetic concerns in the context of his exile from apartheid South Africa and his journeys into and through the diasporic spaces of European metropolitan centres. I will consider the embedded and symbiotic relationship between his political and cultural activism and his artistic production in the period immediately following his exile in Germany and the United Kingdom in the 1970s and 1980s. My special focus will be on his role in the activities of the Black British Artists movement of the period, which aimed to transform the cultural landscape of Britain and to recognise major contributions and challenges that Black British artists posed to the history of Modernism in the UK since the Second World War¹³. I will be focusing on a silkscreen print and three paintings from three different bodies of work that, in my view, vividly reflect Gavin Jantjes' trajectory of artistic concerns while being inextricably linked to and imbedded in the histories of dislocation, exile and resistance from which they emerged. The works are *A South African Colouring Book* (1974-75), two *Untitled* works from the Zulu series created between 1987 and 1990, and his work *Untitled No 2* from the *Korabra* series of seven paintings from 1985- 1986. Starting with the history of Gavin Jantjes' alienation and exile within and from apartheid South Africa, I will trace his journey from the Michaelis School of Fine Art in Cape Town through Hamburg in the 1970s and to London in the 1980s and early 1990s in the degree necessary to illustrate his development as an artist and cultural activist, finishing this circular account back in South Africa where some of the iconic works that I am examining entered the collection of the Iziko South African National Gallery and the Michaelis School of Fine Art, where his legacy and contribution to the anti-apartheid cultural struggle and his impact on the subversion and opening up of the art historical canon remain insufficiently acknowledged.

Gavin Jantjes was born in Cape Town, South Africa, in 1948 and was brought up in District Six, the area that fell victim to the apartheid legislation under the Group Areas Act. It was declared a 'whites only' area, and thousands of people of colour were forcibly removed and their homes and communities destroyed as part of the racist policy of segregation, dehumanisation and control of the non-white population. Having been exposed to art and art education at the local community Children's Art Centre since the age of three, he managed to obtain special dispensation from the Ministry of the Interior that would allow him, a person classified as 'coloured' under the apartheid system, to apply to and, once accepted, to study at a white university¹⁴ (Smith, 2016: on-line). Jantjes proceeded to study at the University of Cape Town, at the Michaelis School of Fine Arts between 1966 and 1969, specialising in graphic design. According to his recollections in an interview with Marlene Smith in 2016, for the first two years at the school he was the only black student there (Smith, 2016: on-line). His introduction to the fraught relationship between the arts and politics came very early; the apartheid government attempted to close down the Children's Art Centre in District Six after its students won most of the categories in a children's arts competition in which the identities of the contestants were not revealed during the judging process. In his second year of studies at

¹³ The term "Black" in the context of Britain in the 1980s was used as a political term that referred to artists and cultural practitioners of African, Asian and Afro-Caribbean descent.

¹⁴ Under the apartheid system, a segregated system of education was in place in South Africa, which provided separate structures and institutions, as well as inferior educational resources and opportunities, for people of colour.

the Michaelis School of Fine Art when he, the only black student, was elected to be the class representative, the security police intimidated him and his family in an attempt to force him to resign (Smith, 2016: on-line). According to his recollections, his experience of police harassment was terrifying, with his phone tapped and his correspondence read. The political situation ‘was getting very hot’ (Smith, 2016: on-line); thus, following his graduation from UCT, he applied for and was awarded a DAAD scholarship from the German government for the Hochschule für Bildende Kunst in Hamburg, Germany, where he studied with Joe Tilson (Araeen, 1989: 145) between 1969 and 1972, and where he received his MA in Fine Art.

It was in Germany that Gavin Jantjes developed a keen interest in multiples and the medium of silkscreen printing while working with one of the pioneers of the direct screen-printing method, Florian Boer (Smith, 2016: on-line). It was also in Germany that he began to become involved with the anti-apartheid movement, starting an African Centre for international students from the continent, attempting to form an organised anti-apartheid movement in West Germany and visiting the ANC offices in East Berlin when researching material for his anti-apartheid prints (Araeen, 1989: 65; Smith, 2016: on-line; Pissarra, Maurice, Ayene, 2011: multiple chapters). It was at this time that he made the work for which he remains most well known, and which has been included in major international museum collections including the Tate Collection, London, the Victoria and Albert Museum, London, the Iziko South African National Gallery and a number of others. These prints are also the most frequently “quoted” work by the artist, has and have featured in every major survey exhibition focusing on that particular period (1970s and 1980s) in the history of South Africa and the international activism of the cultural anti-apartheid movement¹⁵.



Fig. 2.1. Jantjes, Gavin. *A South African Colouring Book*. 1974-75. Screen print on card. Edition of 20. 602 x 452 mm. Installation view.

¹⁵ For example, *A South African Colouring Book* was included in the following major exhibitions, catalogues and publications, among others: “*Rise and fall of apartheid: photography and the bureaucracy of everyday life*” at the International Centre of Photography in New York and in Johannesburg in 2013; “*The Short century: independence and liberation movements in Africa 1945-1994*” in Munich, Berlin, Chicago and New York in 2001; *Visual Century: South African Art in Context*, 2011.

A South African Colouring Book, (Figure 1) is a work consisting of a simple folder containing 11 silk-screen prints, measuring 45 x 60 cm, and was produced as an edition of 20 in 1974-75 while the artist was still living in Germany following the completion of his graduate studies at the Hochschule für Bildende Künste in Hamburg. Each print combines several different components, including documentary photographic images by contemporary South African photographers and other found photographic images, collaged with hand-written or printed text, and overlaid with a grid evoking a child's schoolbook or a wire cage. Each print also bears a graphic schematic image of a box of paint and a swatch of bright colours- the only non-black and white element within each image. The title of the work, combined with the graphic elements referencing a child's activity of colouring, make an almost ironic reference to the process of education or schooling in the realities of life in South Africa. This process is aimed both internally and at the international audience. In 1978, while still living in Hamburg, the artist described his own motivation for the project as his 'first step out of the 'culture of silence' created by the dominant group to perpetuate its position of privilege and to alienate the oppressed from themselves, their culture and their history denying them a voice' (Siebrits, 2002: not numbered). The work was banned in South Africa and would have made Jantjes' return to his home country under the apartheid regime impossible. Jantjes contextualised his motive to educate as follows:

'So by the time I came to Europe and went to the Hochschule für Bilende Kunste in Hamburg, the kids around me were, by comparison, pretty dull. They didn't know anything about the world. This was a time of political protest against the Vietnam War and I mentioned South Africa and Apartheid they didn't even know where South Africa was. They would say "Where in South America is that?" And I'd say "Not America, Africa, South Africa." That's what led me to make 'The Colouring Book' (1974) because they knew so little. They had no idea.' (Black Artists & Modernism: on-line).

As mentioned above, there was a very strong political dimension to his intent to educate, which is supported by the fact that Jantjes was an active participant and co-founder of the anti-apartheid organisations in Germany and collaborated with the ANC's representative office in East Berlin, as mentioned earlier, which he discussed with Marlene Smith at the symposium Black Artists & Modernism that took place in Birmingham in 2016:

'The reason I started connecting with the ANC was I had begun 'The Colouring Book', and I needed information, facts, I needed pictures, etc. They said "Gavin, come on, you've got to help the struggle. Help us with our magazine, write an article, help us design this, etc., etc." So I did what I could' (Smith, 2016: on-line).

Even at this stage, Jantjes experienced problems with how his screen prints were being contextualised. The work was overtly political and aimed at stirring up anti-apartheid action through education on one hand, and employed complex visual strategies that reflected his artistic vision as shaped by his experiences both in South Africa and while studying fine art in Germany on the other. Jantjes exhibited the work at the Institute for Contemporary Art in London in 1976 in response to the events of the Soweto uprising that received international coverage in the press; according to the artist himself, it became another visual document that provided additional information about the events taking place in South Africa and the workings of the repressive and racist regime (Smith, 2016: on-line). It was seen as an important tool for bringing the attention of the international cultural and artistic community to the plight of 'those struggling for

humanity and equal rights' (Siebrits, 2002: not numbered). Jantjes found that critics and journalists did not know how to talk about his work because they were not familiar with realities of South African apartheid on one hand, and knew very little about the printing and graphic techniques with which Jantjes was experimenting and to which he has so attracted on the other. It was at this point that he realised that, unless he wrote about his own practice, it would be very difficult for him to have his work understood either from the thematic point of view or from the point of view of the art-making process and medium¹⁶.

¹⁶ In the later phase of his career, Jantjes became well known and regarded as an educator, teaching at the Chelsea College of Art, lecturing internationally and organising symposiums and conferences for INIVA, contributing numerous essays to publications about Black British artists and about issues pertaining to multiculturalism and cultural policy in the UK and further afield, as well as curating exhibitions in his role as the artistic director of the National Art Museum in Oslo.

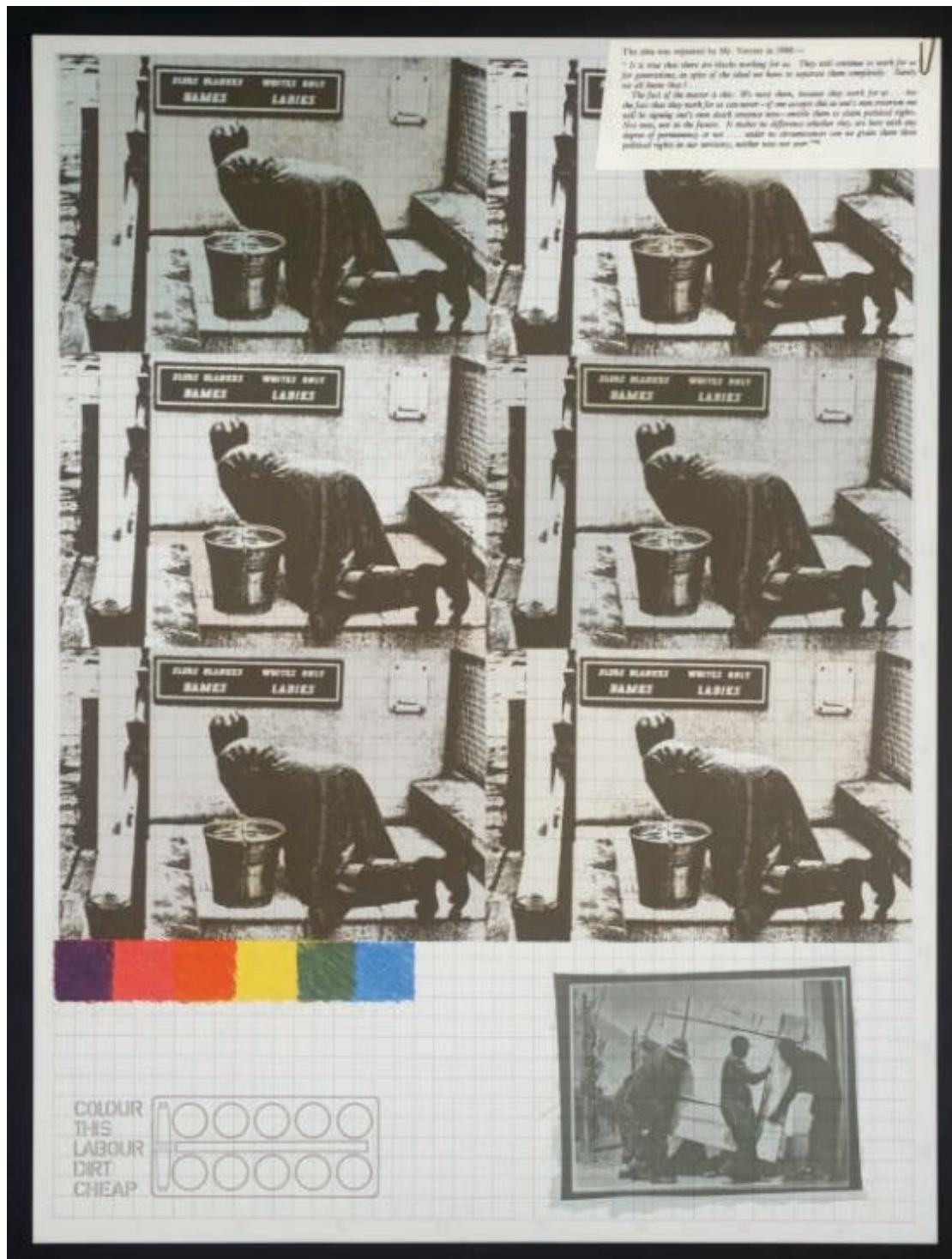


Fig. 2.2. Jantjes, Gavin. *Colour This Labour Dirt Cheap*. 1974-75. Screen print on card. 602 x 452 mm. Tate Collection, UK.

I will now focus on one print in the series, *Colour This Labour Dirt Cheap* (Figure 2) that, in my view, provides rich evidence of how the artist's experiences of alienation and exile, both within and outside of South Africa, inform and work together with his aesthetic strategies in order to achieve both political and artistic goals. The print adheres to the common overall format of the series described above, and contains a photographic image of a black woman crouching on her knees and cleaning an area with the sign "Whites Only" looming above her head. The image is a copy of the photograph

made by Ernest Cole, an exiled South African photographer who documented life under apartheid (Figure 3). Cole included the image, which appeared without a title, in his only book *House of Bondage* that was first published in New York in 1967, a year after the photographer's escape into exile¹⁷. The image is presented as a sharply contrasted black and white negative and repeated six times. Its iteration in the top right corner of the print is overlaid with a typed quote from B. J. Vorster, one of the ideologists of apartheid and prime minister of South Africa (1966-1978). The bottom right corner of the print is occupied by a different black and white image, which has an almost archival quality and features several black labourers handling what appears to be a large, carefully wrapped painting.



Fig. 2.3. Ernest Cole (1940-1990). Uncaptioned. First published in 1967.

Amna Malik argued that Jantjes' screen-printing practice, as exemplified by *A South African Colouring Book*, could be seen as an expression of the creative possibilities of exile in terms of how the work reflects the artist's ability to maintain multiple perspectives simultaneously. It echoes ideas about the diasporic multiple viewpoint offered by Nicholas Mirzoeff, as discussed in the introduction and in the first chapter of this thesis. The use of pop art strategies in the repetitive use of the found and media images, as introduced by American pop artist Andy Warhol, enables the raising of awareness of the media's role in the public's perception of reality. In addition to using newspaper and photojournalistic imagery, Jantjes uses the juxtaposition of images and texts to introduce an extra perspective into the work that creates a sense of surveillance, a kind of an 'aerial view' of the work and of the realities depicted in it. This technique of layering different elements against each other, as if in the process of annotation, enhances the documentary and educational role of the work as well as fulfilling the

¹⁷ Although the caption of the image is not known, 'according to Struan Robertson, the image was taken in the centre of Johannesburg on the edge of Von Brandis Square, next to the Supreme Court. The municipality has recently installed new underground parking, with toilets' (Robertson, 2010: 182).

activist's role of witnessing of the crimes of apartheid. The conscious combination of formal references to pop art and documentary material reflecting realities of life under apartheid could be seen as one of the manifestations of the multiple view point that Malik and Mirzoeff discussed.

The referencing of pop art techniques evident in the work is also significant in terms of the role that pop art played in the disruption of the Modernist art history and canon. Pop art's engagement with and use of popular culture lead to this art movement playing "a leading role in the 'democratization' of art and culture that became such a characteristic and inescapable feature of late 20th century life", while gradually undermining the Modernist convictions and view of art (Mercer, 2007: 7). In the collection of essays from 2007, *Pop art and vernacular cultures*, Mercer advocates for the 'expanded and revised appreciation of pop art's continuing agency as an interruption of dichotomous boundaries' (Mercer, 2007: 30). In combining these two strains of thought, it becomes possible to read Jantjes' use of pop art strategies not only as an effective weapon in the anti-apartheid struggle, but also as evidence of his deep engagement with the subversive potential of his practice in addressing art historical narratives and, specifically, with 'authoritative accounts of what constitutes aesthetic value' (Mercer, 2007: 9).

It seems possible to argue that the artist was drawing on pop art's power of accessibility when deciding on the title of the work. The title's allusion to a child's activity projects both irony and bitterness when compared to the content of the work, and functions as a kind of parody. Irony and ambivalence were also highlighted by Mercer as important strategies in the pop art movement that signalled an atmosphere of irreverence regarding the canonical and official (Mercer, 2007:9). Jantjes' fluency in the use of these strategies could be seen as a manifestation of his deep investment in the discourse of challenging Modernism and its canonical Eurocentric structures already present in the early period of his artistic career when he worked predominantly with the print medium. It is also important to highlight 'the radical ambivalence' (Mercer, 2007:9) of his practice, which would become more evident in later years with the artist's move to painting as his medium and history painting as one of his dominant genres. The functioning of the work as both a political pamphlet and as a sophisticated, layered aesthetic construction that invokes a number of art historical references while disrupting some of them is a manifestation, in my view, of the diasporic consciousness with its multiple viewpoint in this iconic work.

In addition to exploring the possible significance of pop art strategies at play in the title and the repeated use of found imagery in *Colour This Labour Dirt Cheap*, an insertion of a second image at the bottom right-hand corner of this work is of interest because of the way in which it enters into a discursive dialogue with Cole's photograph and with the text by Vorster, which emphatically proclaims the denial of political rights to black people while signalling reluctant acceptance of their presence in order to exploit their labour. The image shows a small group of black labourers moving a canvas, and suggests the fascinating possibility that the artist is making a self-referential comment about the position of his own work in relation to the Eurocentric art discourse and its institutions. The use of his personal documents, such as a copy of his own identity book in one of the prints in the series, reinforces this idea. The composition of the print as a whole juxtaposes an overt quotation of the recognizable pop art technic, which references the Western art historical canon, with a subtle reference to Jantjes' own position as an artist of colour, an exile, and an outsider in relation to the same narrative. I propose, this awareness of his position as both a participant and as an outsider in the narration of art history, as a segregated Other relegated to a dedicated space within Western art's canonical structures, is another strong indication of a diasporic

consciousness at work within Gavin Jantjes' practice. His own experiences of art education and lack of access to art as a person of colour in segregated apartheid South Africa has certainly made him acutely aware of the precariousness of this position. At the same time, Jantjes draws attention to ingenuity and survival strategies that he and other exiles had to develop, both in response to apartheid and when faced with exile in other countries. In an essay for the catalogue *Rhizomes of Memory. South African Photography. Goldblatt, Mofokeng, Hallett* (2000), Jantjes wrote evocatively about a fellow South African artist, George Hallett, who chose voluntary exile:

His ability to float in a culture was something that he had learnt before leaving his home. Surviving apartheid meant learning to float alongside it, and adapting to its ever-changing conditions...(he and others like him believed)South African visual expression had to be more than complaint about the inane and monstrous acts of racists or narrations of the bitter struggle of black people. He wanted it to show and tell something authentic about Africa and the world (Jantjes, 2000: 176-177).

Malik described this expression of a sense of double alienation, both within one's own country and as an exile in a foreign land speaking back to images of blackness (coming from that land but also present in the Western media) as an instance of 'a polyphonic dimension' (Mercer, 2008: 169) of Jantjes' prints. This allows us to reference the idea of the polyphonic narrative in the literary and cultural criticism by Mikhail Bakhtin, as discussed in Chapter 1. In Malik's view, the idea of the polyphonic narrative is one of the important elements that reflects the diasporic consciousness of the artist. Jantjes' work draws parallels between his exile and the exile of the Black subjects in his work within their own land - his use of the images from Ernest Cole's book *House of Bondage* (1968) underscores this connection, and is particularly powerful because Ernest Cole himself was an exiled black South African photographer.

Care needs to be taken not to equate the position of the political exile and cultural Other that artists such as Jantjes, Cole and Hallett experienced with the sense of loss, helplessness or non-belonging. Although such experiences could often be part and parcel of the everyday reality of exile, as described by Said (2000), Hall (1993) and Bhabha (1994), Jantjes refused, certainly in his own case, to see these positions as definitive and all encompassing. In so doing, he rejects the denial of agency that, in his view, often accompanies perceptions of exile from the centre.¹⁸ Examining Gavin Jantjes' views on his own position within the diasporic spaces of Europe, which he outlined in his essay *The Artist as a Cultural Salmon: a view from a frying pan* (1993) allows us to appreciate the artist' rejection of the accounts that emphasise the incapacitating impact of displacement as a result of exile or immigration for artists from Africa. Using a vivid metaphor of a fish species, he writes metaphorically about the journeys African artists undertake in the foreign and dangerous waters of the West:

...I stated that I did not feel like a fish out of water when I got to Europe, but just the opposite....The species of fish I believe I am, is the salmon. It is an intriguing and ambiguous fish, at home in both fresh and salt water. It migrates thousands of miles to regenerate itself; it swims against the current rather than with it; risks leaving the water to climb up rapids and thereby exposes itself to the greedy eyes of the bears on the banks, hungry for rich pickings. And after all of this, it still has the energy and cunning to spawn something personal and new. Its intention is to return to the wild and salty ocean, knowing that it has left behind

¹⁸ Here, the centre is meant as part of the dichotomy of centre and periphery that has framed perceptions of African artists and art in relation to Western centres of Eurocentric discourse production.

something of value, and learnt something new on each journey (Jantjes, 1993: 104).

Both political activism within the anti-apartheid movement and the dialogue with the Eurocentric canon of art history that were manifest in the prints from *A South African Colouring Book* (1974-75) discussed in the previous section of this chapter continued to inform Gavin Jantjes' practice in the early 1980s when he moved from Germany to the United Kingdom. In the same year, 1982, when Jantjes settled in London, he participated in an important cultural event that was organised by the international anti-apartheid movement. The Festival of Culture and Resistance at the University of Botswana in Gaborone involved an exhibition and a symposium that took place in July 1982. These resulted in a resolution that called on the rest of the world to boycott apartheid culture¹⁹. The Visual Arts discussion group at the conference called on the progressive artists within South Africa to work together to produce graphics and artwork in support of the liberation movement. The conference also reaffirmed the cultural continuity between those artists in exile and the people who were developing a culture of resistance to apartheid inside South Africa. An important debate took place within the conference in which the role of art in the anti-apartheid struggle was discussed. It revealed two radically different views within the group of photographers and photojournalists who addressed politics and aesthetics, as articulated by two prominent members of the group, David Goldblatt and Peter McKenzie. While Peter McKenzie argued that photographers were primarily cultural workers, whose main goal should be the advancement of the political fight against apartheid, David Goldblatt's position was for a dispassionate and, as far as possible, an objective approach to the photographic work that would allow the viewers to make up their own minds without any agenda being presented to them.²⁰ Gavin Jantjes was one of many who clarified his own position as follows:

'... I cannot begin to argue the art for art's sake argument in a situation where children are being shot and killed for protesting at injustice. Any South African artist who dares to uphold this argument as relevant for South African culture, only demonstrates his utter disrespect for our dead, and a certain shallowness in the understanding of our culture' (Jantjes, 1982: on-line)

It would be a simplification, however, to see Jantjes' position as limited to confronting the system through the rhetoric of 'political art'. His call, as Rasheed Araeen noted, was to develop a modern language of art that would reflect the contemporary struggle of African culture in our time (Araeen, 1989: 66). The paper that Jantjes' presented at the symposium reflected on the complexity of the relationship of art, culture, and tradition:

'If we acknowledge the use of sophisticated modern weaponry in the liberation struggle, why question an artist who uses photography or stainless steel or video tape in his or her art? We accept the mass of modern western technology in our everyday lives. We don't question our relationship to the motor car or electric ovens or the mass media. All these things influence our lives both positively and negatively. Why do we then fall back on traditional art forms and modes of expression when expressing our lives through art? Do we do it just for tradition's

¹⁹ Boycotts of apartheid society - in various areas including sport, military, economic and cultural ventures - had been mooted by the ANC in the 1950s; the conference resolutions reinforced, expanded, and boosted the tactic of boycott action to cover the arena of culture.

²⁰ In her essay *Unity and Struggle. Afrapix and The Sedimenting of Photography* (Hayes, 2013: 342-347) Patricia Hayes draws attention to the heterogeneity of this group of photographers during the anti-apartheid struggle. Through supplying the testimonies of both parties, she highlights that Goldblatt's position was unpopular and, as a result, he was 'put at a distance' (Hayes in Enwezor & Bester, 2013: 342-343). Hayes states that the Festival gave impetus to the formal establishment of the Afrapix collective, 'marking it with a political identity' (Hayes, 2013: 347).

sake? For the sake of style? Is it not possible for us to use our knowledge of our traditions in a manner other than repetition? In a manner which indicates both where we have come from and where we are going?" (Jantjes, 1982 quoted in Araeen, 1989: 66).

A photograph of Gavin Jantjes (Figure 4) making his speech at the Culture and Resistance Symposium by one of the founders of Afrapix, Peter McKenzie, is included in Okwui Enwezor and Rory Bester's edited volume *Rise and Fall of Apartheid: Photography and the Bureaucracy of Every Day Life*, 2013 (Figure 4).

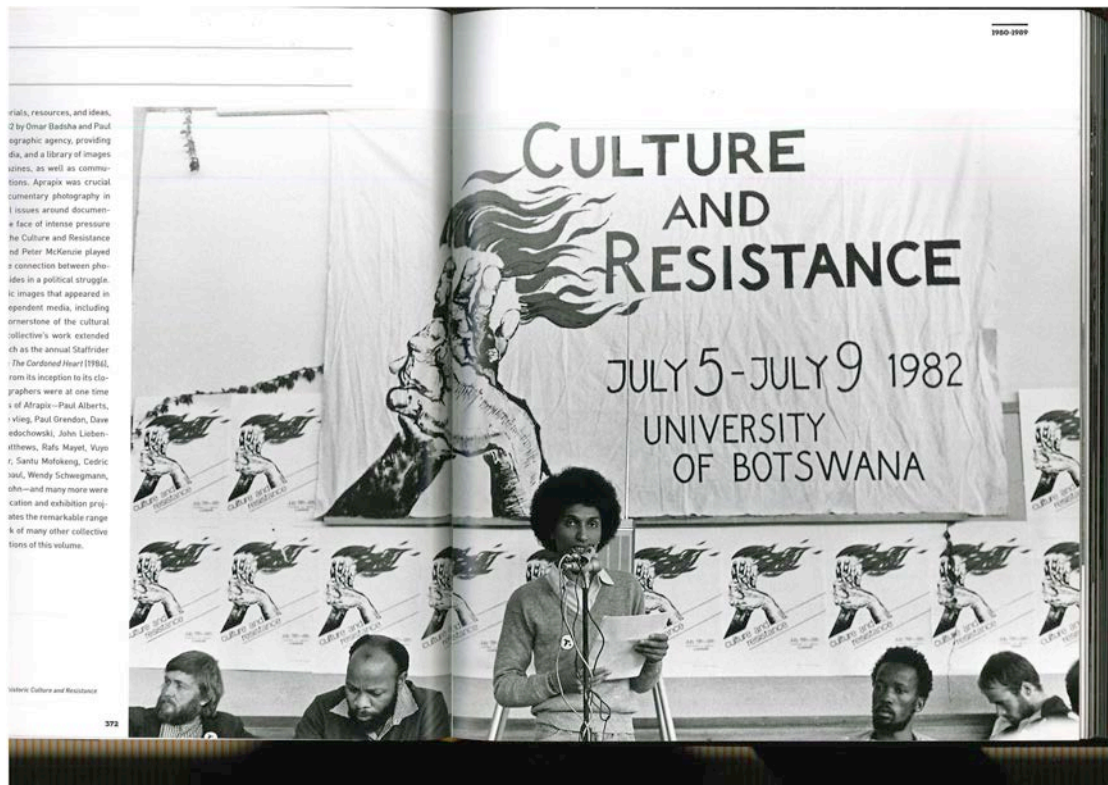


Fig. 2.4. Peter McKenzie. 1982. Gavin Jantjes delivers his speech at the Culture and Resistance Conference in Gaborone, Botswana.

Cultural Salmon

‘In 1970 he came first to London, to a culture he knew only through his imagination of it. Bumping up against the exclusivity of the London art world made his escape from apartheid into a Eurocentric nightmare.’ (Jantjes, 2000: 177)

It may seem that a somewhat dramatic change occurred with regard to medium, style and content with Gavin Jantjes’ move to the UK from Germany in 1982. Although he had had an exhibition of prints at the Edward Tottah Gallery in Covent Garden in London previously, his second showing there, in 1986, was of paintings. In reality, Jantjes started to work on a series of painting while still based in Germany, and it was also in Germany that the artist became interested in histories of Africa and African diaspora. In the following sections I will discuss how the artist’s experiences of life and work in the UK led him to address the issues of recognition and inclusion of diaspora artists through his artistic practice and through his activism and cultural work. I will focus on how his engagement with the medium of painting moved his practice towards new positions while remaining committed to challenging the dogmas of Modernism from within.

Both in Hamburg and later in London, Jantjes developed an active interest in African cultural histories and this interest, with particular focus on the history of slavery, began to shape his practice. He cited the work of and personal acquaintance with Walter Rodney, who was a guest professor at the History Department at Hamburg University when Jantjes was still living in Hamburg, and the author of the book *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa* (1972) as his original inspiration. This interest had already manifested in the speech Jantjes made in Gaborone, as quoted above. This, and other encounters with authors such as Basil Davidson and John Picton, also had an effect on his imagery. The political imagery became less and themes related to African cultural history became more evident (Jantjes, quoted in Smith, 2016: on-line). The artist described the shift that was also driven by his desire to explore other media, as follows:

‘A shift was occurring. I had got to a point where I felt I could design a print, literally with my eyes closed. I’d been doing it for so long I felt once I had the basic ideas and the images and the materials, I could design a print just like that; take it into the studio and print it. I get uncomfortable when things become that easy because I think you’re just repeating yourself. It becomes a formula (Jantjes in Smith, 2016: on-line).



Fig. 2.5. Gavin Jantjes. *Korabra Series*. 1985- 1986. Mixed media and acrylic on canvas. 180 x 200 cm. Various Collections. Installation view of the first four paintings at the Herbert Gallery, Coventry, UK as part of the Black Artists and Modernism project. All images (c) BAM. Stills: Adam Williams.

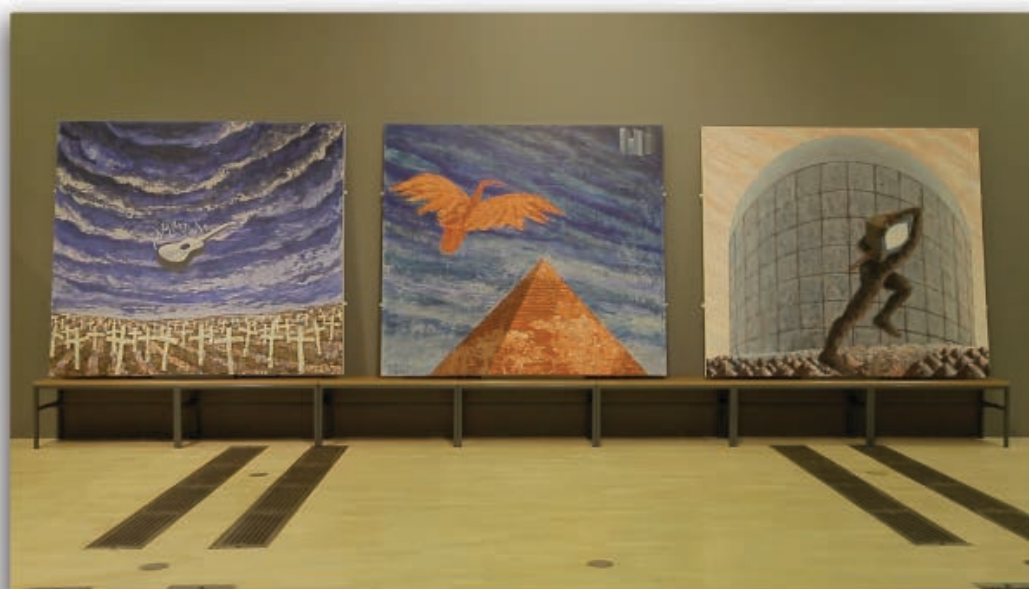


Fig. 2.6. Gavin Jantjes. *Korabra series*. 1985- 1986. Mixed media and acrylic on canvas. 180 x 200 cm. Various Collections. Installation view of the last three paintings at the Herbert Gallery, Coventry, UK as part of the Black Artists and Modernism project. All images (c) BAM. Stills: Adam Williams.

Gavin Jantjes' first exhibition of the paintings mentioned above showcased his *Korabra* series (1986) (Figures 5 and 6) on which he had begun to work, certainly conceptually, while still in Germany, but completed during his residency at the West Indian Association in Coventry, UK, in 1986. The residency lasted several months and involved the artist staying in the city and working from a studio that was set up in this community centre. The idea was to allow members of the community access to the artist's studio while the residency was in progress (Goodwin, 2016: on-line). The series consists of seven paintings and deals thematically with the history of the trans-Atlantic slave trade and its aftermath. The title is a word from the Akan (Twi) language of Ghana and means 'to go and come back'. It has a spiritual dimension, as it is also the name of the drumbeat at funerals (Goodwin, 2016: on-line), and refers to the journeys between the worlds of the living and the dead. Formally, the series is very different from Jantjes' work with prints, not only from the point of view of the medium, but also in terms of scale. The works are monumental in size, measuring 180 x 200 cm, and were made using acrylic and mixed media on canvas, or acrylic on canvas. The artist deliberately uses the genre of history painting, which is reinforced through the thematic content and the physical attributes of the works; by placing these elements in ambiguous and/or symbiotic relationships, the artist aims to initiate several conversations with his audience. One of them addresses the painful period of Africa's past that encompasses the trans-Atlantic slave trade- 'part of the contemporary consciousness of every African man and woman throughout the world' (Araeen, 1989: 68). Another conversation, which is imbedded in his medium, format and style, takes the viewer into the discourse surrounding the relationship between African art and history and Modernism.



Fig. 2.7. Gavin Jantjes. *Untitled*. 1986. Acrylic and mixed media on canvas. 180 x 200 cm. Herbert Art Gallery and Museum Collection.

I will focus on the second work in the series, *Untitled*, 1986 (Figure 7), which represents the trauma of the deadly passage of millions of Africans into slavery in the New World. The large space of the picture plane is dominated by the waters of the ocean, with the symbolic mountains visible in the far distance in the top left-hand corner of the work along the high horizon representing the destination of the New World. The space opposite, the top right-hand corner, is occupied by a symbolic Greek temple-like structure, which references Europe and the Old World. The wide-open space of the ocean is dotted with three coffin-like ships with white sails that seem to be destined to journey across the Black Atlantic. The viewer is thus positioned at the apex of the inverted pyramid composition (another trope of the classical history painting genre), which implies the African continent as the origin of the millions of slaves, thus drawing the viewers into and implicating them in this traumatic history. The triangular composition references not only the historical but also the cultural entanglements of this journey, made clear through the use of Greek architecture as the preferred cultural symbol of European civilisation. The tragedy of the middle passage, the journey across the Atlantic Ocean in which millions of African people lost their lives as a result of the inhumane conditions, is evoked using symbolic means, and somewhat restrained imagery and palette. The trauma is evoked rather than represented directly, leaving space for ambiguity and lack of resolution, creating a sense of deep frustration with the inevitability of the past.

Sonia Boyce, a famous contemporary British artist and another participant in the exhibition, when discussing her own impressions of this series in the context of the Black Artists and Modernism project, raised questions that I consider relevant pertaining the relationship between the works in the series and the stylistic and thematic concerns of German Neo-expressionism. This seems particularly relevant in the context of Jantjes' history of graduate art studies in Germany where Joseph Boyce was a guest professor during that period and whom the young artist came to know well (Jantjes in Smith, 1996: on-line). Jantjes acknowledged this influence on his practice in his lecture "To Paint in the Face of Doubt" given in the context of the "An Appetite for Painting" symposium that took place at the Nasjonalmuseet – Museum of Contemporary Art, Oslo, Norway, in September 2013 (Jantjes, 2013: on-line). By referencing New Expressionist techniques with their deliberate, almost staged quality of painterly gestures (The *Korabra* series of works exhibits the highly textured, almost sculptural use of impasto), the artist opens a conversation that dwells on the relationship of the canon of art history, Modernism and the art practice of African diaspora artists. What is important for this dialogue is Jantjes' insistence, through the reference to the history of slavery, on positioning it within the discourse of modernity itself, with which slavery is inextricably linked. Ideas relating to origins and mythical places, a traumatic history and its aftermath, are also important for both new expressionists such as Kiefer (Boyce, 2016: on-line) and for Jantjes, who brings his own perspective to highlight the ambivalent relationship between Modernism and the art of Africa that has been viewed as left outside modernity, stuck in the past, and thus seen as primitive. The artist may be alluding to the encounter between the two that has dramatically changed the course of art history and Modernism, and from which Neo-expressionism's origins could be traced. In this context, the white Greek temple may be seen as an allusion to these histories and to more contemporary conversations about the origins and composition of culture in Europe.

The first two paintings from the series, including the work discussed above, were acquired by the Herbert Art Gallery and Museum in Coventry, the city in which they were made, while the third entered the collection of the Wolverhampton Art Gallery. *Half the Sky (Diptych)* was included in "The Other Story" (Figure 8), one of the most momentous and influential exhibitions by Black British artists in the history of art in the UK. Eddie Chambers, a British contemporary artist, art historian and curator, who was also one of the participants, described it as a landmark exhibition that sought to outline a history of 'Afro-Asian artists in post-war Britain' (Chambers, 2014: 6). The exhibition was curated by Rasheed Araeen, and took place at the Hayward Gallery, South Bank Centre, London, in 1989. It aimed to question the history of the structural exclusion of the work by Black British artists from the canonical history of Modernism in Britain and to illustrate the artists' engagement with the Modernist framework in their respective practices. It featured work by 24 artists of Asian, African or Caribbean cultural heritage who had lived and worked in post-war Britain for a significant part of their professional lives (AAA: on-line). A substantive catalogue that contained an introduction, four essays and a postscript by Rasheed Araeen accompanied the exhibition. A section of the catalogue entitled "Other Voices" featured contributions by Balraj Khanna, Guy Brett, David Medalla, Mel Gooding, Lubaina Himid and Maud Sulter (*A Statement from The Elbow Room*), and Gavin Jantjes. Following its showing at the Hayward Gallery, the exhibition went on to be seen in Wolverhampton (Art Gallery) and Manchester (City Art Gallery and Cornerhouse) (Chambers, 2014: 6-7). The importance of this exhibition in the history of British art and, more widely, in the history of art of the African and Asian diaspora, was such that in 2010, twenty years after the original exhibition closed, a group show with eleven of the original artists was curated by Aicon Gallery in New York and was entitled "A Missing History. The Other Story Revisited" (Aicon Gallery: on-line).

The history of how this exhibition came about (through the ten-year long relentless battle between Rasheed Araeen and British cultural institutions) is reflective of the reasons that he set out to organise it in the first place²¹. Araeen fully understood the significance of his undertaking. The ambition for the artists who took part in the project, according to Araeen, was not only success in the market place and recognition but, more fundamentally, ‘the artists’ entry into the history of art’ (Araeen, 1989: 9). It is this entry that, for Araeen and for Jantjes, as one of the participating artists and contributors to the catalogue, allows ‘the artists’ work to be discussed seriously or to be recognized for its historical significance’ (Araeen, 1989: 9). Despite the title of the show, Araeen called on artists to oppose separate categories based on race, ethnicity or culture but, at the same time, his aim was to question why non-European artists were not represented in the history of modern art. He framed the show in terms of “...a story of those men and women who defied their ‘otherness’ and entered the modern space that was forbidden to them, not only to declare their historic claim on it but to challenge the framework, which defined and protected its boundaries” (Araeen, 1989: 9).



Fig. 2.8. “The Other Story” exhibition banner at Hayward Gallery, London, UK. 1989.



Fig. 2.9. “The Other Story: Afro-Asian artists in post-war Britain”, 1989, installation views at Hayward Gallery. Photographs from the Rasheed Araeen Archives.

²¹ According to Araeen, it was an extremely difficult and painful process. The original approach to the Arts Council in 1978 was unsuccessful. An approach in 1983 received the same response. Two years of discussions with the Greater London Council was ‘one of the most humiliating experiences of my life’ (Araeen, 1989: 105). Finally, he approached the Arts Council in 1986 again and, to the artist’s great surprise, the proposal was accepted in 1987 (Araeen 1989: 105).

It is important to retrieve some of the history of this seminal exhibition in this dissertation, not only because Gavin Jantjes was one of the participating artists and a contributor to the catalogue, but also because Sarat Maharaj, one of the leading contemporary art historians based in Britain, positions Rasheed Araeen, Eddie Chambers and Gavin Jantjes in 'the line of tough questioners, probing the logic of closure, exclusion and guarded tolerance inscribed in art institutions and the gallery circuit' in the UK in the 1980s and 1990s (Maharaj, 1999: on-line), thus recognising Jantjes' important role in the cultural landscape of Britain at the time. It would be reasonable to state that, for Gavin Jantjes, his participation in the struggle against apartheid as an artist and as an activist did not end with his move to the UK, not only because of his continuous efforts and work in the anti-apartheid movement, but also through his participation in the movement of Black British artists in the 1980s. In his essay for the catalogue *The Other Story* (1989), he makes a direct comparison between apartheid policies in South Africa and the policies and attitudes towards artists of colour in Margaret Thatcher's England:

'Many will call this exhibition a Black Art Show. They do so for the wrong reasons; wishing to marginalize and disqualify it from the realm of mainstream exhibition activity, they call it a 'show' rather than an 'exhibition'. To them the term Black defines the skin pigment of the artists rather than the form and content of the Art. That's an apartheid methodology applied to the national visual culture... Some would claim that they only use the terms artists apply to themselves. Well, let me make my position clear. I am an artist who happens to be black. That's a significant difference and not a semantic subterfuge. The emphasis for me is the artistic practice, not the colour of my skin' (Jantjes, 1989: 125).

In the same essay, Jantjes positioned aesthetics as one of the central questions in the relationship between Modernism, with its Eurocentric world view, and its Others. 'For the art of the rest of the world to demand to be viewed from the point of view of aesthetics (like the art of the West) rather than via the scientific means of anthropology, ethnography or archaeology', for Jantjes, was at the centre of his politics (Jantjes, 1989: 126).

The exhibition was a success, not only because it was popular with the general public with more than 25,000 visitors coming to see it, but also because it generated extensive press coverage and raised the stakes in the debates about the significant changes that had taken in British culture since the end of the Second World War and about the multi-cultural policies in the arts. The range of reactions was wide, and some of them reflected the deep-seated racism and Eurocentrism of the art establishment, which labelled the artists who agreed to take part in the show as 'inauthentic, inauthentically Other as well as inauthentically artists' (Towadros, 2005: 125). Reflecting on the way this exhibition was received, Gilane Towadros provided the following quote from one of the critics, Brian Sewell from *The Evening Standard* newspaper:

Having either no traditions of their own, or traditions so exhausted that no nourishment is to be drawn from them, these artists parrot Western visual idioms that they do not understand... The third-rate imitations of the white man's cliché must seem outrageous to all who care to judge by quality (Sewell, 1990 quoted in Towadros, 2005: 125).

The criticism came not only from the mainstream critics, but also from within the community that the exhibition aimed to represent. Controversially, a number of

artists refused to participate in the show on various grounds, but mainly because of the perceived threat of being “ghettoized” despite the fact that the curator aimed to address these concerns in his writings for the exhibition and the catalogue, as illustrated above. Anish Kapoor argued that his participation ‘would deny him any serious attention as an individual artist’ (Towadros, 2005: 124). Other criticism came from women artists who felt that there were some serious omissions in the composition of the show, which critically disadvantaged them. Five years later, when describing the project in his essay *New Internationalism or the Multiculturalism of Global Bantustans* (Araeen, 1994: 3- 11), Araeen reaffirmed that his intention for the exhibition was ‘...to show that at stake was not so called Ethnic Minority Art or Black Art or an expression of cultural difference or identity, but the gaps in the official history of art’ (Araeen 1994: 8); however, he also had to recognise that it made ‘little difference to the institutional view of things’ (Araeen 1994: 8). In response to some of the criticisms and debates following the exhibition, Araeen also highlighted the dangers of ‘providing institutionally pre-determined spaces for other artists; these may provide an opportunity for them to assert their presence, but they would also frame them on the basis of their difference’ (Araeen, 1994:10).

Jantjes’ role as someone who was involved in multi-cultural policymaking is important for understanding his engagement with the project²². His evaluation of the cultural struggle for recognition is presented in his essay *The long march from ‘Ethnic Arts’ to ‘New Internationalism’* (Jantjes, 1993: 59- 66), which provides an account of the motivations, struggles and outcomes of the long and laborious process of turning the cultural policy in Britain around to recognise and to support cultural diversity as part of mainstream British culture. This process involved making changes to policies on country-wide and local levels and creating new institutions that supported Black (he uses the term to describe people of colour who suffer cultural discrimination) artists. It also placed strong emphasis on the dialogue with the artists and with the community activists themselves to ensure that the new policies and institutions were effective. Jantjes put special focus on the need to change ‘the national consciousness about the arts in Britain. The country had to understand that it had become a multicultural society as a result of its own historical actions (colonialism) and the actions of others (immigration)’ (Jantjes, 1993: 66). Jantjes’ objective, among others, in his work as a cultural policy maker, was to bring the fact that this new multi-cultural reality could no longer be thought of as ‘a fringe benefit of colonialism, rather than a change to the foundations of British national culture itself’ (Jantjes, 1993: 66) to public consciousness.

Gavin Jantjes had 12 works included in “The Other Story” exhibition and in the catalogue. These included six screen prints: *It is Our People* (1974), *For Algeria* (1976), *Notes from Slavery* (1976), *Notes from History* (1977), *Freedom Hunters* (1977) and *No More* (1977). According to the catalogue, there was only one painting from the *Korabra* series (1985): *Untitled No. 3*. The remaining five works included three paintings and two sculptures/ installations. Of the three paintings, one *Untitled* from 1989 later entered the collection of the British Arts Council Collection at the South Bank Centre, while the South African National Gallery eventually acquired another, *Half the Sky (Triptych)*, 1987, in 2000, accession number 2000/322.²³ According to Jantjes (Smith, 2016: on-line), both of these

²² Gavin Jantjes served on the Arts Council of Britain from 1986 to 1990. In 1992, he was the Arts Council’s consultant for the creation of INIVA (Institute of New International Visual Art), for which he coordinated The New Internationalism symposium. He was an adviser to the Tate Gallery in Liverpool from 1992 to 1995, and was then a trustee of the Serpentine Gallery, London from 1995 to 1998. He also served as a consultant to the United Nations Commission on Refugees.

²³ This was, potentially, one of the most exciting discoveries during my research project. The provenance of this work, now in the collection of the Iziko South African National Gallery in Cape Town, was not known, based on personal conversations with curators and the former director, Marilyn Martin (Martin, 2017: personal conversation), to the acquisition committee at the time of its acquisition. I could not find references to its history in any other published

paintings belong to the series of works entitled *The Zulu Series* (1987-1990). The title refers to the literal translation of the word 'Zulu' into English, meaning 'the space above' or 'heavens' (The National Museum of African Art: on-line). What these works have in common is the representation of the night sky as the all-encompassing background littered with numerous stars. The dark sky is rendered in thick, textured impasto combining deep blues, browns and greys that catch and reflect the light, thus enhancing the textual effects of the paint medium. Jantjes' interest in African cultural histories led him to investigate various creation myths and he realised that many of them use as the sky as a backdrop (Smith, 2016: on-line). One of the myths, originating from the Khoisan people of Southern Africa, particularly attracted him. In the myth, which explains the creation of the stars and the Milky Way, a girl picks up ambers from the burning fire and throws them up into the sky; the ambers turn into stars and the ash from the fire into the Milky Way (The National Museum of African Art: online).



Fig. 2.10. Gavin Jantjes. *Untitled*. 1989. Sand, tissue paper and acrylic on canvas. 200 x 300 cm. Arts Council Collection, South Bank Centre, London, UK.

Of the two works mentioned above, the *Untitled*, 1989 (Figure 10) is the one that represents the most apparent link among the issues of art history, representation and origin, which the artist addressed in the *Korabira* series through his use of technique and their manifestation in the works from the *Zulu Series*. The large-scale painting, measuring 200 x 300 cm, continues to use the history painting genre as an evocative format for the discussion outlined above. It features a representation of an African mask floating in space and linked, through what resembles a coiled umbilical cord extending from its

research available through the UCT library. The discovery was made possible purely because the South African National Gallery Library owns a copy of *The Other Story* catalogue, the only copy of this important publication, which is out of print, in a public library collection in South Africa, which in itself represented an important discovery that opens up possibilities for other researchers and students to engage first hand with the archive of this momentous exhibition and Gavin Jantjes' role in it. It must be noted that there is a discrepancy between the title of the work in the South African National Gallery database and in *The Other Story* catalogue. The clarification regarding the correct title has been requested from Gavin Jantjes via a personal email but had not been received at the time of writing this section.

mouth, to a representation of a recognisable figure from Pablo Picasso's iconic *Demoiselles d'Avignon* painting of 1907. The impact of African visual production on the development of the language of modern art is being highlighted. The relationship of African art and European Modernism and the history of abstraction is thrown into focus, questioning the idea of originality and purity that has been used continuously to exclude African and diaspora artists from the history of Modernism and from the history of art in general. Jantjes' painting leaves the viewer with a sense of ambiguity, questioning the nature of the cord that connects the two systems of thought and visual production - we are uncertain about the implications of the interdependent relationship between the two, even though we are left with no doubt as to their foundational role in the creation of the universe around them. Homi Bhabha described the work in the following way, drawing attention to the cultural negotiations at stake:

The line drawing of the translucent *demoiselle* gazes wide-eyed at the viewer in the familiar figurative pose; the mask at the other end of the canvas, turns away from the priority of the figurative and the visual to suggest other senses of identity. The two images are linked through umbilical cords that suggest not an unmasking of the Picasso figure, but a challenging tension across the terrain of cultural difference between the visual locus of the aesthetic, and the *sensoria* of other cultural systems. In one sense, the two figures are incommensurable; in another, it is this difference that makes possible the negotiation of cultures on equal terms (Bhabha, 1990: 41).



Fig. 11. Gavin Jantjes. *Half the Sky (Triptych)*. 1987. Sand, pigment and acrylic on canvas with ceramic egg and wax sculpture on shelves. 180 x 320 x 14. Iziko South African National Gallery Collection. Photo author's own.

The title of the other painting, *Half the Sky (Triptych)*, 1987, (Figure 11) is taken from a Chinese proverb, 'Women hold up half the sky'. The large work (180 x 320 x 14) is a representation of the universe as seen in the southern hemisphere's night sky with its

innumerable constellations. The artist used sand, pigment and acrylic on canvas in order to both enhance the textural qualities of the medium and to make a symbolic reference to the earth as a giver of life and its central role in many African cultures. The thick application of paint creates an uneven, ragged surface that has a three-dimensional feel and alludes to the ungraspable depths of the universe (Figure 12). The stars are represented using gold paint that makes them shimmer, while the constellations are outlined with subtle and threadlike, weightless lines. Gold is also used to give the names of women from South African history to the constellations; from Nandi, the mother of Chaka, to Winnie Madikizela Mandela, political activist and ex-wife of President Nelson Mandela. The work was included in the “Head North” exhibition at Iziko South African National Gallery²⁴ in 2001, where the artist described his motivations for making it and its symbolic elements as follows:

‘The three colours green, black and gold are primary to the work. They are also connected to the ANC. One of the reasons for this painting is that I had never done a work specifically about women, as I believe that they have a voice with which they address the world. Unfortunately men hardly listen to them and therefore have a much narrower view of the world. My painting was more of a praise poem for fifty per cent of the people who make South African history what it is. The materials wax and earth are paramount in African creativity. Both are malleable and natural. Africa gave the world the lost wax method of casting and pottery is extensive, but its association with ‘women’s work’ makes us forget its importance. Ceramic has more association to Mother Earth, the generative deity, the maker, creator and giver of life. The plant-like sculpture echoes fruit or seeds but also has a spikiness. The two objects speak about the never-ending cycle of death and creation’ (Jantjes, 2001: on-line).

Jantjes’ statement confirms his preoccupation with the symbolic potential of materials and imagery (Figures 13 and 14) that is evident in *Half the Sky (Triptych)* and in his earlier paintings from the *Korabra* series, as well as in his graphic work from his earlier period. His work still addresses issues of cultural politics, but not in the directly confrontational or politicised manner typical of his work during the years of the struggle against apartheid. The poetic quality of the imagery and the symbolism have become more important, both in the use of the title that is linked to mythology and in the representation of the starry night sky. Nonetheless, there are a number of conversations or dialogues, to use Sonia Boyce’s words (Boyce, 2016: on-line) that the artist is initiating with this work too. The representation of women and the recognition of their role in history in general and in South African history in particular is one such point of dialogue. The artist extends this dialogue to a debate about the wider issues of recognition. His introduction of the elements of clay and earth alludes to ideas of a world order in which women’s roles remain undervalued. The choice of materials reinforces the association of clay objects with women’s work (that continues to be marginalised and underpaid). The artist extends this association to include issues regarding art history and the dominance of the Eurocentric artistic canon when describing the lost wax method of casting as originating from Africa, but not being widely recognised as such. Jantjes makes connections concerning issues of recognition within the sanctioned art history or canon to those of gender, culture and race, adding another dimension to this important debate.

²⁴ The archives of the South African National Gallery reveal that the acquisition was made possible with the financial assistance of the Norwegian Government, which was provided to coincide with the visit of the Norwegian King and Queen to South Africa and to the gallery. The same archival materials, specifically the minutes from the acquisition committee’s meetings, reveal that acquisition of Gavin Jantjes’ work was seen in the context of the policy of rectifying the gaps in the national collection that resulted from the lack of support and motivation for acquiring art by black South African artists, both those in the country and those in voluntary or forced exile.

In this regard, the dialogue that is opened with the audience echoes the dialogue to which Sonia Boyce draws our attention when discussing Jantjes' *Korabra* series. The tension of the dialogue about history that is evident in the *Korabra* may not be as obvious as the imagery in *Half the Sky (Triptych)*, but the material qualities of the painterly technique remind us of deep currents that continue to circulate in the discourse surrounding the history of art, modernity and the artistic legacy of Africa and the African diaspora.



Fig. 2.12. Gavin Jantjes. *Half the Sky (Triptych)*. 1987. Detail. Sand, pigment and acrylic on canvas with ceramic egg and wax sculpture on shelves. 180 x 320 x 14. Iziko South African National Gallery Collection. Photo author's own.



Fig. 13. Gavin Jantjes. *Half the Sky (Triptych)*. 1987. Detail. Sand, pigment and acrylic on canvas with ceramic egg and wax sculpture on shelves. 180 x 320 x 14. Iziko South African National Gallery Collection.

Photo author's own.

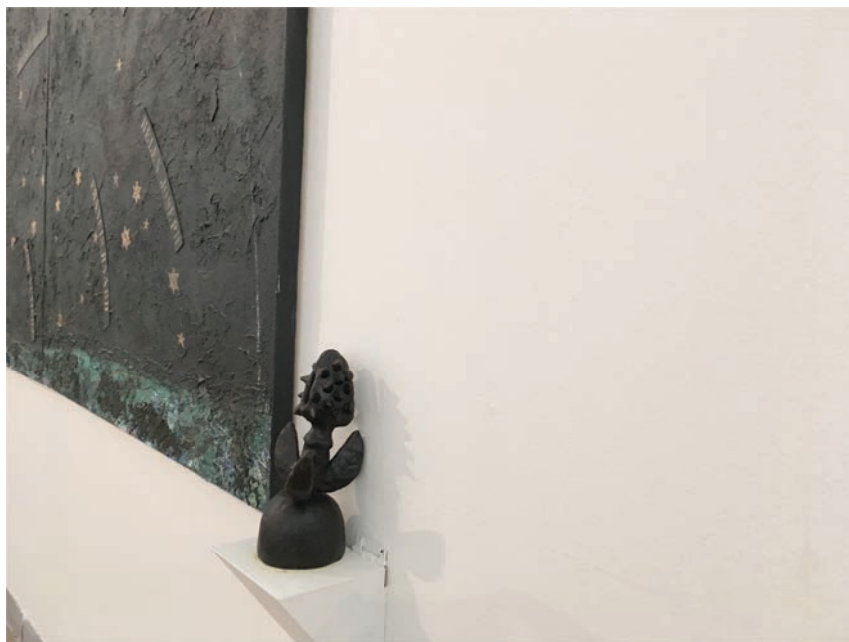


Fig. 2.14. Gavin Jantjes. *Half the Sky (Triptych)*. 1987. Detail. Sand, pigment and acrylic on canvas with ceramic egg and wax sculpture on shelves. 180 x 320 x 14. Iziko South African National Gallery Collection. Photo author's own.

In conclusion, I would like to reflect on how the diasporic journeys undertaken by the artists discussed in these chapters are never linear – they occur in spirals and circles and, at times, loop back on themselves, while revealing the proverbial truth about the impossibility of wading into the same stream twice. It feels both hopeful and symbolic that the artworks produced by a South African artist, who fled apartheid's injustices and persecutions and was targeted for exclusion from education, art, culture and his own history by the apartheid regime, are now seen as an important part of the South African National Heritage and feature in the collection of the South African National Gallery, the main artistic cultural institution in the country²⁵. It also seems highly symbolic that one of his artworks, *Half the Sky Triptych*, 1987, which was included in one of the most important exhibitions in the history of Black British art and in the struggle by diasporic artists from the Global South for recognition of their rightful place in the history of Modernism and in the history of art more broadly, is now included in the South African National Gallery collection. It is symbolic because Gavin Jantjes devoted his life, through political and cultural activism and policymaking, to fighting the cultural apartheid system within the wider art world, well beyond its historical location in South Africa. Jantjes attempted 'to weave primary issues in painting and in politics' (Jantjes, 2009: 138) of history and of art together in powerful, yet poetic ways. He has managed to find ways, beyond the political pamphlet, to reflect these issues through his art practice, developing a stylistic language and technique that give them a powerful and original expression.

²⁵ *A South African Colouring Book* (1974-75) entered the collection of the South African National Gallery in 1996, accession numbers 96/57:1 to 96/57:11.

Half the Sky (1987) officially entered the collection of the South African National Gallery in 2000, accession number 2000/322. The Norwegian government assisted the acquisition financially (Iziko South African Gallery Archive, 1998-2000)

There is, however, a darker, ironic side to some of the results of my research on Gavin Jantjes' academic and artistic footprint in the country of his birth. The University of Cape Town, the school at which he was the only student of colour at the Michaelis School of Fine Art in 1966-67, does not have a single catalogue of his work in its extensive library²⁶. Despite the hardship that he had to endure in order to gain access to art education in South Africa, his persecution by the apartheid regime and, despite his considerable success as an international educator and curator, organising numerous symposia and exhibitions, his own university has never invited him to share his experiences and extensive knowledge with the new generations of students in the now democratic South Africa²⁷. "*The Other Story*" is being taught as part of the curatorship course, however, despite the lack of materials about it. It is true that Jantjes' artistic practice has not had much visibility in the last fifteen years since his move to Norway to lead the National Museum of Art in Oslo as its creative director and curator of international exhibitions. It is also true that there are only two catalogues of his graphic work were ever printed and they date back to the 1970s and 1980s. Nonetheless, his work was included in a number important exhibitions of African and Asian diaspora artists in the UK, many of which also had catalogues published, including "Into the Open: New paintings, prints and sculpture by contemporary black artists" in 1984, the "Third World Within" exhibition curated by Rasheed Araeen in 1986, "Voices from exile" in 1986, "The Essential Black Art" in 1988, "One spirit: black artists against racism: Gavin Jantjes, Juginder Lamba, Jenny McKenzie, Shaheen Merali, Symrath Patti" in 1989, and "The Caribbean Cultural Centre presents : Transforming the crown : African, Asian and Caribbean artists in Britain, 1966-1996" in 1998. Most of them took place before 1994, when acquisitions of such materials would have been difficult, if not impossible. Many of them are currently out of print. This area in the history of art could benefit from further research, particularly with regard to the roles and contributions of South African diaspora artists.

Jantjes' position and location in the diaspora and his experiences as an exile from a repressive apartheid regime has had a profound impact on his practice. As an artist, he has navigated different spaces of political and aesthetic concerns; his ability to merge these different spaces and to find aesthetic languages that reflect them may be seen as one of the manifestations of his diasporic consciousness. His ability to combine his political and cultural activism and to remain committed to his art and to respond to the evolving demands of his practice as an artist could be interpreted as another. The experiences of artists from Africa, who found themselves in diasporic spaces in Western metropolitan centres in the twentieth century as a result of exile or migration, have been inextricably linked with experiences of marginalisation and fraught relationships with the structures of power that sustained the Eurocentric narrations of art history. Gavin Jantjes has actively challenged these structures through his art and through his educational work and his writing. Jantjes' active dialectical position echoes Mikhail Bakhtin's dialogical principle that Kobena Mercer adopted in his approach to signification in the context of African American art historiography:

"The word in language is half someone else's. It becomes one's own ...only when the speaker appropriates the word, adapting it to his own semantic and expressive intention. Prior to this moment of appropriation the word does not exist in a neutral or impersonal language... rather it exists in other people's

²⁶ The only catalogue for "*The Other Story*" exhibition in a public library in the UK is available from the Iziko South African National Gallery library.

²⁷ Personal communication with the artist (29.06.2016) that included his paper "Tales of Diversity" delivered at ELIA, the European League for the Institutes of the Arts in 2015.

mouths, serving other people's intentions: it is from there that one must take the word and make it one's own (Bakhtin, 1981: 293-294 quoted in Mercer, 2007: 146).

Reflecting on the relationship of art, history and the role of the artist in his introduction to the exhibition catalogue dedicated to the four South African winners of the Nobel Peace Prize, Albert Luthuli, Desmond Tutu, F. W. De Klerk and Nelson Mandela, Gavin Jantjes stated:

When one says that art holds a mirror to society, this does not mean it reflects a mirror image. What artists make visible is an extraordinary evocation of human experience. It is a "magical reflection" of past, present and future possibilities and potentials. Good art has the power to recall what has been lost or remains unseen. It transforms ideas into visible objects using whatever technologies are available to the artist. Art's "magical reflection" is cherished because it offers different and novel ways to extract meaning from reality, and it wants nothing more than our engagement with it. The axiom that there is no identity without history and no history without pictures rings true when one considers a country with a history as tumultuous and culturally complex as that of South Africa (Jantjes, 2009: 8).

Summarising the role of the artist as a cultural worker, which has been his role throughout his career regardless of whether he was involved in the politics and policies or not, he stated:

'The socially committed artist and the successful political figure are brave individuals who act with conviction and for a community. Their unselfish actions are often daring, and they pursue their ideas with dogged determination. When art's "magical reflection" advocates societal change, it makes visible the spirit of the people' (Jantjes, 2009: 9).

Being seen as an artist first and as a South African and a person of colour second was central to Gavin Jantjes' concerns, but he always knew that, in order to achieve this, he had to be part of the struggle in his art every bit as much as in politics.

Chapter 3. Marlene Dumas

On self and others

Resting her chin on her hand and looking over her shoulder, a woman is staring at something behind us that we cannot see. She is staring out of the picture frame that the image of her head occupies almost fully; her pale pink face with blue shadows, framed by the burning orange of an unruly mop of hair. Her expression is difficult to read; it seems calm, perhaps thoughtful, but might equally be interpreted as almost blank, lost in a moment - her eyes reflect some light and her nose is almost invisible, adding to this expression of blankness - a riddle-like image. The contrast between the deep black of the support at the bottom of the picture and the flaming orange of the hair is the main component of the painting that could be seen as dramatic in terms of its pictorial language. The way these dark, bluish-black shadows creep up from their bottomless pit at the base of the painting, through the back of the woman's hand and onto her face, offsetting and underlying her paleness, has a somewhat menacing quality. However, there is no sense of urgency or immediate threat emanating from the subject; instead, the painting seems to capture a mundane and fleeting moment in her life. The woman in the image or, to be more precise, in the photographic source that served as the basis for the image, is Marlene Dumas herself. The work, entitled *Evil is Banal*, is her self-portrait from 1984 (Figure 3.1).



Fig. 3.1. Marlene Dumas. *Het Kwaad is Banal/ Evil is Banal*, 1984. Oil paint on canvas. 125 x 105. Collection Van Abbemuseum, Eindhoven.

The striking title, which is based on the book by Hannah Arendt “*Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil*” (1963), combines references to both Duma’s personal history of having grown up as a white South African under the apartheid regime and to the wider philosophical considerations that Arendt discussed regarding the role common people with very limited power can play in crimes against humanity as a result of conformity and the passive acceptance of evil. However, as would become central to

Dumas' practice, the concerns of the subject matter become intertwined with concerns of her media. The artist has written extensively about painting problematizing her chosen medium, taking pains to highlight the separateness of the physical medium with its own set of meanings and expectations from the subject matter as well as the relationship between the two. The self-portrait functions not only as an image or as a representation of herself or, more precisely, of a photograph of herself, an acting and thinking subject, but as a painting, a physical object, that in itself has the potential to be exonerated of any wrong doing on the basis of its status as an art work. In this early work, Dumas highlights the tension between the different planes that come together in the creation of a painting - the subject matter, the image, the painting itself as a medium and as an object. She is interested in the role of the artist in manipulating them and in implicating herself in them. The fundamental question that she seems to be posing in this work is the complexity of that implication. On one hand, she underscores the separateness of the artwork from the artist and from the artist's autobiography (they cannot and should not be understood as being direct manifestations of one another). This separateness is emphasised through the title, which does not involve a direct reference to the artist. On the other hand, she seems to admit, at the same time, that an artist cannot avoid responsibility for his or her creation; in other words, responsibility for the final result of the their creative process. This is manifest in the genre of self-portrait itself (it is undoubtedly Marlene Dumas whom we recognise in the painting) and because of the fact that, despite the lack of a direct reference, we are inclined to read the title as a reference to the artist herself. Furthermore, a certain emotional and ethical removal of self or, as Dumas would later describe it (Dumas, 2014 (1): 105), a degree of separation and an 'amoral touch', were considered by the artist to be necessary preconditions for making good art. All three aspects underlying the self-portrait will be examined in more detail, as all three of them contribute to an understanding of Marlene Dumas' practice in its relationship to the discourse surrounding diaspora, as well to the ideas concerning cultural hybridity and belonging.

It would be very limiting to engage with Marlene Dumas' creative practice without examining her writing. Over the course of her career she has written extensively – poetry, essays, reflections, lectures and speeches. She published a selection of them, initially in 1998 and then again in the new extended edition in 2014 under the title *Sweet nothings: notes and texts*. This conscious use of writing allows not only an opportunity to

hear the artist's voice but also to understand the importance that meaning making through the medium of writing plays in her practice (titles being one of the examples of this). Much of Dumas' writing engages deeply with her creative practice, as well with the reception of her work in the wider art world with its structures of museums, curators, critics, biennales, exhibitions and government bodies. As I was unable to interview the artist, her extensive writing and what appears to be her willingness to comment and discuss her work extensively through various channels (publications, video interviews, published interviews, talks and documentaries) compensates for the lack of direct contact and access to her personal considerations regarding the issues that are central to my research.

A diasporic experience is primarily an individual experience and any examination of diaspora and its role in Marlene Dumas' practice needs to be grounded in the aspects of her biography linked to her journey from South Africa. I will examine various accounts of that journey and its implications for her creative production as perceived by herself and as viewed by others. In a poem, written for the exhibition "Give the People What They Want"²⁸, which featured a painting with the same title dated 1992, Dumas wrote:

From the Postscript.

It has been said: men make history, women autobiographies.

I am aware that I've used a great deal of sexual terminology, but it's all bound up with my subject-matter.

No, they're not all self-portraits.

No, it's not always my daughter. No, I had a happy childhood.

No, I've never been in therapy.

No, I've never slept with museum directors.

Yes, I find compassion the most difficult thing there is and not compatible with creativity.

Yes, I find myself the best example of evil (Dumas, 2014: 71).

This poem reflects the tension between the autobiographical role in her artistic practice and the status of the autobiographical as a gendered and therefore inferior inspiration for an artist; it also, through the conversational form that contains an argument with an unidentified critic or journalist, emphasises the on-going struggle for the interpretation

²⁸ First published in the arts journal *De Witte Raaf* (vol. 8, no. 42, 1993)

and framing of her practice. It may seem that Dumas is simply rejecting attempts to align the meaning of her work with specific biographical events but, in the last two lines of the poem, she raises an argument about the phenomenological foundations of her practice - the relationships involving herself, her subject matter and her artwork, and the tension between the image and the medium and the conversation between herself and others, be they the audience, the critics or the subjects of her paintings and drawings. Her interest in the phenomenology of relationships between self and others, as well as her rejection of closed systems of thought and interpretation, align with the ideas that Mikhail Bakhtin introduced almost a century earlier, as discussed in Chapter 1 of this dissertation. Her self-portrait could be seen as a vehicle to explore these relations. Her conscious use of multiple voices, such as the one in the title, the one coming through the source material of her own photograph and referencing her “biographical” self and her voice as an artist and the maker of the painting are all set into a dialogic relationship. This kind of relationship, according to Bakhtin, allows the revelation of individual voices, combining them but not subordinating them to each other, thus creating a polyphonic work (Bakhtin, 1975). When analysing this work, we can also refer to Bakhtin’s view that the process of self-definition takes place through the process of relating to the other (Bakhtin, 1975: page). In this case, Dumas explores the other within herself, as well as beyond the boundaries of self, in her past and in the present moment, which includes the viewer of the work as the other.

On Past and Present

Marlene Dumas was born in Cape Town, South Africa, in 1953. Having grown up on a farm outside of Cape Town in a white Afrikaans community, she chose to study art at an English-speaking university, the University of Cape Town, at the Michaelis School of Fine Art, where she became exposed to ideas, experiences and people that were progressive, opposed the apartheid ideology and, in some instances, crossed the lines of racial segregation imposed by the apartheid regime (Evenhuis & Verhey, 1997: DVD) (Figure 3.2). On completion of her studies, she was awarded a scholarship that sponsored a two-year study period abroad and chose to go to Holland in 1976 as she felt it was less intimidating than New York, and less antagonistic than London. Going to London would also have upset her mother, who held strong anti-British sentiments (Dumas, 2014 (2): 17). Although she did not speak Dutch, her Afrikaans background would have been perceived as helpful in making such a choice. She enrolled at *Ateliers ‘63*

in Haarlem, an art educational institute founded in 1963, which focused on working with younger artists, where she studied and later worked.



Fig. 3.2. Dumas working at the Michaelis School of Fine Art, 1973.

Photograph by Professor Neville Dubow.

The following references to her initial experiences of the move from South Africa to Holland provide a glimpse into the impact the move had on a young artist. In a letter to her mother that she read out in the film by Rudolf Evenhuis and Joost Verhey (1997), she reflected on the two very different countries and the sense of freedom that she experienced for the first time, attributing it to the lack of prejudice in her new place of abode. Her conclusion was, 'I see South Africa as even a sadder country' (Evenhuis & Verhey, 1997). This letter sets up a dialogue, which may be seen as unavoidable for someone who has moved to a new country, between Dumas' South African background and her life in Holland. This dialogue manifests itself most explicitly in her writing, in which African and South African references are regular and numerous. It is also reflected in her painting practice, which the writing attempts to contextualise and, at times, to exonerate from simplistic autobiographical explanations.

In order to contextualise Marlene Dumas' position in relation to the discourse of diaspora, it is necessary to reflect on the context in which Dumas made the move from

her country of origin to Europe. As a white South African, Dumas was largely shielded from the extremely repressive political climate in the country and, significantly, limited in her exposure to a variety of visual media because the media was closely censored. Television was only introduced into the country in the year of Dumas's departure for Amsterdam (Dumas, 2014 (2): 17). Her exposure to art was also limited to reproductions in books, although her horizons were significantly widened during her studies at the Michaelis School of Fine Art. One of the consequences of the move, which was also one of the driving factors for leaving South Africa for a number of artists, was that leaving enabled them to engage with subject matter that would not have been permitted in South Africa. Pissarra suggested that a number of artists, Gavin Jantjes and Marlene Dumas among them, turned to such subjects (Pissarra et al., 2011: 187). They included overt political content that was critical of the regime; Pissarra provided examples of Jantjes' *A South African Colouring Book* (1974-75) (Figure 3.3) and his posters for the anti-apartheid movement. He also mentioned '... explicitly sexual content, seen in the works by artists as disparate as Dumile, Dumas and Coombes' (2011: 187).

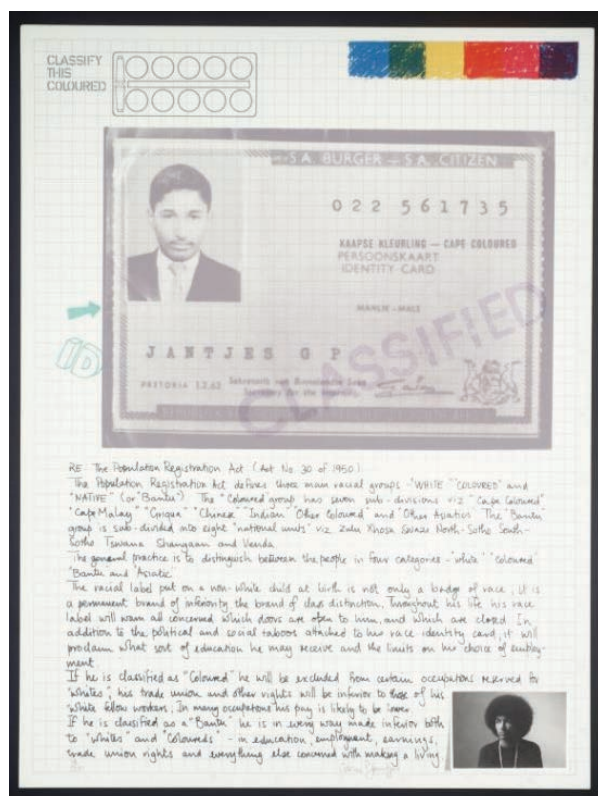


Fig. 3.3. Gavin Jantjes. *Classify this Coloured*. From *A South African Colouring Book*. 1974-75. Silkscreen print on card. 602 x 452 mm. Tate Collection, United Kingdom.

Although the total cultural boycott of South Africa by the international community was only introduced in the 1980s²⁹, even in the years preceding it, young artists' exposure to the international art world was extremely limited. This, according to Dumas herself (Evenhuis & Verhey, 1997: DVD), was one of the important reasons for her departure. Unlike a number of other South African artists who felt compelled to leave because they were either prevented from studying and art practice due to racial oppression or faced persecution by the regime for political reasons, Marlene Dumas was the first to describe her move as a free choice, in which the politics of the country, although important, did not invoke the same sense of inevitability and urgency. In another essay, for the catalogue of her exhibition "Measuring Your Own Grave" in New York in 2008, Richard Shiff quoted Dumas as giving the following three main reasons for her desire to leave her home country: 'My whole love life was mixed up. My politics were mixed up. My concept of art was mixed up. It was a good time to leave' (Shiff, 2008: 152). The political component was related to her feeling disconnected from her culture, in the name of which atrocities were being committed by the apartheid regime (Cooke, 2015: on-line). The art component was related to her rejection of painting and her interest in other media, such as collage, on one hand, and on the other, her natural talent for painting that some of her lecturers and she herself felt was her main strength (Shiff, 2008: 152). In her own words: 'the townships were burning. Yet I felt totally incapable and inadequate to address the political system of apartheid in my work' (Dumas, 2014: 17). Despite the challenges that living in South Africa presented to the young artist, her move into diaspora was not a forced one, as it was based on a number of reasons, some of them personal and linked to her career development as a young artist. It did not result from the situation of either forced or voluntary exile. In a number of interviews (Evenhuis & Verhey, 1997: DVD; Dumas, 2014(2): 17), Dumas discussed that she always had the relative comfort of knowing that, 'if things did not go well in Europe, she would just go back to her mother'. Only once her daughter was born did she realise

²⁹ In the 1960s, the worldwide Anti-Apartheid Movement began to campaign for *cultural* boycotts of apartheid South Africa. Artists were requested not to present or allow their works be hosted in South Africa. On December 2, 1968, under resolution 2396, the United Nations General Assembly made the request to all states and organisations "to suspend cultural, educational, sporting and other exchanges" with the racist regime and with organisations or institutions in South Africa that practiced apartheid. Individual countries and artists' organisations adopted their own resolutions. Sporting and cultural boycotts did not have the same impact as economic sanctions, but they did much to raise consciousness of the global condemnation of apartheid amongst ordinary South Africans.

On December 10, 1980 the United Nations General Assembly adopted a special resolution on the cultural boycott of South Africa. The Committee of Artists of the World against Apartheid was established in Paris with the support of the Special Committee against Apartheid (SAHO: on-line).

that the situation had changed and her move became a more permanent one (Dumas, 2014 (1): 165).

Although Marlene Dumas never described herself as an exile, the introduction of the cultural boycott could be linked to how the reception and contextualisation of Dumas as an artist in the international context was framed³⁰. Dumas' status as a white South African living in Amsterdam, particularly post-1980 when a total cultural boycott of South Africa by the Netherlands was introduced and international activism against the apartheid regime was gaining ground, must have presented a certain challenge to those critics and journalists who referred to Dumas' biography in order to rationalise her work. The idea of 'a kind of voluntary exile' that began to take shape in writings about Dumas became a way to reconcile the international opposition to apartheid with Dumas' background as a white Afrikaans woman from South Africa. In a more recent interview, timed to coincide with her retrospective exhibition "The Image as Burden" (2014-2015) that toured several international museums, including the Tate Modern in London and the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam, Rachel Cooke suggested that 'her status as an exile was helpful, a kind of protection against criticism and failure' (Cooke, 2015: on-line), while Dumas again mentions never having intended to stay and her mother's home as a refuge 'if it all fails' (Cooke, 2015: on-line).

It is worth examining one of the more direct and unambiguous descriptions of Marlene Dumas as an exile, which is contained in the main catalogue essay for her solo exhibition "Marlene Dumas: Measuring Your Own Grave" (2008- 2009), curated by Cornelia Butler, which was staged at the Museum of Contemporary Art in Los Angeles and travelled to the Museum of Modern Art in New York and the Menil Collection in Houston, Texas. In her essay, Butler described Dumas as living in Amsterdam 'in a kind of self-imposed exile since 1976' and explained Dumas' choice to travel to Amsterdam rather than New York 'because race relations in the US reminded her of the apartheid regime she was fleeing' (Butler, 2008: 43). In personal correspondence with the curator quoted in the footnotes of the essay, Dumas was quite clear about her motives for leaving, and was at pains not to present them as a form of anti-apartheid activism or

³⁰ The impact of the boycott is comprehensively discussed in Mario Pissarra's chapter in *Visual Century, South African Art in Context*, Volume 3, Chapter 8. Pissarra stated that the target of the boycott was not the individual artists, but the racist state and its organisations and proponents. Although affected, many artists, particularly white artists, were able to take part in certain cultural activities abroad. In any event, according to Pissarra, white artists would have been even less affected in relative terms compared to their black compatriots, who were often denied such basic human rights as citizenship and freedom of movement, as well as access to art education, meaning that chances of travelling abroad were almost non-existent. Nonetheless, Pissarra asserted that 'the boycott had a profound impact at multiple levels' (Pissarra, 2001: 187), including dividing South African artists who supported it from those who did not, as well as forcing them to re-evaluate their own positions and interactions with the oppressive systems of the racist regime.

political exile (Butler, 2008: 74). Although not completely contradicting Dumas' own statements quoted earlier and their correspondence, Butler chose to emphasise the forced, unavoidable and almost life-saving character of the journey that the young artist undertook from Cape Town to Amsterdam, which Dumas explicitly rejected. In her own words, Dumas found America less appealing 'not because I had such high principles; it was more intuitive' (Butler, 2008: 74). The curator linked most aspects of Dumas' artistic practice, such as her use of language, her subject matter, and her interest in working with ready-made images as her source material to the artist's experience of apartheid in her own country. She seems to ground Dumas' practice primarily in the artist's biography, foregrounding the political (in the historical sense) in these aspects at the expense of the artist's concerns about the politics of her medium, its legacies and the politics of the image (Butler, 2008: 62, 74).

I will examine how such framing could or could not be justified by looking at both Dumas' works and her writing, focusing particularly on those instances in which she evokes Africa or South Africa in her own descriptions and contextualisation of her work or public and critical responses to it. What becomes clear from analysing her volume *Sweet Nothings: notes and texts* (1998 and 2014) is that her references to Africa and South Africa are omnipresent despite the fact that, in many instances, the content of her writing appears to resist the autobiographical reading of her work. In one of the most famous and often-quoted statements that originally appeared in 1994 in a text entitled *Dutch Art?* the artist wrote:

'South Africa is my content and Holland is my form, but then, the images I deal with are familiar to almost everyone, everywhere. I deal with second-hand images and first-hand experiences' (Dumas, 2014:85).

In 2013, Theodora Vischer, a long-time friend and one of the curators of Marlene Dumas' retrospective "The Image as Burden", which was staged across three different art institutions³¹, asked her to elaborate on the meaning of that statement; in response, Dumas said:

...You know, people always thought that South Africa and apartheid were the things that influenced me most, but what I kept on trying to make clear was that, besides coming from South Africa with its apartheid regime, I learned so many other things. I hadn't produced any proper artworks yet but I'd thought and learnt a lot about painting and art in general. What I am trying to say is that I

³¹ Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam, 6 September 2014 – 4 January 2015; Tate Modern, London, 5 February – 10 May 2015; Foundation Beyeler, Basel, 30 May 2015 – 6 September 2015;

had already developed a sense for the problems in art back then in South Africa, but more on a theoretical level. It was only when I came to Amsterdam, that I began – very slowly – to explore these ideas for my own art and to transform them into concrete works (Dumas, 2014: 171).

It may seem that Dumas' intention is to reject any unambiguous links between her practice and her South African background but, as is often the case, in both her writing and her artworks, the moment the readers or viewers seem to find a firm grounding in relation to her textual or visual work, she immediately unsettles these expectations. In the paragraph following her rejection of simplified links between her biography and her practice, she suggests that the story would not be complete without mentioning her love of the African masks and African sculpture she was exposed to in her country of birth and their influence on her work (Dumas, 2014: 171-172). Although admitting that this angle of interpretation is something that she came to appreciate as time went by, she nonetheless felt that it was a valid one, particularly regarding her work created for the exhibition "Not From Here" that took place in 1994 in New York. It was also in the context of this exhibition that the following poem appeared, addressing Dumas' position as an outsider culturally, politically and in terms of her artistic background and loyalties:

My fatherland is South Africa
my mothertongue is Afrikaans
my surname is French.
My mother always wanted me to go to Paris
she thought Art was French,
because of Picasso.
I thought Art was American,
because of Artforum.
I thought Mondrian was American too,
and that Belgium was part of Holland.
I live in Amsterdam
and have a Dutch passport.
Sometimes I think I'm not a real artist,
because I'm too half-hearted;
and I never quite know where I am.
(Dumas, 2014: 84)

It was also in the context of this exhibition with its evocative title "Not From Here" that Dumas created the work *The Painter* (1994), which she herself described as 'an important decision' for the show (Dumas, 20014:171). In the work (Figure 3.4), which is based on a photograph of Dumas' daughter Helena, the figure of the child seems to hover between the picture plane and the pale, almost devoid of any detail, background. Her face is indeed mask-like; her expression is serious, but is not sweet, nor ominous or intimidating. The greenish shadows around her face create a sense of other-worldliness, while colours

that are balanced between warm and cold create a sense of visual ambiguity, which is further enhanced by the deep blood-red of her stained hands that hang next to the sides of her body as if in resignation or, perhaps, anticipation. Only the title provides a suggestion to resolve the visual conundrum - but only up to a point. Even in the title, the ambiguity continues - is the painter referring to an artist or not, is the title symbolic, and why is the focus again on the material rather than on the subject? The sense of the fluctuating meaning, which is never completed, is one of Dumas' central concerns as a painter.



Fig. 3.4. Marlene Dumas. *The Painter*. 1994.

Oil paint on canvas. 200 x 100 cm. The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Fractional and promised gift of Martin and Rebecca Eisenberg.

In this sense, it could be argued that the work is a kind of representation of herself, not as a comment on identity or biography, but rather on the problems of painting itself that are critical to who she is as an artist. In both her practice and in her own writing and its contextualisation, Marlene Dumas appears to shrug off assumptions and stereotypes about her identity and simplified biographical explanations. She is making her audience think of Africa and South Africa as part of her background, but on terms that fall outside of general assumptions and stereotypes. In its essence, this is parallel to her process of making us question our assumptions and stereotypes about the relationship between image and painting that has long preoccupied Dumas, and which found its ultimate reflection in her retrospective with its own multi-layered title – “The Image as Burden” – based on the title of her painting of 1993 (Figure 3.5). The ambiguity of these relationships seems critical to an understanding of Dumas’ work.



Figure 3. 5. Marlene Dumas. *The Image as Burden*. 1993. Oil paint on canvas. 40 x 50 cm. Collection of Mimi Dusselier.

As pointed out earlier, Dumas’ own writing abounds in references to South Africa and reflections on her experiences of the transition from South Africa to the Netherlands. Coming from an Afrikaans cultural background, she experienced the subtle, but nonetheless significant, misalignment of the two languages, Dutch and Afrikaans,

and of the two cultures. She also experienced the transition from being designated an *allochtoon* (the old-fashioned Dutch term commonly used to refer to the Other, a cultural alien) due to her Afrikaans background, to seeing this designation being increasingly transferred to immigrants from the Middle East and Africa, the experience that once again highlighted for Dumas the contrived and artificial nature of such designations, which often entail the negative casting of difference and racial prejudice as a consequence (Dumas, 2014: 165).

There does not seem to be direct reference to the artist's own experiences and discussions of diaspora or the diasporic condition in her writings, partly because the discourse on diaspora is a relatively recent phenomenon that tends to focus on migrations that took place in the period since the early nineties, but also because of Dumas' background as a white Afrikaans woman and her seemingly steady and progressive incorporation into the art world as a Dutch or European artist. This can be traced via the exhibitions in which Dumas has been invited to participate since her arrival in Europe. A selection of the exhibitions that position themselves as representing Dutch or European art and/ or artists is provided below:

The Netherlands representation at the Bienal de Sao Paulo: *Holanda 184* in 1985.
Art from Europe, Tate Gallery, London in 1987
6 Dutch Artists at The Fruitmarket Gallery in Edinburgh in 1989
Identita et Alterita: Figures of the Body 1895-1995 (Biennale of Venice), Palazzo Grassi, Venice, Italy, 1995 (The Dutch Pavilion)
Biennale of Venice, Palazzo Grassi, Venice, Italy, 1997
Art of the 20th Century: Flemish and Dutch Painting from Van Gogh, Ensor, Magritte, Mondrian to Contemporary Artists, Palazzo Grassi, Venice, Italy, 1997
Europeans in 2010 at Zwirner & Wirth in New York

At the same time, Dumas continues to be included in exhibitions that represent South African art and/ or artists. The following list includes the most prominent ones:

Art Against Apartheid in Amsterdam in 1985
12 artists from South Africa, Museum 't Coopmanshûs, Franeker, Netherlands, 1995
Africus. First Biennale of Contemporary Art, Johannesburg, South Africa, 1995
Image and Form: Prints, Drawings, and Sculpture from Southern Africa and Nigeria (I), Brunei Gallery – School of Oriental and African Studies -University of London, London, United Kingdom, 1997
Aspects of South African Art, 1903-1999, Sandton Civic Gallery, Johannesburg, South Africa, 2001
Painting at the Edge of the World, Walker Art Center, Minneapolis, United States, 2001
Passport to South Africa: Arte contemporanea sudafricana, Centro Trevi, Bolzano, Italy, 2002
Africa Remix (I), Museum Kunst Palast, Dusseldorf, Germany, 2004
The ID of South African Art (Van Den Ende Collection), Fortis Circus Theatre, Scheveningen, Netherlands, 2004-2006
Africa Remix (III), Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris, France, 2005

Africa Remix (II), Hayward Gallery, London, United Kingdom, 2005
Africa Remix (VI), Johannesburg Art Gallery, Johannesburg, South Africa, 2007
CAPE 2007, Look Out Hill, Cape Town, South Africa, 2007

It is interesting to note that, in the case of Marlene Dumas, discussions of her positioning within the discourse, as well as within the structures of the art world such as exhibitions, biennales and museums, tend to focus on ideas about belonging rather than being couched in terms of diasporic identity or post-apartheid production. Gavin Jantjes noted the emergence of the term ‘post-apartheid’: ‘It was a label that lazily grouped all South African art production of the mid-1990s under one umbrella, disregarding their sometimes disparate contexts and intentions’ (Jantjes, 2011: 21). Perhaps Marlene Dumas’ position as a South African artist was already not being seen as unambiguously attributable at that time. What is more certain is Dumas’ conscious engagement in the discussion of her dual belonging and her rejection of any one-dimensional or restrictive definition. In 2008, on the occasion of her exhibition “Intimate Relations” at the South African National Gallery, she was asked to choose whether she considered herself to be a Dutch or a South African artist; however, she rejected the idea that ‘she could not have it both ways’. Marlene Dumas stated that ‘she did want it both ways and more ways’ (Bedford, 2008: on-line). In this context, Dumas’ statement points to her continuous struggle against clear-cut boundaries and her affinity with ambiguity; it also shows Dumas’ awareness of the implications of such discussions, which seem to be unacceptable to the artist. Nira Yuval-Davis points to the underlying politics of the questions about belonging:

Belonging is about emotional attachment, about feeling ‘at home’ and – as Michael Ignatieff points out (2001) – about feeling ‘safe’. In the days of ‘global war on terrorism’ such a definition gets a new poignancy. Belonging tends to be naturalized and becomes articulated and politicized only when it is threatened in some way. The politics of belonging comprises specific political projects aimed at constructing belonging to a particular collectivity or collectivities which themselves are being constructed in these projects in very specific ways. Citizenship and identities, as well as cultures and traditions – in fact all signifiers of borders and boundaries play central roles in discourses of the politics of belonging (Yuval-Davis, 2003: 2-3).

Dumas described one of her early experiences of how discussions of belonging and identity could be appropriated by opposing agendas in her 2012 piece “*Every Prize has*

its Price”, when she was given the Vermeer Award, the most prestigious award for a Dutch artist:

It wasn't my intention to stay in Holland, although it was wonderful to walk the streets alone at night and read all the banned books. ...Holland was very good to me. I will always appreciate that. Holland gave me a place where I was able to take my distance. In 1976 TV reached South Africa for the first time and in 1983 I made my first appearance on Dutch TV. I thought the show was about the beauty of diversity, but there was a subtext, as the real focus of the program addressed the feelings of discontent amongst the Dutch about foreign artists taking advantage of the social benefit system (Dumas, 2014: 165).

In an essay entitled “*Dutch Art?*” (1994), Dumas tackles the question of her belonging and affiliation directly, asking herself a question that she must have heard asked or implied by others, namely why she would participate in group shows of Dutch art abroad or continue to live in Holland when she does not see herself as either a Dutch Artist or Dutch. Her answer was unexpected and very personal, but also genuine. It captured some of the experiences of living in the so-called in-between space of different cultures – the reasons she gave included being ‘scared, a coward, an opportunist and lonely’ (Dumas, 2014: 85). In the same piece, she contemplated her position between and within the two physical geographies and their emotional and political imprints:

Thinking about myself in a Dutch context cannot be done without thinking about South Africa.... The Dutch took me in....South Africa remains my cruel muse and judge, which like the Christian God cannot be appeased. While the Dutch take my hand and tell me I'm ok. Holland allowed me to paint, because they believe in painting (Dumas, 2014: 85).

In this statement, the artist seems almost tormented by her position as belonging both to South Africa and to her adopted homeland. The torment expressed evokes ideas of the double consciousness discussed by W. E. B. Du Bois, although the relationships that the artist expresses could almost be seen as: Her country of birth is the one for which she longs but which makes her feel tormented, and almost rejected, while her adopted country provides respite and accepts her as an artist and a painter. One might go so far as to suggest that, in this particular instance, Dumas sees herself as a kind of exile, not a political one, but an exile in terms of her painting practice. The first sentence also refers us back to Bakhtin's thoughts about the multiplicity of voices and their mutual dependence and equal dialogic role signifying identity (Bakhtin, 1975).

Dumas was not the only artist who chose to stay abroad following the end of apartheid. Among those who would have been unable to return before the end of apartheid and who chose to continue to live abroad were Feni Dumile, Gerard Sekoto and Gavin Jantjes (Pissarra, 2001: 187).

For Dumas, the duality and mutual implication of the two cultural contexts described above, in her view, are linked to her practice. Dumas described the “problem” of her dual belonging in the same way that she described a painting, in terms of form and content, the complicated relationship between the two, the tension between them, the importance of separating one from the other and the importance of not confusing them while appreciating both for what they are. The important message, as with her painting, is that neither part could be assumed to stand for the whole; neither her South African nor her Dutch cultural affinities and experiences are primary. She refuses to choose between them in the same way that she would not be able to choose between the form and the content of her work. If we make these connections, her painting *The Image as Burden* (1993) acquires further significance, particularly in the light of her comments about South Africa being the ‘cruel muse and judge’ (Dumas, 2014: 85).

This would help to explain the constant presence of South Africa in the background of her practice, a presence that cannot be ignored but which would also not satisfy Dumas as a short cut to an explanation of her work³². This presence, in my view, involves the internal dialogue between her two backgrounds and other voices that are thrown into the spotlight, creating a polyphony of meaning that is irreducible to either South Africa or Holland, painting or photographic image, or form or content.

³² Despite her rejection of the ideology of apartheid and due to her privileged (compared to her black compatriots) position as a white Afrikaans woman, Dumas was able to maintain close contact with her family in her country of birth. Following the democratic elections in the country, she provided financial and personal support to a number of projects in the country, including donations of work and funds for artist residency programmes at the South African National Gallery. Dumas gifted a series of portrait drawings on paper entitled *The Next Generation* from 1995 to the South African National Gallery. She has also donated funds to the residency and research project “Fresh”, which enabled seven young South African artists, including Moshekwa Langa, to participate in month-long residencies at the South African National Gallery in 2001 and 2002. “Fresh” project was funded by the Prince Bernhard Cultural Fund via an award to Marlene Dumas. The objectives of the project were to support the development of young South African artists who had captured international attention or who were just emerging on the local scene, and to connect the South African public with the artists and their work (Langa, Murinik & Bedford, 2003).

On Language and Humour

I have already mentioned the importance that Marlene Dumas places on the use of language and writing as part of her practice. Her experience of living with several different languages (Afrikaans, Dutch and English) and of negotiating among them is directly linked to both her studies at the University of Cape Town (her move from an Afrikaans-speaking community to a English-medium university) and her move to Holland where, despite learning some Dutch, she continues to rely on English as her language for thinking and writing about art. The concept of translation, both language translation and cultural translation, with all the attendant ambiguities, inadequacies and, at times, productive and humorous slipups is something that is highly familiar and inspirational for the artist. She transfers these concepts into her art production and, in a remark in 2003, stated: 'Art is not a Mirror: Art is a translation of that which you do not know' (Dumas, 2014: 6). As someone who is forced to function in the spaces in which different cultures meet and have to be "translated" into one other, Dumas is not only familiar with such problematic issues, but uses them as a generative force. She even applies the same terminology when discussing the problems of art that she explores in her painting practice; for instance, when she focuses on issues of interpretation and meaning. However, she also mixes the politics of language with the politics of art when she gives provocative and ambiguous titles to her works and her exhibitions. The paintings *Losing (her meaning)* and *Waiting (for meaning)*, both from 1988, (Figures 3.6 and 3.7) that were shown at the solo exhibition "Waiting (for Meaning)" at Kunsthalle zu Kiel and at the travelling show "Miss Interpreted" (1992), originally staged at the Van Abbemuseum in Eindhoven and curated by Jan Debbaut, attest to the fact that Dumas engages with the ideas related to meaning making and interpretation in a broader phenomenological sense. She does not restrict these concepts to the domain of language, culture or art. For her, these issues are inseparable from the self- Other relationships that underpin the process of meaning making. According to Dumas' own comments about the reception of the "Miss Interpreted" exhibition (1992), her point is not the correctness or incorrectness of someone's expectations (although, as discussed earlier, she has often been at pains to reject typecasting and stereotypes), but the politics of meaning making and interpretation.



Fig. 3.6. Marlene Dumas. *Loosing (her meaning)*. 1988. Oil paint on canvas. 50 x 70 cm. Private Collection.



Fig. 3.7. Marlene Dumas. *Waiting (for meaning)*. 1988. Oil paint on canvas. 50 x 70 cm. Kunsthalle zu Kiel collection.

Humour and irony are indispensable parts of Dumas' language, both in its pictorial and linguistic incarnations. They are not only the coping mechanisms that provide the freedom to address serious and (at times) grave thematics, but should also be seen as the product of the in-between space in which mismatches and misalignments are part of everyday reality, and where humour and irony play the role of an alternative liminal space that is less restrictive and determined. They act as a kind of compensation for the sense of loss that is inevitable in any process of translation. The following two statements reflect Dumas' openness to and use of humour in her work:

In my exhibition *Not from Here* (1994) there's black and white as races. And there's black and white as colours. There's pink bodies and dark blue faces. There's black people who are yellow and white people who are dark and skins peeling off and eyes left out. And sometimes it's also a little bit funny (Dumas 2014: 87).

From *The Perfect Lover, the Absent Lover and the Daughter* (1996):

At the same time, the medium (the colours, the textures and the brush strokes and gestures) has to have a lot of freedom too, so it can run into its own paths of chance and surprise. I take pure joy in the making and in the material qualities of the work. Even if the work uses 'sad' images (the 'what' may be painful, but the 'how' is always joyful). The work is not manic, nor depressive. The 'how' smiles at the 'what'. There is nothing as funny as unhappiness says Samuel Beckett. This is my sense of humour (Dumas, 2014: 106).

This humour, irony and word play could be seen as examples of Dumas' resistance to the process of stereotyping and type casting, but it is also a response to and, perhaps, an expression of her own experience of finding herself in a situation in which her own expectations and assumptions underwent a similar process of being destabilised.

On Hybridity and Self/Other Relations

The tension between image and painting, artwork and meaning, that Dumas asserts to be at the centre of her practice, when viewed in the context of her dual nationality (she received Dutch citizenship in 1989, the year her daughter Helena was born) and her relationship with both South Africa and Holland, makes it necessary to draw some parallels between Dumas' approach to contextualising her practice and Sarat

Maharaj's important essay on cultural hybridity and cultural translation – '*Perfidious Fidelity: the Untranslatability of the Other*' (1994). One of the starting points for this parallel is biographical; both Dumas and Maharaj have experienced the South African apartheid regime's ideological treatment of difference as insurmountable. They both witnessed the tragedy, as well as absurdity, that resulted from the imposition of the artificially determined grid of segregation that separated races and cultures. As Maharaj wrote:

[U]ntranslatability was given a singular twist by apartheid for its own ends. It projected the impossibility of translation, of transparency, to argue that self and other could never translate into or know each other. This sense of opacity served to underpin its doctrine of an absolute 'epistemic barrier' – grounds for institutionalizing a radical sense of ethnic and cultural difference and separateness. Self and other were deemed to be locked in their own discreet, pure spaces (Maharaj, 1994: 29).

Marlene Dumas expressed her own complicated relationship with certainties of terms and definitions in a text entitled *Against the Wall. Letter to David* (2010) as follows: 'is it because the rhetoric of South African apartheid feeds my distrust of definitions and at the same time my longing for them? The naming of things and people. The spirit of the Law against the letter of the Law' (Dumas, 2014: 157). Although Sarat Maharaj's and Marlene Dumas' experiences under apartheid could not be equated in any way due to Dumas' privileged position as a white Afrikaans woman, nonetheless, Dumas' writing shows how it left a profound and lasting impact on her and how she came to see it, as discussed previously in this chapter, as the epitome of evil (Evenhuis et al., 1997: DVD). Marlene Dumas' practice and its reception could be viewed as built around different manifestations or forms of translation. The following could be highlighted:

- (a) Her translation of photographic images into paintings and drawings;
- (b) The translation of the motivations and inspirations behind her practice into poems, essays and other writing;
- (c) Translation of her work by curators and critics for the audiences; and
- (d) Translation, in a symbolic and personal meaning-making way, of her works by the audiences themselves.

Her consequent engagement with the theme and practice of instability in the relationship of meaning, language and art and the process of translation among them could thus be traced back not only to her experiences as a foreigner settling in a new country, a diasporic subject in a wide sense of the term, but also to the first-hand experience of the ideology of purity and singular, pre-defined fixed meanings and cultural paradigms.

Maharaj's essay also casts the idea of hybridity in a new light. By the mid-nineties, the term and the idea behind it had acquired central status and were validated within the discourse of globalisation, the post-colonial world order and the new internationalism; they became seen as the main counterpoint to the ideas of purity and singularity. What Maharaj is attempting to do in his essay is to remove some of the shine of the dangerous cliché from the concept of hybridity that has allowed it to slip into the equally static and limited opposition to the idea of purity, serving as its binary opposite. He draws attention to those spaces and shades of meaning, as well as other barely definable or articulable traces of meaning, that are lost in the process of translation. He highlights the fact that the hybrid is, in fact, a sign of the failure of translation and should be seen as one of the manifestations of the limits of cultural translatability, and that this limitation is where its viable power resides. He stated:

“The aim is to prevent it from narrowing down into a reductive, celebratory term. To record it in a more circumspect key involves defining it as a concept that unceasingly plumbs the depths of the untranslatable and that is continually being shaped by that process. It is to re-inscribe it with a double-movement that cuts across ‘optimism and pessimism, the opaque and the crystal-clear’- to activate it as a play-off between poles. It amounts to re-indexing hybridity as an unfinished, self-unthreading force, even as a concept against itself. At any rate, as an open-ended one that is shot through with memories and intimations of the untranslatable’ (Maharaj, 1994: 29)

For Dumas, who described her practice in terms of the relationship between the self and other, and between content and meaning, as well as a process of dealing with ‘second-hand images while applying first-hand experiences’ (Dumas, 2014(1): 85), the sense of hybridity and of navigating the shadowy spaces of the untranslatable appear to be at the core of her approach. She is interested in the tension, in what is lost and what could be found in the process of translation of a real life event or personal experience into, first, a photographic image and then, through her own creative process, into drawings or paintings, which function as physical objects, two-dimensional representations and, at the same time, as works of art in which the surface carries as much ‘baggage’ as does the image. Dumas’ practice is about what is lost in translation and what is gained. She emphasises her paintings’ many failures as images, but rejects

these failures as having anything to do with their success as paintings. As Virginia MacKenny pointed out,

Dumas acknowledges struggling with representation, veering between ‘rejecting the figure, the image with all its loaded meanings and interpretations and responsibilities and limitations and prescriptions and descriptions; and then again embracing language, naming and codes and logic to connect to others...’. She finds a route between the two extremes through paint itself, creating a telling interface between rendition, subject, and content (Dumas, 2014: 71).

Maharaj’s writing follows that of Jacques Derrida, a French philosopher who ‘advances the view of meaning –making as partial and speculative, one in which the loss of sense mutates into a new sense’ (Maharaj, 1994: 32). It seems significant that Dumas reflects, although indirectly and in her poetic and metaphorical way, on the impact and limitations of structuralism and post-structuralist philosophers, whose work has been widely influential within the fields of art history and visual culture studies. In a piece written in 2004 in connection with her painting *The Death of the Author* (2003) (Figure 8), she used the image of the writer Céline on his deathbed, and seemed to make reference to Roland Barthes’ famous essay from 1967 (Barthes, 1972).



Fig. 3.8. Marlene Dumas. *Death of the Author*. 2003. Oil paint on canvas. 40 x 50. Collection Jolie van Leeuwen.

Dumas appears to follow an argument that insists on the separation of the reading of her work from its original source, on the necessary removal of the context of a painting's origin from engagement with it. However, in a characteristic ironic and destabilising twist of the narrative which, until that point seemed consistent, she introduces a seemingly unrelated anecdote from Jacques Derrida's visit to South Africa and his reaction to the proceedings of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. Reportedly, Derrida said that 'one could not forgive the unforgivable and one could not forgive in the name of the dead' (Derrida, quoted in Dumas, 2014:137). According to Dumas, an African colleague said in response: 'I can, because I am in contact with the dead, they speak to me and are with me. Thus why may I not speak for them?' (Dumas, 2014:137). The inclusion of this story not only comments on Dumas's own stated inability to paint a portrait of her father, whose death (when she was 12) was the only death she witnessed personally, but also emphasises how imbedded in their own cultural and biographical context the commentators are, even when they argue about the irrelevance of that context. What Dumas seems to insist on in this statement is not the relative merits of including or disregarding the origin or the original context of an art work or art practice, but her interest in the tension between the two. The space in which this tension and the process of dealing with it occur is the process of translation or interpretation, and ultimately the process of relating to the other in a Bakhtinian sense. Maharaj's ideas allow us to approach Dumas' artistic practice as a space characterised by fluid hybridity and as an in-between space. In her interview with Gavin Jantjes for *A fruitful incoherence: dialogues with artists on internationalism*, published by INIVA in 1998, when confronted with the question about her life in the two different worlds, of being both a Dutch and a South African artist, Dumas, metaphorically speaking, retreated to her studio and, by extension, her practice and identified them as her only real home. She accepts that her true location is not a geographical one in Europe or in Africa, but the space of art itself and that, for her, one of the most important qualities of that space is its 'in-between quality'. The artist locates herself in relation Jantjes' notion of the new internationalism as being in the in-between space but, in so far as this applies to her artistic practice, she views 'art as the space between people' (Jantjes, 1998: 50).

As was the case with Maharaj's essay, when analysing the interview and discussion between Dumas and Jantjes above, it is important to be cognisant of their autobiographical connection via South Africa, their country of origin, and of their respective journeys into diaspora. It is no less crucial to remember the different positions

and reasons for leaving that compelled them to embark on that journey. Gavin Jantjes was forced to leave South Africa due to the censorship of his work and the racial segregation that imposed limits on his practice. He was not able to return until the demise of apartheid for the same political reasons. By recognising the diasporic space in all its heterogeneity, he is able to connect his and Dumas' experiences as cultural in-betweens despite these differences. Jantjes' discussion of Dumas' groups of portraits, particularly her *Black Drawings* from 1991- 1992 (Figure 3.9) draws attention to the dialogue that this work elicits and its ability to 'genuinely seek knowledge about our differences' (Jantjes, 1998: 14). The work needs to be seen as an engagement and, to use Julia Kristeva's term, to enable to "see the foreigner in ourselves" (Kristeva, 1997). This controversial work has forced the most linearly 'politically correct' explanations from curators and critics, who have framed it as the artist's response to apartheid. For Dumas, the work was about 'freeing from apartheid'. According to her, it was an exploration of the colour black in all of its materiality and of individual subjects in all of their particularity of expression, poses and relationships to the camera and the process of being photographed. As Dumas noted with some irony, people cannot help regarding individuals grouped together as homogeneous, and 'were so concerned about being politically correct that they were politically wrong' (Dumas cited in Jantjes, 1998: 62). For both Jantjes and Dumas, the presence of apartheid and South Africa's liberation from it in their respective trajectories as artists is beyond doubt, not in terms of direct subject matter but rather in terms of the process of dealing with its underling structures that position difference as a rigid binary relationship that is heavily prejudiced.

Gavin Jantjes talks perceptively about the response of many Western curators and institutions to the opening up of South Africa after the end of apartheid as 'limiting the scope of artistic production (of these artists) to the realities of apartheid- and thus to the past' (Jantjes, 2011: 27). In this statement, Jantjes alludes to this approach as a slightly evolved but essentially the same version of the quest for authenticity and uncontaminated originality among Western curators in the work of artists from Africa and the Global South, typecasting these cultures as unchanging and static. It is important to question this practice because, while celebrating the end of apartheid via 'post-apartheid themed exhibitions', they were in fact extending its practices of segregation and separate development, albeit in the context of the international art world and the recognised canonical structures. Marlene Dumas expressed the same sentiment in her

comment about the way her *Black Drawings* (1991-92) were contextualised by the American curator, as described earlier.



Fig. 3.9. Marlene Dumas. *Black Drawings*. 1991-92. 111 drawings, one slate sheet. Ink on paper and slate. 279 x 333 cm overall; 27.9 x 33.3 cm each, slate 23 x 29.5 cm. De Pont Museum of Contemporary Art, Tilburg.

There are many ways to approach Marlene Dumas' practice - many volumes have been written about her work, two of them being written by the artist herself, but her main texts remain her drawings and paintings themselves. The debates in which she is interested may carry traces of different geographies, political systems and personal traumas, but it is people, the human figures, which confront us when we look at her work. The process of engaging with her art requires of us to think about many possible relationships and conditions of exchange: between two subjects as in a sensual exchange, between two subjects in the exchange of looking, between the artist and the viewer, between the viewer and the painting medium, and between the artist and the painting medium, between the painting medium and the subject. The reward of such an

engagement is a deeper understanding of ourselves, not only of our loneliness and disconnection in an ever-increasingly polarised and alienated world but, more importantly for Dumas, in our inevitable definition of self through others – and it is in this in-between space that the boundaries between the two have the potential to recede.

Chapter 3. Moshekwa Langa.

The Artist and the Art World: Origins and Positions.

In 2008, the Museum of Modern Art in Los Angeles organised an exhibition titled 'Marlene Dumas: Measuring Your Own Grave'. A few pages into the catalogue, the image opposite the preface takes us into Dumas' studio (Figure 4 1). The space is framed as a close-up shot of her files and folders packed on the shelves – her 'image bank', as the caption explains. Marlene Dumas is well known for using photographic imagery from various printed media as the source material in her work. The photograph in question is meant to convey an insight into the background to her practice, the inner workings of her mind and imagination. Cornelia Butler, the editor of the volume and the curator of the exhibition, placed another image of Dumas' studio on the first page of her own essay about Dumas' practice included in the catalogue. In the essay, she made several comments about the way Dumas' archive of images, located in her studio, functions in her view: 'Far from an organized atlas, the contents of Dumas's archive function as a filter, constantly reshuffled in the artist's imagination and waking consciousness' (Butler: 2008: 45). Later, Butler asserted: 'Dumas's hunting and gathering of pictures of all kinds is an almost entropic way to create visual knowledge, the end result being a painting' (2008: 45). The placement of the studio photographs alludes to the lineage linking the source material and the works presented in the catalogue and the exhibition. In other words, it appears to refer to their history and genealogy. The first image (Figure 4.1) also has a kind of *studiolo*-like effect, framing a glimpse into the private space of a famous contemporary artist, not unlike the privileged spaces of high learning, aesthetic appreciation and solitary contemplation of the famous art patrons and artists of the past. Crowded into the upper left-hand corner of the image, but nevertheless clearly visible from behind the shelves, is a striking portrait of a man looking straight at us. This man on the margin of the image that represents Dumas' studio, and supposedly offers precious clues to her practice, is Moshekwa Langa, a friend of the artist, Marlene Dumas, at whose catalogue we are looking.



Fig. 4.1. Binders containing Dumas' image bank in her studio in Amsterdam, 2008.

From the catalogue *Marlene Dumas: measuring your own grave*.

We may speculate about the reasons that the designers of the catalogue and exhibition curators thought it important to have this portrait of Langa included on the margins of their carefully constructed visual insight into Dumas' practice. It appears almost as if another file on the shelf has been squeezed into the picture frame and, only after close inspection, does it become clear that it is actually an artwork hanging on a wall in the adjacent studio space. Furthermore, the portrait already appeared earlier as a full-page reproduction on the title page of the book (Figure 4.2). This painting, entitled *Moshekwa*, had been completed two years previously, in 2006, and was indeed in Dumas' studio at the time; clearly, it was important to her. Was its second inclusion, in the intimate revelatory image of the studio as discussed above, meant to provide a further reference about the background to her practice, to locate it in a particular history and geography? Is it there in order to highlight, metaphorically, Dumas' South African background as both a biographical fact and as another anchor of her practice? What makes the portrait of Langa seem a better mechanism than that of Dumas' own physical self or a simple statement in the text on the opposite page about her routes in South Africa? These questions are intriguing, particularly as the irony is that Langa, although a

fellow South African, had been living in Amsterdam, like Marlene Dumas herself, for over ten years at the time of the painting of his portrait.

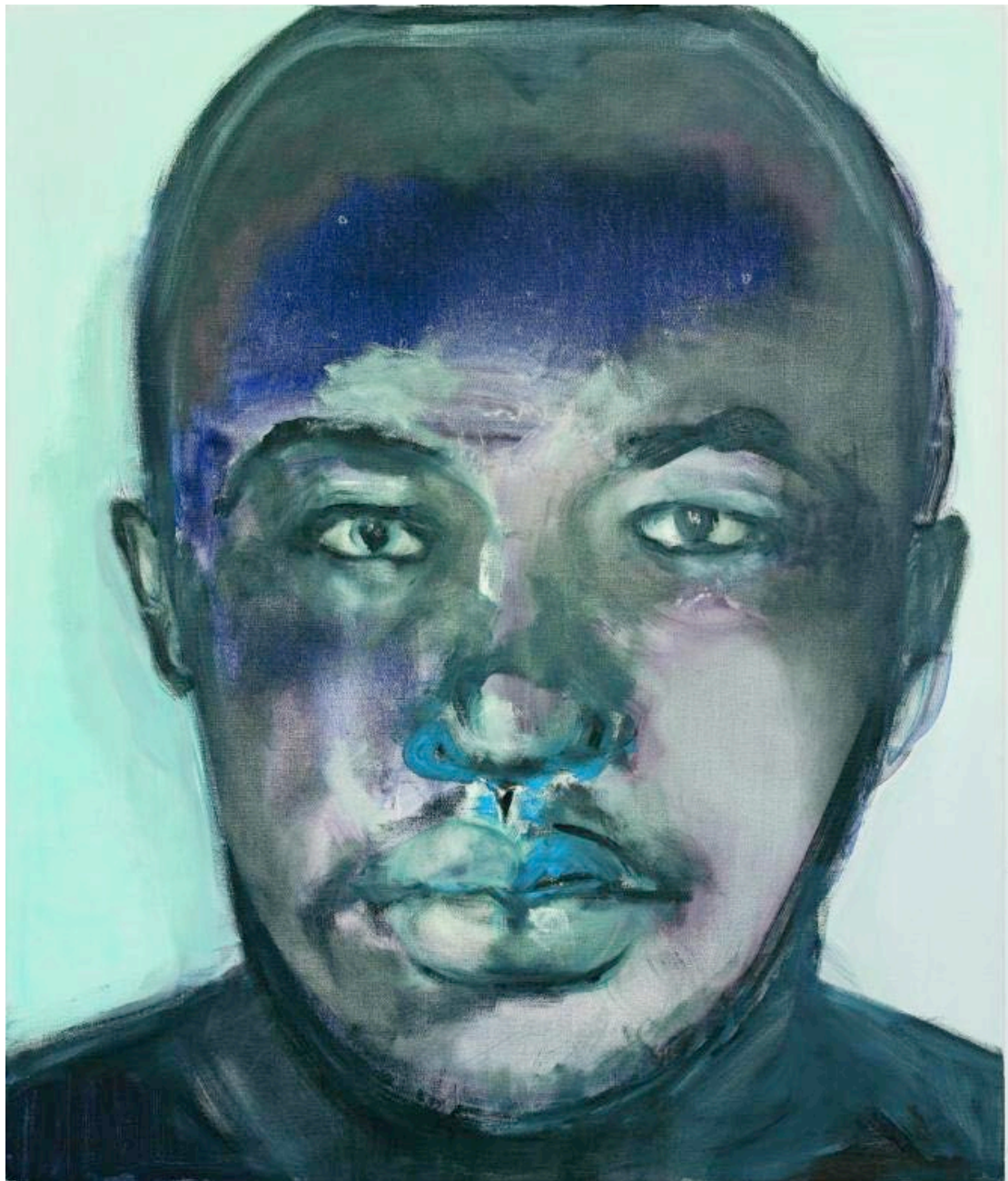


Fig. 4.2. Marlene Dumas, *Moshekwa*, 2006. Oil on canvas, 130 x 110 cm. Private collection.

The story of the portrait of Moshekwa Langa in Dumas' studio is remarkable in a number of ways. Moshekwa Langa met Marlene Dumas in 1996, about one year after his first solo exhibition at the Rembrandt van Rijn Gallery in Johannesburg, curated by the gallery's director Stephen Hobbs. The exhibition brought Langa to the attention of the

South African and, later, the international art world. At the time of their meeting, Langa's career was taking off. While working for the South African Broadcasting Corporation in Johannesburg, selecting and editing video material for an art programme, the up-and-coming artist, hailed as the 'wunderkind' of the new post-apartheid South African art world (Friedman, 1996), came to Berlin where he met Dumas, a well-established and critically acclaimed artist and a fellow South African. The initial polite, formal and fleeting introduction eventually turned into a friendship that developed mostly, according to Langa, via a regular exchange of postcards, which continued even when Langa moved to Amsterdam in 1997, where Dumas has also been living for a while. Langa shared the story of his acquaintance with Dumas in an interview with Sean O'Toole in 2009, which attempted to retrieve the background to this striking painting.³³

As I mentioned previously, Dumas' use of found imagery, such as photographs and photographic reproductions, is well known as one of the cornerstones of her practice. The history behind the image she used as her source when painting *Moshekwa* (2006) speaks not only of Dumas' contribution to the tradition of painting that engages photography as its source and subject matter but, more importantly for this paper, reveals some of the concerns and influences in Moshekwa Langa's own practice. Particularly relevant is Langa's engagement with the discourse about African and African diaspora art in the context of the expanding contemporary art canon and his awareness of both the advantages and the pitfalls of his position in relation to that discourse.

The portrait by Dumas is based on a printed poster entitled *Wanted* (2002) that was created by Langa and given to Dumas as a gift, an expression of friendship that has connected the artists over the years (Figure 4.3). Langa made the poster as part of an artists' workshop held in Martinique in 2002 organised by the Triangle Network initiatives³⁴. The photographic image used in the poster was taken by a Trinidadian photographer, Marlon Griffith, at Langa's request and showed the artist as he appeared the morning after an altercation with some locals at a bar during a night out³⁵. Langa's use of the photograph as a kind of found object that was conceptually enhanced through the manipulation of the format and the ironic use of title reflected both the

³³ The work was first exhibited in South Africa in 2007 and 2008 as part of the "Marlene Dumas: Intimate Relations" solo exhibition at the Iziko South African National Gallery in Cape Town and at the Standard Bank Gallery in Johannesburg, and later as part of the "Marlene Dumas: Measuring Your Own Grave" mid-career retrospective that took place in 2008 and 2009 at the Museum of Contemporary Art in Los Angeles, The Museum of Modern Art in New York and The Menil Collection in Houston.

³⁴ The Triangle Network is an international network of small-scale arts organisations and projects that support and disseminate the work of emerging artists through artist-led workshops, residencies, exhibitions and outreach events (Gasworks: n.d.).

³⁵ For a detailed account of the history of the poster, see Sean O'Toole's interview with Moshekwa Langa in the special feature article, *Another Chapter*, published on Frieze.com (O'Toole, S. 2013).

autobiographical approach that has been one of the key drivers in his practice since the start of his artistic career (Langa, 1999) and, at the same time, spoke to his on-going concerns about his framing and positioning by the power structures of the art world according to pre-determined and imposed identity stereotypes (Friedman, 1996; Langa, 1999; Langa, 2011).



WANTED
SERIAL KILLER
SPECIAL ARMS
TABLE AND CHAMPAGNE BOTTLE
FAVORITE PLACE "CHEZ VAVA"

Fig. 4.3. Moshekwa Langa. *Wanted*. 2002. Photo collage. Image from the archive of Triangle Network.

The poster became a visual register of the hyper-visibility that he has experienced as an artist from South Africa and from Africa, and his continuous effort to avoid having his practice reduced to an identity discourse illustration in which his background as a black artist from South Africa shortly after the end of apartheid was treated as the main driver in the discussions of his artistic production. In this work, based on his own photograph, Langa seems to comment on his position as the focal point of the desiring gaze of the art world. His chosen format of a police mug-shot evokes, with certain dark humour, elements of implied criminality, marginality and deviance. By choosing this format, he also inserts himself into the Eurocentric, well-established, authorised and authoritative art historical narrative linking the avant-garde, Modernism and Post-modernism; the discourse that traces itself back to Marcel Duchamp (Figure 4.4a). Marcel Duchamp used the format of a police “Wanted” poster in his rectified readymade *Wanted: \$2000 Reward* from 1922-23³⁶ as part of his artistic alter ego Rrose Sélavy. As an artist- provocateur, Duchamp engaged the art world in a subversive relationship, questioning the idea of art and the role of the artist. His practice has had profound implications for the development of art ever since, and provided a fascinating reference for Moshekwa Langa’s work almost a century later. Placing himself within the work as a wanted subject while subverting the claim on his subjectivity through the humour expressed in the text and the obviously constructed nature of the image, the artist reveals his awareness of the machinations to which he is subject. The work juxtaposes ideas of fame and notoriety, and the price an artist like Langa may have to pay for inclusion into the art historical narrative to which the work so openly references. As in the piece by Duchamp, Langa’s work also masquerades as a simple joke, a humorous reference to a personal incident that left him feeling “worse for wear” (O’Toole, S. 2013), but which reveals layers of meaning behind the constructed layers of different physical media at close inspection.

³⁶ This work by Marcel Duchamp, along with a number of others, has recently been studied with the purpose of re-classifying it as a readymade or rectified readymade, operating as art based purely on the artist making the choice to designate it so, to that of a highly original, multi-layered work that only appears (intentionally) as a simple choice-based work of art (Alfaro, 2000).



Fig. 4.4a. Marcel Duchamp. *Wanted: \$2,000 Reward*. Lithograph, 1961 (replica of 1923 original).

Langa spoke at length and on a number of occasions about the pressure he has experienced to conform to a set of expectations that confine his art making within the identity discourses that have particular currency for the international artistic power structures of curators, critics, biennales and institutions since his engagement with the art

world, both in and outside of South Africa (Langa, 1999: on-line; Mercer, 2003; Langa, 2011: on-line). Neither this pressure nor his responses are surprising, given the reception of one of his earliest works and the exhibition that brought him recognition in 1995, which I will discuss in the next section of the dissertation. They encapsulate the relentless drive on the part of critics and curators to rationalise his aesthetic concerns according to the imperatives of identity politics. They also highlight how such framing operates in terms of linking aesthetics with discourse and the important and powerful role this process can play in an emerging artist's career.

The signature work in Langa's pivotal first solo exhibition at the Rembrandt van Rijn Gallery in Johannesburg in 1995 was a mixed-media drawing installation that consisted of brown, large, used industrial multi-ply paper cement bags covered with a layer of wax, suspended from a washing line and marked with charcoal and washes of colour extracted from household cleaning materials and organic matter (Figure 4.5a).



Fig. 4.5a. Moshekwa Langa, *Untitled (Skins)*, 1995. Multi-media drawing installation. Collection of Iziko South African National Gallery. Images are from the photographic archive of the Iziko South African National Gallery. Images were originally taken by Moshekwa Langa at his home in Kwa-Mhlanga in 1993- 1995.

Sean O'Toole has explored in detail how Stephen Hobbs, curator and director of the gallery, encountered the work for the first time in the backyard of Langa's mother's home in KwaMhlanga, a small town in the 'homeland' state of KwaNdebele, where Langa stayed for eighteen months following his graduation from a private and liberal Waldorf school in Pretoria in 1993³⁷. It is relevant to note here that, at that school, Langa studied art for his Matric exam and, while at school, made the acquaintance of the important South African artists, Walter Battiss and Robert Hodgins³⁸. Hobbs acknowledged that he not only recognised the potential of the work immediately, but also how its transfer to the gallery would alter its reading. My recent finding³⁹ of the photographic archive of images taken during that period by Moshekwa Langa in the "Artists Dossiers" files of the Iziko South African National Gallery, containing over 70 images among other documents, prompted me to test the assumption that it was only the gallerist, Stephen Hobbs, who could appreciate the implications of the changed context and location, namely the transfer from the rural backyard to a metropolitan fine art gallery space. A close look at some of the images taken by the artist of the experiments in his impromptu backyard studio provides evidence that Langa was highly aware of the importance of context for the meaning of his work, even during the early stages of its production. The images contain examples of similar, or even what appear to be the same installations placed differently indoors and outside, using different supports and background structures (Figures 4.4b, 4.4c, 4.4d and 4.4e).



Fig. 4.4b. Images from the photographic archive of the Iziko South African National Gallery. Images were originally taken by Moshekwa Langa at his home in Kwa-Mhlanga between 1993 and 1995.

³⁷ For a detailed account, see Sean O'Toole's special feature article, *Another Chapter*, published on Frieze.com. (O'Toole, 2013).

³⁸ As above.

³⁹ The location of these photographs was not known either to the artist or to his gallery (Langa, personal communication, January 12, 2017).



Fig. 4.4c. Images from the photographic archive of the Iziko South African National Gallery. Images were originally taken by Moshekwa Langa at his home in Kwa-Mhlanga between 1993 and 1995.



Fig. 4.4d. Images from the photographic archive of the Iziko South African National Gallery. Images were originally taken by Moshekwa Langa at his home in Kwa-Mhlanga between 1993 and 1995.



Fig. 4.4d. Images from the photographic archive of the Iziko South African National Gallery. Images were originally taken by Moshekwa Langa at his home in Kwa-Mhlanga between 1993 and 1995.

Although the images cannot suggest any indication of the artist's familiarity with a gallery setting as an inseparable component of the work's interpretative framework that was evoked by Hobbs, they offer sufficient evidence of Langa's awareness of the crucial importance of context and site to the work's perception and reception. The above observation is also supported by the artist himself, as he mentioned the following recollection with regard to the motivation that drove him to take the images, which I discovered in the photographic and documentary archive in the South African National Gallery:

'I realized that being so far away in the rural area and doing the work that I did I will not be "discovered". I did not want to be "discovered". No one is going to be discovering me. I had to be my own agent... Let me take photos to show people further afield" (personal interview, January 31, 2017).

It was this proactive approach and the artists' own actions in presenting the images to the gallerist that lead to Stephen Hobbs seeing the images of Langa's early works and experiments (Figures 4.5a, 4.5b, 4.5c and 4.5d). He later included some of them in the exhibition at the Market Theatre Gallery in Johannesburg in 1995. Initially called 'Untitled' in the exhibition, the installation of ripped, brown smeared cement bags (Figure 4.5a) was described by the Sowetan journalist and critic, Victor Metsoamere (cited in Williamson, 1996: 86) and by the critic Hazel Friedman, among others, as reminiscent of animal skins with all the plethora of ensuing associations garbed in rural, traditional and racial terms of reference (Friedman, 1995). Based on this visual analogy, the contextualisation of the work as an identity-focused practice emerging from a rural

African location at the time of the dismantling of apartheid became possible. Friedman claimed that it revealed and fused the relationships between rural and urban, traditional (which implied African) and contemporary, coming from a young, untrained visionary who appropriated mundane, everyday materials and objects and made conceptual work that connected with the political and institutional agendas of the day (1995). She acknowledged the dangers that awaited a young artist whose work could easily be stereotyped and co-opted into the politically expedient narratives. At the same time, she seemed to fail to realise that her own review and the framing of the work as “skins”, with all the implications of that title that I mentioned above, would do the same.



Fig. 4.5b. *Untitled (Skins)*, 1995. Multi-media drawing installation. Site view at the artist's home studio. Collection of Iziko South African National Gallery. Images are taken from the photographic archive of the Iziko South African National Gallery. Images were originally taken by Moshekwa Langa at his home in Kwa-Mhlanga between 1993 and 1995.



Fig. 4.5c. *Untitled (Skins)*, 1995. Multi-media drawing installation. Site view at the artist's home studio. Collection of Iziko South African National Gallery. Images are from the photographic archive of the Iziko South African National Gallery. Images were originally taken by Moshekwa Langa at his home in Kwa-Mhlanga between 1993 and 1995.



Fig. 4.5d. *Untitled (Skins)*, 1995. Multi-media drawing installation. Site view at the artist's home studio. Collection of Iziko South African National Gallery. Images are from the photographic archive of the Iziko South African National Gallery. Images were originally taken by Moshekwa Langa at his home in Kwa-Mhlanga between 1993 and 1995.

In Sue Williamson's book *Art in South Africa, the Future Present* (1996), the author quotes Langa as saying:

I think that my work is unclassifiable in terms that a lot of people are used to using to talk about South African art and black art. I don't think people expect black people to make the work I do... and not having an art education makes it all the more complex (Williamson, 1996: 88).

Arguably, Langa's relationship with this new title, *Skins*, that eventually took hold (in the 2003 catalogue for the "Looking Both Ways" exhibition, the work is simply captioned *Skins*) was not straightforward. He was highly aware of its fabricated nature and what it signified. The South African National Gallery wanted to acquire the work, which was a huge boon for the young artist (Figures 4.6 and 4.7). The fax communication (SANG archive: 30 June 1996) from 1996 that he sent to the director of the gallery, Marilyn Martin, makes it clear that *Skins* had become an operational title of the work, thus recognising the gap between his original intent and the nature of his original aesthetic enquiry and what it evolved into via the transition to the gallery and into the public discourse. His message expressed hesitation regarding the acquisition of the work (SANG archive: 30 June 1996) (Figure 4.6).

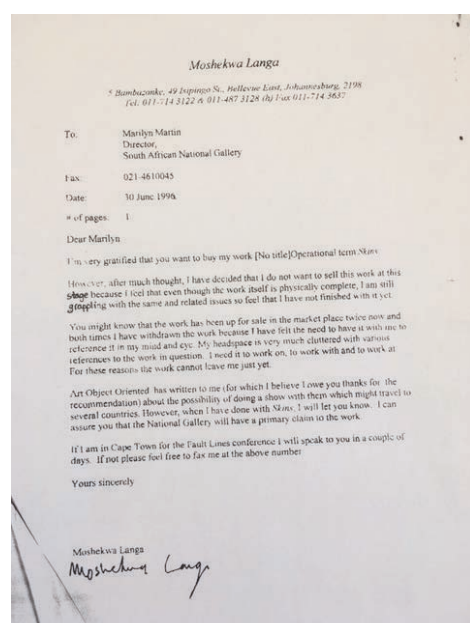


Fig. 4.6. Documentary archive of the Iziko South African National Gallery. Accessed between July 2016 and January 2017. Image by the author.

If we consider the importance of such a placement for his career, the reasons for his hesitation must have been extremely serious. He wrote: “I feel that even though the work itself is physically complete, I am still grappling with the same and related issues so feel that I have not finished with it yet...My headspace is very much cluttered with various references to the work in question” (Langa, 1996: fax communication). Langa benefited greatly from the enthusiasm (regardless of its motivation) with which his opening show was received, but he may have been uncertain of what the work with its new and popular title came to represent, and how that representation would be fixed by the act of acquisition into the collection of what was arguably the most prestigious art institution in South Africa.



Figure 4.7. Moshekwa Langa, *Untitled (Skins)*, 1995. Installation view at Iziko South African National Gallery, 2011.

This is not simply a matter of the title being misleading or foreclosing, even though the kind of title that we are dealing with here is, in many ways, limiting the interpretation of the work to a reductive expression of Langa’s African and rural roots at the expense of other important influences in his work that I will explore. Another of his quotes in Williamson’s book supports this interpretation. Langa explained the use of *Untitled* in the titles of his early works as follows: “These things don’t have titles because titles tend to fix things” (1996:88). A further quote refers to his relationship with the way in which his works have been interpreted: “The work is not being received by me. It’s being received

by other people. They are the ones who have to be accountable to their ha ha ha” (1996: 88). Langa’s subsequent interviews, throughout his career, reveal how open-endedness is an important quality in his practice, which he pursues consciously and consistently. Although he seems to have overcome his reluctance to use more specific titles, his use of language, particularly with regard to titles, is anchored in extremely personal and, at times, inaccessible biographical markers that may be seen as obscure or even enigmatic by the majority of his audience. In his conversation with Kabelo Malatsie in 2016, Langa stated:

‘I don’t have issues with how people understand it or misunderstand it because I think that, when you are looking at an artwork, you have an attraction to it or you are repelled by it or you are fascinated by it ... I do not go out of my way to obfuscate meaning by using complicated abstract concepts by naming them in other languages...the way that I use names is an anchor, it is notes for things that I would rather not forget’ (Moshekwa Langa, *Ellipses*, 2016).

In the light of the statements quoted above, the reason that he could not reject the title “*Skins*” becomes more understandable, not only because it almost became his signature work for a period, and a very successful one at that, but also because this interpretation with its animalistic, rural and violent connotations could be a valid one among others. It reflected a conscious decision not to police the understanding of his work on one hand and to use reflective strategies to avoid identity-based pigeonholing on the other. It seems that Langa found the strategy of quiet resistance more fruitful than that of placing tight restrictions on the interpretation of his work. Arguably, the multiplicity of meaning that is inherent in Langa’s work is one of its important characteristics, which makes it so rich and rewarding for the viewer. The problem arises when the process of interpretation becomes locked in a particular ideological (and monological, if we were to use Bakhtin’s definitions as discussed in Chapter 1) discourse, irrespective of the actual intention and aesthetic concerns of the artist. This kind of co-optation positions the practice and the artist within a power relationship in which they are denied agency and are framed as Outsiders, marked by difference and positioned at the margins of the contemporary art canon.

Such positioning has been discussed at length and in depth by many art historians and post-colonial theorists and critics, who challenged the Eurocentric art historic discourse, who brought about the recognition and retrieval of many previously marginalised artists, not just those of African descent, but also those from the wider

terrain of the Global South, and facilitated the expansion of the contemporary art canon (Oguibe, 1999: 31)⁴⁰. In this regard, the struggle for the visibility of diaspora artists, or African diaspora artists more specifically, is an extension and a reflection of the wider process that has been exposing and challenging the status quo that fixes artists of African descent as marginalised ‘Others’, viewed through an essentialising Western lens of authenticity. Moshekwa Langa’s early career provides important insights into the mechanisms in which such structures operate.

Diasporic openings and closures

In 1997, Moshekwa Langa was invited to study at the prestigious Rijksakademie in Amsterdam. He moved to Holland that year and has lived and worked predominantly in Amsterdam ever since, while maintaining links with South Africa. Langa has been represented by a South African gallery and has returned for personal and professional reasons on a number of occasions. In 1999, two years after his move, he had a solo exhibition at the Renaissance Society at the University of Chicago, where he showed many of the works that he created during that period, some at Rijksakademie, some for the Second Johannesburg Biennale and some subsequently (Figure 4.8). This exhibition included drawings, map works, an installation, banners and photographs. In a catalogue essay by one of the curators, Hamza Walker, Langa’s practice is contextualised in terms of displacement, geographical and historical traversals and exile (Walker, 2007: 79). Importantly, Walker also traces the genealogy of his practice to South Africa, with its histories of dislocation, as an ‘inextricable part of its foundational narrative - from its colonial origins, with its celebratory tales of treks, voyages, frontiers and settlers, to the rampant displacement of blacks under grand apartheid, and finally in the biographies of numerous dissidents and exiles’ (Walker, 2002:79).

⁴⁰ See works by S. Hall, R. Araeen, O. Enwezor, O. Oguibe, M. Okediji and many others.



Fig. 4.8. The Renaissance Society at the University of Chicago. 1999. Moshekwa Langa. Installation View.

From this point onwards, the discussions about Langa's practice become discussions about the diasporic in his work, his perceived sense of internal displacement that is 'already endemic to South Africa's polyglot national identity' (Walker, 2002: 79). In the same essay, the author also foregrounded questions about 'the development of an aesthetic articulating the conditions of displacement and exile' (Walker 2002: 80). It is interesting to look at these readings of Langa's work, which consequently continued to resonate throughout his career, in connection with the Artist Talk interview that Langa gave during the show (Langa, 1999: on-line). In response to his host's request to account for the process of unravelling and disintegration evident in his work and linked, according to Walker, to the artist's transition from South Africa to Holland, Langa discussed his struggle with 'being locked on to comment about South Africa' (Langa, 1999), and its recent and current politics and history, in great detail. Although he had an interest in politics and took part in projects that were specifically set to respond to the political realities of the day, such as the dismantling of apartheid and processes of

reconciliation,⁴¹ the artist refused to allow his practice to be rationalised exclusively in that way. He realised that, since his move to Europe, commentary on South Africa then and now had become all that was expected of his work, a situation that he found untenable at best and degrading at worst. In his own words, he found it very ‘disturbing that this became a contract that I have not entered into and that was used all the time against me’ (Langa, 1999). Even more insightful is Langa’s comment about the resistance strategies he had to develop in response to this kind of framing (which, going back to his first solo show with *Untitled (Skins)*, 1996, was not unfamiliar to him). Although recognising the initial pressing need to reject such reductive ‘given readings’ (Langa, 1999) of his work, he also rejected ‘the idea of being tied up in resisting mode’ (Langa, 1999). Instead, he chose to allow his work and his very open approach to his practice to speak for itself. This position, in my view, is reflected in a number of ways. The variety of forms that his work takes (from drawing to installation to video) is one such manifestation. The open-ended, poetic, often described as elusive, enigmatic, difficult to define sensibility that his works project is another. Colin Richards, curator for the exhibition “Graft”, part of the Second Johannesburg Biennale in 1997 that featured Langa’s work, famously described Langa’s work as follows:

‘You are unsettled, you are undone because you can’t place him and consequently you don’t know where your place is’ (Richards 1997: 236).



Fig. 4.9. Moshekwa Langa. *Temporal Distance (with criminal intent). You will find us in the best places.* 1997. Mixed media installation. Installation view at “Graft” (curated by Colin Richards) as part of the Second Johannesburg Biennale.

⁴¹ “Faultlines” exhibition at the Castle of Good Hope in Cape Town in 1996 was one such project.

Temporal Distance (with criminal intent), You will find us in the best places is a site-specific multi-media installation that was first presented in 1997 during the Second Johannesburg Biennale as part of the exhibition “Graft” curated by Colin Richards (Figure 4.9). It has been re-staged a number of times, including at the exhibition at the Renaissance Society at the University of Chicago in 1999, the “Looking Both Ways: Art of the Contemporary African Diaspora” exhibition at the Museum for African Art in New York in 2003, in “Making Worlds” at the 53rd Venice Biennale in 2009 and at several others. Langa had already started working on this installation when he was at the Rijksakademie. The title of the work seems to point both to the artist himself as the protagonist and to imply an external gaze being projected onto a group of which he may or may not be a member. On one hand, there seems to be a connection between the tone and the presence of a fixing, incriminating gaze suggested by the title and the *Wanted* (2002) poster that I discussed earlier. On the other hand, the installation itself is so open ended, meandering and evocative of a 3D urban landscape modelled for surveillance or, possibly, child’s play, that any given singular definition of fixing of its meaning within either the politics of looking or the discourse of displacement and exile or political mapping becomes difficult to justify. The spools of thread, tangled and strewn around the floor, could be read as a web of relationships or as an evocation of a map; the bottles, toy cars and a mirrored disco ball could be markers of urban presence and, at the same time, reflect the artist’s fascination with objects that he never had as a child but could possess now and could use to revisit that space in the past through imagination (Figure 4.10).



Fig. 4.10. Moshekwa Langa. *Temporal Distance (with criminal intent), You will find us in the best places*. 1997. Mixed media installation, installation view at The Renaissance Society, The University of Chicago.

Langa himself speaks of the work as both being rooted in his experience of living in Amsterdam, a large city, but at the same time pointing to his wider experiences of urbanity with its inherent threats, risks and allures, in Johannesburg or anywhere else (Mercer, 2003). The foregrounding of the transnational or even the diasporic sensibility in the work seems tenuous, unless we open up the notion of the diasporic to the widest possible interpretation, which would include any kinds of moves, between rural and urban, for pleasure or work, out of desire or from necessity. In his conversation with Kobena Mercer that appeared in the catalogue for the travelling exhibition “Looking Both Ways. Art of the Contemporary African Diaspora (2003 to 2006)”, curated by Laurie Ann Farrell, the artist himself discusses his move to Johannesburg, an even larger urban centre than Amsterdam, from his small rural town in Limpopo, as a defining moment for him (Mercer, 2003: 102- 108). Even so, we need to be careful of privileging the urban/rural dichotomy with its implied idea of “emergence” above other readings, and be reminded that Langa spent many years in Pretoria at a private Waldorf school there before his move to Johannesburg. The installation was shown at a number of exhibitions between 1997 and 2009, each version different from the previous one, making it both site-specific and universal (Figure 4.11). Issues of migration, belonging and urban alienation are not confined to one specific country or city. Shifting and introducing subtle but perceptible changes in each of its incarnations, the work mutated in response to each specific site as a kind of shifting memory, always losing and gaining something in the process of being articulated. The work captures the importance of memory in his practice and its non-linear, interwoven quality. The process of the work’s adaptation to each site, where it has to be constructed anew each time it is exhibited, draws parallels with the lives and identities of those who undertake forced or voluntary journeys into new lives away from their countries of birth. The process of construction and the ultimate form of the work may be dictated, at least in part, by the circumstances of the site but, once in place, the installation changes the site too, inhabiting it and changing its character and meaning. This intentional hybridity of the resulting artwork could be likened to Bakhtin’s ‘intentional semantic hybrids [that are] inevitably internally dialogic. Two points of view are not mixed, but set against each other dialogically’ (Bakhtin, quoted in Mercer, 2007: 139). This kind of relationship can also be seen in the title, which contains the voice of the artist seemingly responding to an unvoiced, but

nonetheless present perception of a group, to which he seems to claim to belong via some invisible authority or dominant structure. This brings us again to the idea of the double consciousness of W. E. B. Du Bois and Bakhtin's dialogic polyphony. These ideas help us to realise how Langa's creative process, both in terms of his medium and (installation that has to be adapted to the site) and his use of titles, highlights the tension that has the potential for 'unmasking of another's speech' (Bakhtin, quoted in Mercer, 2007: 139). and thus of subverting the institutional authority (of the site of the museum or of the site of national culture more broadly).



Fig. 4.11. Moshe Kwa Langa. *Temporal Distance (with criminal intent). You will find us in the best places*. 1997-2003. Mixed media installation. Installation view at the 53rd Venice Biennale (curated by Daniel Birnbaum). © Photos: Haupt & Binder

Langa's preoccupation with memory, traces and evocative marks and gestures informed another body of work that he exhibited alongside his installations. His 'map' works could be traced to his scrapbooks and his early attempts to write an autobiography, although he found language alone limiting. At the time (in 1993 after he finished school), it led him to expand his autobiographical accounts to include images and collaged elements that would capture all the extra elements that the words alone could not.

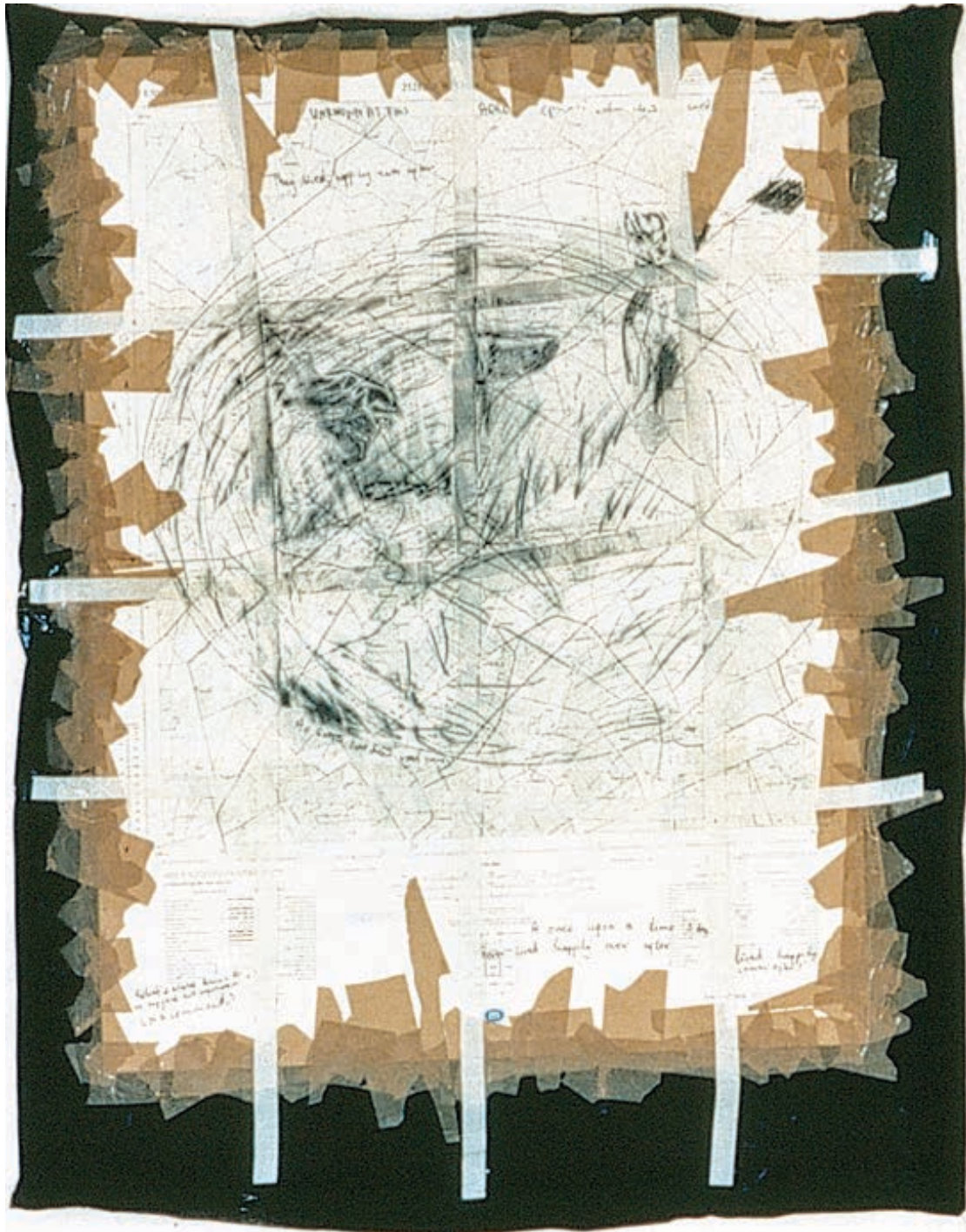


Fig. 4.12a Moshekwa Langa. *Untitled (Collage)*. 1995. Mixed media drawing collage using maps, black plastic rubbish bags. 70 x 50 cm.

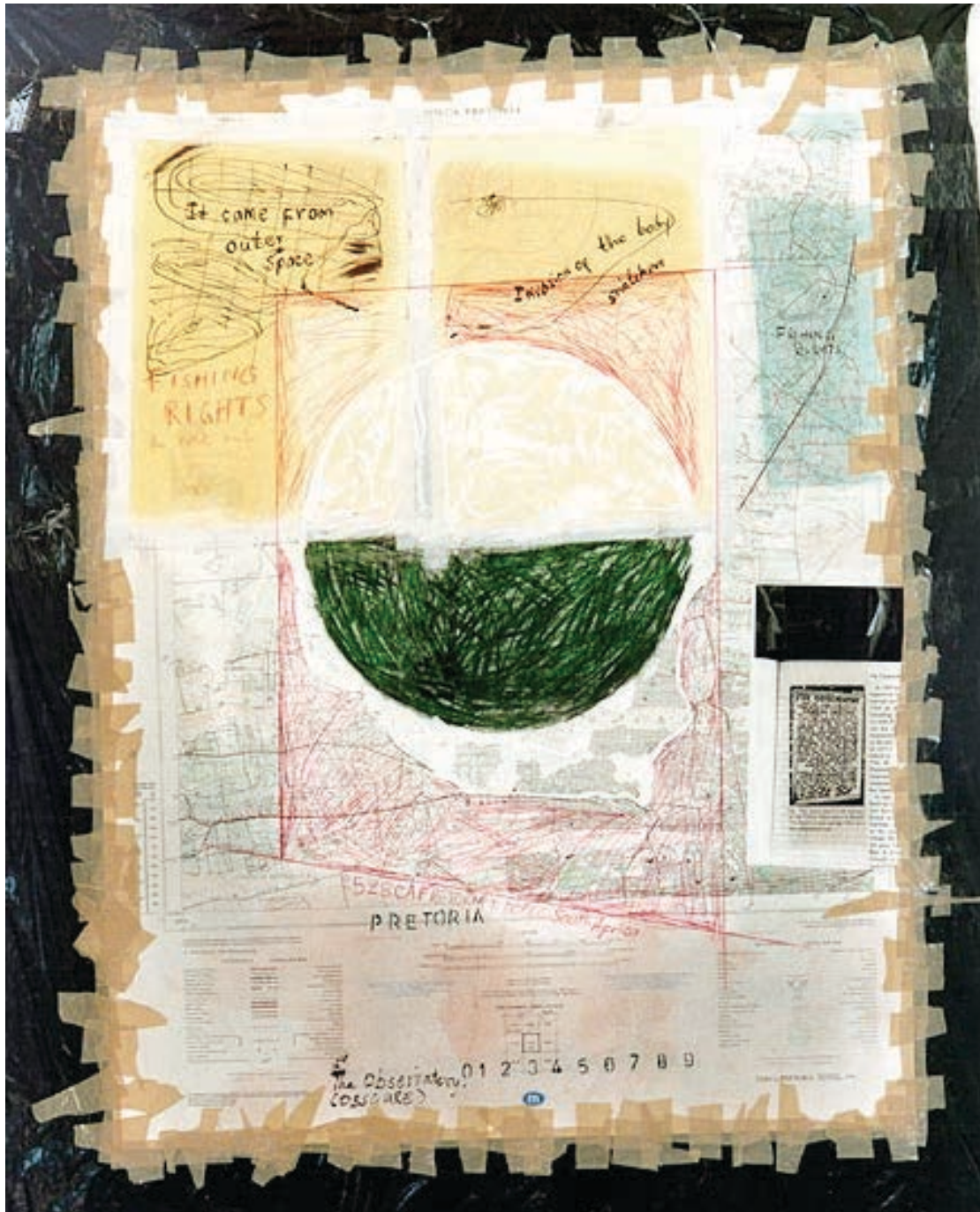


Fig. 4.12b. Moshekwa Langa. *Untitled*. 1996. Mixed media drawing collage using maps, black plastic rubbish bags.

The *Untitled* map collages from 1996 were made for a specific project, an exhibition entitled *Faultlines: Inquiries into Truth and Reconciliation* curated by Jane Taylor at the Castle of Good Hope in Cape Town. It meditated on the impact of apartheid and included old maps reflecting the obliterating policies of the regime that wiped entire communities off its maps and from its landscapes (Figures 4.12a and 4.12b). It is fascinating to trace the origins of this particular use of maps, as well as tape as media, to

the early experiments by the artist reflected in the IZIKO SANG archive mentioned above. Specifically, the image taken by Langa at his improvised home studio (Figure 4.5d) is a record the artist's early attempts to experiment with the medium. The archival photos also reflect the fact that this was only one of a number of media and themes that the artist has employed from the earliest point in his career. The impact of these map works was so strong and so narrowly focused on the TRC and apartheid (that were certainly the focus of the exhibition but not necessarily of the whole of Langa's practice) at the expense of any other interpretations that Langa had to find ways to disengage from the fixed expectations placed on him as a commentator on post-apartheid politics. In his conversation with Kobena Mercer (2003: 107), the artist firmly rejects identifications as a social and political commentator, saying instead that he finds inspiration in dreams and mythologies. The body of work entitled *Landscapes*, 2003, was specifically produced for the exhibition "Looking Both Ways: artists of the contemporary African diaspora" (in the context of which the interview with Mercer appeared) (Figure 4.13). Here, Langa typically uses mixed media, including elements of maps, but they are dominated by the flowing swirls of colour that are reminiscent of distant views, meandering paths and rivers; at the same time, in their imprecision and dreamy sensibility, they take us into the world of memories, dreams and imagination. They also point to, as the artist himself suggests (Mercer, 2003: 105), the profound influence of his schooling at the Waldorf Academy where he was discouraged from using strong colour contrasts, hard edges and strong lines. Langa found himself in dialogue with such ideas about colour and aesthetics in much of his practice.



Fig. 4.13. Moshekwa Langa, *Rooiwaal I*, 2003. Mixed media on paper. 140 x 100 cm. © Langa Moshekwa.

The ideas of traces, of gathering and remembering experiences, verbally, visually and through mark making are also carried through to the other two bodies of work with which Langa was busy with 2003 to 2005. These are the *Index* works and the *Mapping* works (Figures 4.14 to 4.16).



Fig. 4.14a. Moshekwa Langa, *Untitled IV*, 2004. Mixed media on paper. 140 x 100 cm. Image courtesy of Stevenson, Cape Town and Johannesburg.



Fig. 4.14b. Moshekwa Langa, *Untitled XX*, 2004. Mixed media on paper. 140 x 100 cm.

Although frequently linked to his travels and seen as a signifier of his diasporic identity (and of his South African identity with vestiges of the apartheid system of forced removals and internal displacements as per Walker's (2002) influential interpretation), in my view, these seem to offer another reading when we listen to what the artist has to say about his relationship with diaspora in his discussion with Kobena Mercer (2003). As with other identity-based definitions, Langa rejects diaspora as a consideration or framework for either his own subjectivity or for the reading of his aesthetic language. In response to the question: "What does "diaspora" mean for you?" Langa replied:

Oh, but I didn't know I was in the diaspora. It's very uncomfortable to think of myself in such a setup, because "diaspora" is very definite... I resist the kind of total description that does not allow for other, additional parts of myself. Perhaps "traveller" would be a better word (Mercer, 2003: 107).

Langa seems to be resisting not just the term but what appears to him as its fixed nature, the strength of its implications and the violence of its reductive power. Echoing Okwui Enwezor's statement, quoted earlier, about the misuse of the term diaspora in relation to artists of African descent working in the West, Langa did not find a community of other Africans that self-identified as such and with whom he shared a language and values in the present.

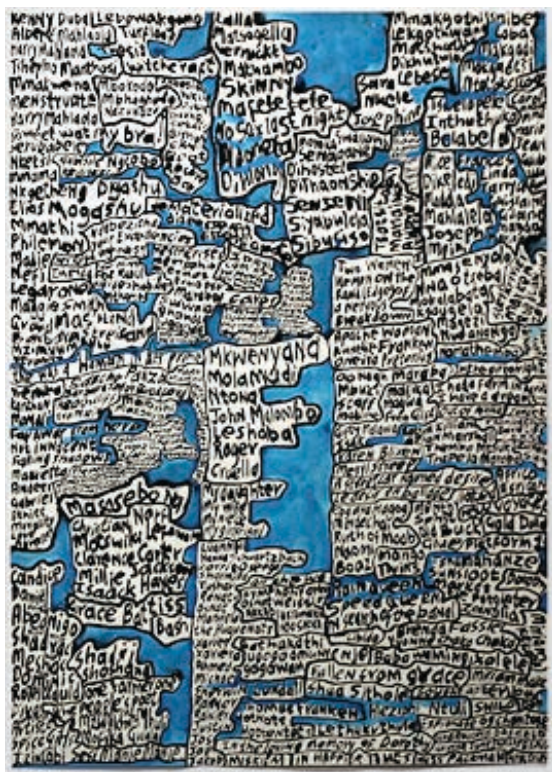


Fig. 4.15a. Moshekwa Langa, *Untitled (Index) Mkwenyana (Son in Law)*, c. 2006. Mixed media on paper. 140 x 100 cm. Image courtesy of Stevenson, Cape Town and Johannesburg.



Fig. 4.15b. Moshekwa Langa, *Untitled V (Index – Periodic Table of Elements)*, 2004. Mixed Media on paper. 140 x 100 cm.



Fig. 4.16. . Moshekwa Langa, *Untitled II (Mapping text)*, 2009. 153 x 103.

Langa discusses his *Map* works not in geographical or political terms, but in terms of memory and time, the desire to record his life and the ‘traces that I gather when I travel’ (Langa cited in Mercer, 2003: 105). Thus, the maps and mapping (with all their collaged and scribbled bric-a-brac, not unlike his installations), as well as his *Index* works, could be seen as mind maps, primarily referencing processes internal to his practice but also acting as records of his specific geographical and autobiographical journeys. As records, they are idiosyncratic, but are not meant to be confined just to the artist’s own experiences. He noted:

When I got to the point where I started to use language very explicitly by using or recounting names, it became very interesting because the names or places that I was referencing or recording were probably very loaded for people who encountered the works. The fact that I have used many names myself over the years- Moshekwa, Mokwena, Aaron, Mamabolo, Langa- was also a contributing factor because of the many different kinds of people that made me the person I was (Moshekwa Langa. *Ellipses*, 2016: 6-7).

Not only does the artist consciously keep the interpretation of his works and their titles open, he also emphasises the multiplicity and interconnectedness reflected in his practice, while being aware of its open-endedness. Langa's mind maps do catch aspects of reality that could be political or reflect the artist's biography in their nets, but they are as imprecise about the past as they are unpredictably open to the future. They are not meant to be complete or defined as something specific. His works are similar to pages in the book about himself that he attempted to write as a teenager. They act like pages in a notebook, a kind of personal diary containing both visual and verbal elements. They could never provide a complete and resolved picture of the artist's identity or his life, and they constantly point to areas still to be explored. In this way, they do resist definitions, not as an overtly political stance, but because it is not possible to fix and contain imagination and memory, as well as because Langa's practice and his particular aesthetic are not meant to be defined in the limiting, monologic, terms that have consistently been applied to them.

Snapshots and Exposures

In 2006, Okwui Enwezor published an extensive volume entitled *Snap Judgments. New Positions in Contemporary African Photography*. It was released in conjunction with a large-scale touring exhibition that was shown at several venues, including at the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam and the International Center of Photography in New York (March – May 2006). The project aimed to provide a wide survey and to present an opportunity for further engagement with the more recent development of this field of art practice on the African continent and in its diaspora. Enwezor also stated that it was a long-overdue response to the tired tropes of Afro-pessimism permeating Western media accounts of Africa, particularly photographic ones (Enwezor, 2006: 26) that presented the narrative of perpetual disaster by zooming in on poverty, famine and war while obfuscating the role of European colonialism and its exploitation of Africa's resources. The inclusion of works by Moshekwa Langa might have been considered a surprising choice, not based on the strength of the work itself but purely because photography was not the medium for which Langa had best been known for in the period on which the curator focused. After the three acclaimed series of Polaroid images made in 1998 and exhibited between 1998 and 2001, namely *True Confessions: My Life as a Disco Queen*, *When I left the Couch* and *Far from the Scenery He Knew or Understood* (see their analyses in Chapter 1 of this thesis), there seemed to be little focus on photography in Langa's practice for a

number of years. Hamza Walker discussed the Polaroid series of 1998 as continuing the tradition of African studio portraiture photography exemplified by artists such as Samuel Fosso (Walker, 2002:82). In the new body of work made in 2006 that Okwui Enwezor featured in his project, the artist seems to be making the job of curators and writers difficult by offering works that did not have overt references either to African studio portraiture photography and its traditions nor to documentary photography for which his home country, South Africa, is so famous. Difficult to categorise yet again, Langa's photographic still lifes were in contrast to other works included in the exhibition and its catalogue. They involved a series of photographs that the artist took on a trip to the Northern Province (later Limpopo) of South Africa: images of objects in three different homes at which he had stayed in his youth. In addition to *Snap Judgments*, nine photographs from the series were presented as part of the "Encounters" series of exhibitions organised by the Modern Art Oxford Gallery in the United Kingdom in 2007, and later at the São Paulo Biennale in 2010. Only a limited number of works from the series were selected for the exhibitions mentioned above and for the *Snap Judgments* catalogue. In the exhibitions, they were presented as chromogenic prints sized 27.9 x 35.6 cm (Figures 4.17 to 4.21).



Fig. 4.17. Moshekwa Langa. *Untitled V*. 2005. Chromogenic Print. 27.9 x 35.6 cm. Image courtesy of the artist and Goodman Gallery, Johannesburg.



Fig. 4.18. Moshekwa Langa. *Untitled II*. 2005. Chromogenic Print. 27.9 x 35.6 cm. Image courtesy of the artist and Goodman Gallery, Johannesburg.



Fig. 4.19. Moshekwa Langa. *Untitled XVI*. 2005. Chromogenic Print. 27.9 x 35.6 cm. Image courtesy of the artist and Goodman Gallery, Johannesburg.



Fig. 4.20. Moshekwa Langa. *Untitled XXI*. 2005. Chromogenic Print. 27.9 x 35.6 cm. Image courtesy of the artist and Goodman Gallery, Johannesburg.



Fig. 4.21. Moshekwa Langa. *Untitled III*. 2005. Chromogenic Print. 27.9 x 35.6 cm. Image courtesy of the artist and Goodman Gallery, Johannesburg.

Although the choice may seem surprising from the point of view of Langa's practice, it becomes more understandable when reviewed in the context of Enwezor's curatorial intention. Enwezor's strategy in the show that showcased works by 36 artists and collectives from 17 countries on the African continent and beyond was to move away from the studio portrait photography (while recognising its historical role) that has been relatively well known outside the continent⁴² to focus on the new directions the medium had been taking since the beginning of the twenty-first century: documentary, fashion and analytical and conceptual photographic practices were highlighted. Enwezor wrote in the catalogue:

But the significant shift highlighted in *Snap Judgments* is the privileging of the investigative, conceptual, and archival potential of the photographic medium... it is as much as medium of witnessing as it is an analytical one. Consequently, over the last ten years, an analytical, post documentary photographic work oriented around the artists' heightened sense of observation has emerged more strongly (Enwezor, 2006: 25).

⁴² Okwui Enwezor made a significant contribution to the recognition of African studio portrait photography via the exhibition "In/Sight: African Photographers 1940 to the Present" that he organised at the Guggenheim Museum in 1996 (Guggenheim, 1996: on-line).

It is this quiet observation, and stillness in the representation that, I would argue, attracted Enwezor to Langa's new photographic works which, on the formal level could be most accurately described as a series of still-life works involving mundane, personal objects in simple domestic and private environments. A single object, usually a piece of furniture or a household item, is in focus within the frame of each image, their environment mostly stripped of further detail. They present a kind of zooming in to take a closer look at the essential structure of ordinary things, the process grounding us in the reality of the everyday, and at the same time taking us out of it into the more elusive domain of memory. The introspective and melancholy quality places the images in the domain of private memory; they possess an aesthetic that seems to make the documentary function secondary, if not irrelevant. Unlike most of the other works profiled in the catalogue, which the curator described as 'each taking a problematic or focusing attention on social subjects' (Enwezor, 2006: 19), Langa's focus is neither on 'communities undergoing transformation' nor on portraiture or fashion as a means to explore the identity and self-expression of the subjects. Nonetheless, the series could be interpreted as a kind of portrait and self-portrait, defying the expectation of what African photography should look like, making it just as powerful in rejecting the Afro-pessimism that Enwezor set out to challenge in his ambitious travelling exhibition. Some of Langa's images are impossible to place in an African context while others are recognisably South African because of the particular styles of furniture photographed, but none of this really matters to the artist. The airy, poetic images hover silently between reality and memory, they are part of his intimate world of the past that is located in Africa and evokes a sense of longing both through the distance of time that separates him from his childhood homes and through the expanses of geography that lie between his new place of residence in Amsterdam and his South African homeland.

The curator's vision of the role of the diasporic artists and their production within the context of his exhibition is made clear in the following statement:

There must be also acknowledgment of the fact that contemporary African art exists both inside and outside the continent. In fact, it is unreservedly international. The inside/ outside dialectic owes much to a broad range of complex postcolonial shifts, especially the increasing participation of diasporic and expatriate African artists located in the heart of European and American art centres. Consequently, the postcolonial dimension of contemporary African art encompasses recognition of the diasporic and international experiences of the

artists. The relationship between Africa and the western metropolis is set in dramatic tension, producing a lively relay of arguments and counter-arguments, texts and counter-texts, to narrate the differing social temporalities (between modern and contemporary) and cultural perspectives (between African and diasporic) that are reshaping contemporary Africa (Enwezor, 2006: 23).

Although Langa's images, with their undercurrents of memory, distance and life journeys may be seen as providing a reference to the larger flows of history that frame the relationship between the African continent and the Western urban centres that have acquired diasporic identities as part of their multi-cultural mix, I would argue that they still eschew acting as representative of the generalised diasporic subject of the art world. For Langa, it is the relationship between himself and the Western metropolis (or even any other metropolis) that is of interest. At the same time, it is his ability to find an aesthetic language that transcends the personal and individual and finds a point of outsideness (in Bakhtin's terminology) that enables his practice to speak to universal values and wider issues facing humanity in our turbulent age.

The *Untitled* photographic series is also characterised by the stark absence (especially in the context of other works in the catalogue) of a black protagonist included in the image; a black African body, which Enwezor highlights as the framing mechanism in much of the work on which he focuses. Langa's approach, as discussed previously, does not offer such an anchor for the reading of his work. In a way, his *Untitled* photographs appear unframed by the subject. In fact, the subject of the images is the artist himself and the story of his personal journey, a journey that took him away from his home and social circle and back again. In a recent interview, he described the journey back home as a desire to step back into the familiar place of the past and finding it impossible - the result of the journey being the melancholia and stillness that the works exude⁴³. Although not physically present within the images, the artist is also the one physically framing the images on the other side of the lens. There is something ironic and playful, as well as subversive, in the series that could thus be interpreted as another self-portrait. This subversive, melancholic irony, used as an aesthetic strategy, links the series to Langa's *Wanted* self-portrait discussed at the beginning of this chapter. Despite the formal differences between the works, their conceptual engagement with the complex

⁴³ Interview conducted with Moshekwa Langa (while he was in Paris) by myself via telephone and Facetime on 31.01.2017.

layering of representation and framing allows us to speculate that these issues continued to have an impact on his production.

It is important to note that the Oxford selection, however, was presented under the exhibition title “Homeland”. The title “Homeland” was chosen by Langa as the most representative way to refer to the circumstances and the inspiration behind the series. Undertaking the trip to several of his childhood homes belonging to his family allowed him the opportunity to reconnect and spend time with his grandmother and aunt, whom he calls his surrogate parents (personal interview, January 31, 2017). Coming from Amsterdam and having many years of moves, travels, successes and challenges behind him, he found himself an observer in places that once were his childhood homes and where people dear to him still lived. The homes and people bore the imprint of time passing relentlessly that Langa tries to capture in his images. In his own words, there was a sense of sadness about these objects and interiors so lovingly constructed by women who spent their lives working in Johannesburg as domestic workers, saving money so that they could build these houses for their children. However, many of these children, including Langa, departed and took other paths, leaving their childhood worlds behind (personal interview, January 31, 2017). It was not the first time that the artist felt himself both close to and removed from the social circle of his youth. It is difficult not to draw some parallels between the homecoming of the much younger artist in 1993 - 1994 after his graduation from the Pretoria Waldorf School and his return to these places many years later in 2006 in the midst of his successful career as an artist; a career that was forged in the earlier, intense period of self-searching and experimentation.



Fig. 4.22. Moshekwa Langa. *Where Do I Begin?* Video stills.

Although not part of the photographic series, the exhibition in Oxford also included the video work *Where do I begin?* (2001), which conceptually reinforced the idea of journeys taken and places left behind (Figure 4.22). A three-minute video taken of the feet of people boarding a bus with their varied footwear and glimpses of their travel dress invites the audience to ask questions about their destinations and reasons for travel, while the accompaniment of the famous Shirley Bassey song from 1971 of the same title brings poignancy and quiet intensity to the work. Langa was very closely involved in the curation of this exhibition (personal interview, 31 January 2017), and it is significant that he chose to juxtapose departures, arrivals and journeys evoked by the video with the still and meditative photographic portraits of objects in simple, pared-down interiors. These silent, inanimate witnesses are like the older people inhabiting these spaces, watching resignedly as the younger people come and go. Their witnessing is not limited to what and who is left behind, but extends to journeys undertaken and departures experienced. They stand as both material belongings and as markers of belonging, undemanding in their stance but, nonetheless, impregnable markers of the passing of time.

As with a number of other examples discussed earlier, there seems to be a significant shift between the way the curator chose to contextualise the artist's work in "Snap Judgments" and the way it was contextualised by the artist himself in "Homeland". However, it would be incorrect to make claims of misrepresentation and to deny Langa any awareness of the implications and resonances of his project viewed through the political lens or the framework of post-colonial theory. "Homeland", the exhibition title chosen by the artist, could never be viewed in neutral or merely autobiographical terms in the South African context. This would be particularly obvious to the artist, who chose to work with maps and, specifically, apartheid era mapping practices that reflected the erasure and destruction of land rights and the imposition of artificial borders earlier in his career. The creation of 'homelands', specially designated areas in which black South Africans were allowed/ forced to live, was one of the central policies of apartheid that enforced the dispossession and displacement of the black majority of the country's population. Mapping practices obfuscated signs of segregation and other apartheid crimes committed under the Group Areas Act and served as an impetus for Moshekwa Langa to employ maps and mapping at the beginning of his career as part of his artistic practice that reflected on these histories and their implications for his life.

Examined in the context of the circumstances of its production, it becomes possible to argue that the photographic series exhibited in "Homeland" is consistent with

Langa's artistic processes that are evident in the other media and genres for which he is better known. Deeply introspective and autobiographical, the series is part of the project of witnessing his own life made particularly powerful and overt through his experiences of travel, emigration and estrangement. The fact that his private experiences reflect the experiences of displacement and exile that are so characteristic of our age makes his production resonant for wider audiences. For Okwui Enwezor, these personal and reflective images, 'whether or not...intentionally constituted in response to colonial imagery, must be seen in terms of privileging of African memories' (Enwezor, 2006:25), as they are created in response to the historical forces of colonisation, urbanisation and globalisation that have shaped the relationships on and beyond the African continent. Characterising them as forever denying the desire for homecoming, Enwezor positions the series within his project "Snap Judgments" as reflective of the diasporic experience and its "postcolonial melancholia" (in Paul Gilroy's terminology), a meditation on 'the African postcolonial condition' (Enwezor, 2006:41). Enwezor described the approach to making images by the artists in the book as 'anti-photogenic and anti-spectacular' (Enwezor, 2006: 19). Langa's works are undoubtedly anti-spectacular; the aesthetic that they offer is beguilingly beautiful, characterised by a meditative nature, simplicity and the poetic elusiveness of their stories. The focus of the artist's attention shifts from the contrast and pattern in one image, to the play of light and shade in another; he invites us to contemplate the quiet, almost sad beauty of these material objects that act as sentinels of time within these domestic spaces. Their stillness contains stories that are not accessible to us, perhaps reflecting the artist's personal preoccupation with recording stories and memories of the past and present. The attention to detail and quiet focus on the objects as storytellers and carriers of signs of time's passing connects Langa's photographs to the long historical European tradition of depicting still lifes and domestic interiors for which Holland, Langa's place of residence since 1997, is famous. Their intimate size is consistent with that tradition. Although it would be incorrect to claim that seventeenth-century Dutch still life and domestic interior painting tradition has served as an inspiration for this contemporary series of photographs, expanding the context of the analyses of these works by Langa adds another enriching dimension to the examination of his practice. In his catalogue essay, Enwezor draws the reader's attention to the sheer variety of 'multiple ways of representing African life and space' reflected in the work of artists he selected. He describes these practices as reminding us that 'we share not only the same space but also the same time' (Enwezor, 2006: 18). Langa's

practice as exemplified in this body of photographic work could not be defined through its positioning within a certain moment in time and space, or limited to the expression of a certain discourse privileged by the art world. It claims its place within a wider aesthetic universe that is defined not via geographical or cultural attributes but via, in the words of Kwame Anthony Appiah, its value as art:

One connection - the one neglected in talk of cultural patrimony - is the connection not through identity but despite difference. We can respond to art that is not ours; indeed, we can only fully respond to “our” art if we move beyond thinking of it as ours and start to respond to it as art (Appiah, 2009: 85).

Whether we accept or reject the validity of examining Moshekwa Langa’s practice through the diasporic lens, it has nonetheless been the subject of the process of diasporisation, constituted not as much by his diasporic subjectivity but through the development of the concept and category of Contemporary African Diaspora art. This process has been instrumental in putting his practice on the map of the art world and the circuit of biennales and exhibitions. Often a reluctant and critical participant, he has developed strategies of ‘quiet resistance’ (Mercer, 2003: 107) to the mechanisms of co-option by the evolving and expanding canon. His ever-shifting installations, meandering landscapes and open-ended and enveloping mind maps could not be found on any real map, or placed in any specific metropolis. In the 2014 catalogue for the IFA Gallery show “The Jealous Lover”, the artist presented a list of key words describing his interests. The list is (unsurprisingly) very long, highly diverse and unpredictable, not unlike his practice (:76). The last but one item on the list of things important to him, Langa placed ‘a society without strangers’. Perhaps, instead of trying to locate Moshekwa Langa’s definition-defying practice within the equally complex and elusive definitions of diaspora aesthetics, we should use a different measure that I would put simply as Moshekwa Langa, the artist, and his dream for a world without strangers.

Conclusion

In the introduction to my dissertation, I discussed the term diaspora as a palimpsest – various histories of the term have contributed different connotations to how it is understood today. What I attempted to address in my own work is the current meaning of the term ‘diaspora’ as a contested term. By analysing the creative practice, writing and histories of three different artists whom, as I have discussed, have different relationships with the idea of diaspora and with being designated as diasporic subjects, I have demonstrated that these contestations originate not only in academic discourse, but are also produced by the multiple voices within the space that is described as diasporic. I have also focused on the tensions between different applications of this term that have recently become apparent. On one hand, the term is being used increasingly by the institutional structures of power within the art world as a way to commodify diasporic identities and to incorporate them as useful ‘Others’. On the other hand, diaspora artists have been responsible for the powerful contestations of the status quo in social, political, academic and artistic fields.

Gavin Jantjes, Marlene Dumas and Moshekwa Langa undertook their journeys from South Africa to Europe at different historical moments and for different reasons. All of them could be seen as successful in their chosen careers, gaining international recognition for their creative, academic and educational work. What has become apparent throughout my process of research and which is evidenced in the dissertation is the degree of connection among the three artists. These connections were established after they left their country of birth. Gavin Jantjes wrote extensively, and a number of his essays appeared in publications that addressed the art of African and other diasporas, and included work by Marlene Dumas and Moshekwa Langa (*Changing States: Contemporary Art and Ideas in an Era of Globalisation* edited by Gilane Towadros, 2004; *A Fruitful Incoherence: Dialogues with Artists on Internationalism*, edited by Gavin Jantjes, 1998). He also organised a conference and an exhibition of paintings entitled “An Appetite for Painting” in 2014, at which both he and Marlene Dumas delivered lectures and where he interviewed her as part of an Artist Talk programme. Marlene Dumas became friends and painted a portrait of Moshekwa Langa, one of her most striking portrait works; she has also supported the artist residency project “Fresh” at the South African National Gallery financially (from the prize money awarded to her in Holland), for which Langa was chosen as one of the

participants. Works by all three artists are in the collection of the South African National Gallery in the country of their birth. These stories may appear to be simple coincidences, but they become significant when we consider them in the context of Okwui Enwezor's statement about the misapprehension of the term diaspora in contemporary art discourse:

[A]s far as we know, there does not exist any network... of expatriate Africans that can be said to have molded itself into a visible collective community and that distinctly fashions itself as such' (Enwezor in Enwezor & Okeke-Ogulu, 2009: 24-25).

Although I agree with Enwezor's statement, which highlights the lack of self-definition in the way diaspora is appropriated as a term among other aspects, it also implies that networks actually do exist, but not in a way that could be described using distinct categories, clear definitions or boundaries.

My dissertation draws attention to the distinction between these unsanctioned, marginal spaces and the authoritative and authorised accounts of diaspora, made increasingly visible in the construction of the contemporary art historical canon, which I have discussed extensively in the Introduction and in Chapter I. Again, Sarat Maharaj's focus on the failures of translation and on the ultimate untranslatability of the Other become useful when we consider the productive and subversive potential of the diasporic spaces. Maharaj's warning about the celebration of hybridity as the perfect answer to nationalist discourse (Maharaj, 1994:34) should be applied to the celebratory approaches to diaspora and diaspora art as the answer to problems of migration, displacement and alienation, which are emblematic of our age. It is the indefinable, the "in-between" and unaccounted for aspects of diaspora and the diasporic condition, it is the resistance to definitions and dichotomous structures that makes diaspora a subversive category and the art produced in its spaces a powerful and questioning force capable of reaching audiences beyond borders of any kind.

It would be better, perhaps, to discard the term diaspora all together when discussing the creative practice of contemporary artists, irrespective of where they come from and where they choose or are forced to live and work. It might appear to be a productive approach, but adopting it would ignore the fact that the term is out there in the world and the process of category making in relation to diaspora art is taking place. In my dissertation, I have adopted a different approach by attempting to understand if the term could be useful when analysing artworks created by artists born in South Africa

but who, for very different reasons, have been living and working in the West. It may appear that examining the artistic practices of artists who resist being defined as diasporic through the lens of diaspora will reinforce the appropriation of the category by the power structures, including academic ones, supporting the ever-evolving and expanding yet still Western-centred art historical narrative. By examining other theoretical tools and ideas, including those suggested by Mikhail Bakhtin, Sarat Maharaj, Okwui Enwezor, Kobena Mercer, Stuart Hall and Homi Bhabha, among others, I have attempted to recover those aspects of the diaspora discourse that resist its appropriation by and reveal the structural machinations of the institutions of power in the art world and in wider society. In my view, highlighting the limitations and failures of the term keeps the space for debate open and ensures its vitality; examining the creative practices of Gavin Jantjes, Marlene Dumas and Moshekwa Langa, shaped by their respective journeys across the world, unsettles any fixed definitions of self-hood to which we may still cling. Coming to understand how they achieve this is itself a process, a journey that no one but we ourselves have to undertake by looking at their artworks and reading their creative work. Our reward is the glimpse into the untranslatable, into the spaces of the “in-between” and beyond; it is, perhaps, a glimpse into ourselves.

How to articulate the leftover inexpressible of translation? Is it perhaps to be glimpsed in a back-to-front crazy word, an image’s shimmer, the flick of a gesture, the intimacies of voice, in listening to its silences – an attentiveness that opens on to an erotics and ethics of the other beyond its untranslatability? (Maharaj, 1994: 34)

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Documentary Archives:

Iziko South African National Gallery Archive

Address: Government Avenue, 8000, Cape Town, South Africa

File Name: 2/Marilyn Martin

Folder Name: Correspondence/1998; Correspondence/1999; Correspondence/ 2000

Photographic Archives:

Hasselblad Foundation. Erna och Victor Hasselbalds Shtoftelse. Online archive. Ernest Cole Archive.

<http://www2.hasselbladfoundation.org/fmi/webd#Bilddatabasen>

Physical addresses:

Hasselblad Center

Götaplatsen

412 56 Göteborg

Hasselbladstiftelsen

Hasselblad Foundation

Ekmansgatan 8

412 56 Göteborg

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Figure 3.9. Marlene Dumas. *Black Drawings*. 1991-92. 111 drawings, 1 slate sheet. Ink on paper and slate. 279 x 333 cm overall; 27.9 x 33.3 cm each, slate 23 x 29.5 cm. De Pont Museum of Contemporary Art, Tilburg. Available: <https://s-media-cache-ak0.pinimg.com/originals/15/54/b2/1554b2d993835950b0efdfa23ad237e0.jpg> [07.03.2017].

Chapter 4.

Figure 4.1. Binders containing Dumas' image bank in her studio in Amsterdam, 2008. From the catalogue *Marlene Dumas: measuring your own grave*. Available: <http://bethanyjohns.com/Marlene-Dumas-Measuring-Your-Own-Grave> [March 25, 2016].

Figure 4.2. Plate 2. Marlene Dumas, *Moshekwa*, 2006. Oil on canvas, 130 x 110 cm. Private collection. Available: <http://theculturetrip.com/africa/south-africa/articles/paintings-of-marlene-dumas-portrait-of-an-artist/> [March 22, 2016].

Figure 4.3. Moshekwa Langa. *Wanted*. 2002. Photo collage. Image from the archive of Triangle Network.

Available: <https://www.flickr.com/photos/trianglenetwork/5838700033/> [March 22, 2016].

Figure 4.4. Marcel Duchamp. *Wanted: \$2,000 Reward*. Lithograph, 1961 (replica of 1923 original).

Available: http://npg.si.edu/exhibit/duchamp/images/14_thumb.jpg
<http://npg.si.edu/exhibit/duchamp/pop-ups/01-14.html> [March 22, 2016].

Figures 4.4a to 4.4e. Images from the photographic archive of the Iziko South African National Gallery. Images were originally taken by Moshekwa Langa at his home in Kwa-Mhlanga between 1993 and 1995.

Figures 4.5a to 4.5d. Moshekwa Langa, *Untitled (Skins)*, 1995. Multi-media drawing installation. Collection of Iziko South African National Gallery. Images are from the photographic archive of the Iziko South African National Gallery. Images were originally taken by Moshekwa Langa at his home in Kwa-Mhlanga between 1993 and 1995.

Figure 4.6. Documentary archive of the Iziko South African National Gallery. Accessed between July 2016 and January 2017. Image by the author.

Figure 4.7. Moshekwa Langa, *Untitled (Skins)*, 1995. Installation view at Iziko South African National Gallery, 2011.

Available: <http://friezenewyork.com/sites/default/files/d.jpg> [March 22, 2016].

Figure 4.8. The Renaissance Society at the University of Chicago. 1999. Moshekwa Langa. Installation View.

Available: <http://archive.renaissancesociety.org/site/Exhibitions/Images.Moshekwa-Langa.38.html> [March 22, 2016].

Figure 4.9. Moshekwa Langa. *Temporal Distance (with criminal intent). You will find us in the best places*. 1997. Mixed media installation. Installation view at Graft (curated by Colin Richards) as part of the 2nd Johannesburg Biennale.

Available: http://www.artnet.com/magazine_pre2000/reviews/silva/silva4-28-15.asp [March 22, 2016].

Figure 4.10. Moshekwa Langa. *Temporal Distance (with criminal intent). You will find us in the best places*. 1997. Mixed media installation, installation view at The Renaissance Society. The University of Chicago.

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http://archive.renaissancesociety.org/site/files/media/501/1999_langa15_b.jpg [March 22, 2016].

Figure 4.11. Moshekwa Langa. *Temporal Distance (with criminal intent). You will find us in the best places*. 1997-2003. Mixed media installation. Installation view at the 53rd Venice Biennale (curated by Daniel Birnbaum). © Photos: Haupt & Binder

Available: http://universes-in-universe.org/eng/bien/venice_biennale/2009/tour/making_worlds/moshekwa_langa [March 22, 2016].

Figure 4.12 a. Moshekwa Langa. *Untitled (Collage)*. 1995. Mixed media drawing collage using maps, black plastic rubbish bags. 70 x 50 cm.
Available: <http://archive.renaissancesociety.org/site/Exhibitions/Images.Moshekwa-Langa.38.html> [March 22, 2016].

Figure 4.12b. Moshekwa Langa. *Untitled*. 1996. Mixed media drawing collage using maps, black plastic rubbish bags.
Available: <http://artthrob.co.za/99feb/images/langa-pretoria.jpg> [March 22, 2016].

Figure 4.13. Moshekwa Langa, *Rooiwaal I*, 2003. Mixed media on paper. 140 x 100 cm. © Langa Moshekwa.
Available:
http://artnews.org/goodmangallery/?exi=36118&The_Goodman_Gallery&Moshekwa_Langa [March 22, 2016].

Figure 4.14a. Moshekwa Langa, *Untitled IV*, 2004. Mixed media on paper. 140 x 100 cm. Image courtesy of Stevenson, Cape Town and Johannesburg.

Figure 4.14b. Moshekwa Langa, *Untitled XX*, 2004. Mixed Media on paper. 140 x 100 cm. Available: <http://artthrob.co.za/05feb/images/langa04a.jpg> [March 22, 2016].

Figure 4.15a. Moshekwa Langa, *Untitled (Index) Mkwinyana (Son in Law)*, c. 2006. Mixed media on paper. 140 x 100 cm. Image courtesy of Stevenson, Cape Town and Johannesburg.

Figure 4.15b. Moshekwa Langa, *Untitled V (Index – Periodic Table of Elements)*, 2004. Mixed Media on paper. 140 x 100 cm.
Available: <http://artthrob.co.za/05feb/images/langa02a.jpg> [March 22, 2016].

Figure 4.16. Moshekwa Langa, *Untitled II (Mapping text)*, 2009. 153 x 103.
Available: <http://www.goodman-gallery.com/exhibitions/461> [March 2, 2016].

Figures 4.17 to 4.21. Moshekwa Langa, *Untitled* series from 2006. Images courtesy of the artist and Goodman Gallery, Johannesburg. Sourced from Enwezor, O. 2006. International Centre of Photography. *Snap Judgments: New Positions in Contemporary African Photography*. Gottingen: Steidl.

Figure 4.22. Moshekwa Langa. *Where Do I Begin?* Video stills.
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