

FAM5006W

'Art, outrage, dialogue: A McLuhan reading of three visual communicative practices in Cape Town public space'.

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BRWSTO002

Supervisor: Ronald Irwin

Consent forms submitted for a minor dissertation for *partial fulfilment* of the requirements for the award of the degree of Masters in Film and Media Studies: Media Theory and Practice.

Faculty of the Humanities  
University of Cape Town  
7 April 2015.

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## SUMMARY

**Title of mini dissertation:** Art, outrage, dialogue: A McLuhan reading of three visual communicative practices in Cape Town public space.

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**Degree:** MA (Media Theory and Practice)

### **Abstract:**

This mini-dissertation places a specific focus on the City of Cape Town and considers the space between aesthetics, commercial interest and social relevance in public visual communication practices. Instead of making a general statement or providing a value judgement, this research examines the nature of the debate surrounding public artistic practices by referring to three main artists; namely Michael Elion, The Tokolos Stencil Collective and Freddy Sam. The basis of the discussion is centred around the recent controversy surrounding Michael Elion's Sea Point public art sculpture, *Perceiving Freedom* (2014) and the respective questions it raised about what public space means, who has the right to represent themselves, and what that looks like. By drawing a comparison with *Perceiving Freedom* (2014) to the visual communicative practices of Freddy Sam and The Tokolos Stencil Collective, this research examines the progression of the debate. This encompasses the ways in which each artist and their work serve to illuminate the different visual modes of engagement in Cape Town's public spaces.

Due to the contemporary nature of the subject matter, this debate is engaged with on three different levels. The first level examines the context of this debate and each artist, whereas the second level considers the points where their respective visual communicative practices intersect and engage in dialogue with each other as well as the general public. The last level considers an alternative way of reading the content, context and form of visual communicative practices so that their resulting effect can be better understood. This is done with the use of Marshall McLuhan's (1964) total effect media theory.

Although several other prominent South African artists are mentioned in the scope of this research, it is important to note that the focus still pertains to the aforementioned themes of aesthetics, commercial interest and social relevance in public visual representative practices. Therefore Michael Elion, The Tokolos Stencil Collective and Freddy Sam remain the specific focus of discussion, as their respective works are used to illustrate these three themes.

The first level of engagement offers a theoretical background to the reader by briefly familiarising them with international street art and graffiti practices. This brief yet concise background allows for a better understanding of the history and politics surrounding unsanctioned public visual practices and how they differ to formal sanctioned and funded ones.

**Key Terms:**

Art; public art; visual communicative practices; Sea Point Promenade; Michael Elion; The Tokolos Stencil Collective; street art; muralism; Freddy Sam; graffiti; Art54; World Design Capital; tag; community collaboration; *Perceiving Freedom*; Marshall McLuhan; total media effects.

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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I wish to extend my heartfelt thanks to my supervisor, Mr Ronald Irwin for his patience, passion and guidance. His constant motivation and calming abilities made this research possible. I would also like to thank my family, particularly my dad and stepmom for keeping me sane during this Cape Town adventure.

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## CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

“Some people become cops because they want to make the world a better place. Some people become vandals because they want to make the world a better looking place” (Banksy 2005:7).

### 1.1 Background

This mini-dissertation places a specific focus on the City of Cape Town and considers the space between aesthetics, commercial interest and social relevance in public visual communication practices<sup>1</sup>. Instead of making a general statement or providing a value judgement, this research examines the nature of the debate surrounding public artistic practices by referring to three main artists; namely Michael Elion, The Tokolos Stencil Collective and Freddy Sam. The basis of the discussion is centred around the recent controversy surrounding Michael Elion’s Sea Point public art sculpture, *Perceiving Freedom* (2014) and the respective questions it raised about what public space means, who has the right to represent themselves, and what that looks like. By drawing a comparison with *Perceiving Freedom* (2014) to the visual communicative practices of Freddy Sam and The Tokolos Stencil Collective, this research examines the progression of the debate. This encompasses the ways in which each artist and their work serve to illuminate the different visual modes of engagement in Cape Town’s public spaces.

Due to the contemporary nature of the subject matter, this debate is engaged with on three different levels. The first level examines the context of this debate and each artist, whereas the second level considers the points where their respective visual communicative practices intersect and engage in dialogue with each other as well as the general public. The last level considers an alternative way of reading the content, context and form of visual communicative practices so that their resulting effect can be better understood. This is done with the use of Marshall McLuhan’s (1964) total effect media theory.

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<sup>1</sup> This research employs the umbrella term ‘visual communicative practices’ to denote a category that encompasses a contemporary understanding of outdoor artistic practices that are official and unofficial,

Although several other prominent South African artists are mentioned in the scope of this research, it is important to note that the focus still pertains to the aforementioned themes of aesthetics, commercial interest and social relevance in public visual representative practices. Therefore Michael Elion, The Tokolos Stencil Collective and Freddy Sam remain the specific focus of discussion, as their respective works are used to illustrate these three themes.

The first level of engagement offers a theoretical background to the reader by briefly familiarising them with international street art and graffiti practices. This brief yet concise background allows for a better understanding of the history and politics surrounding unsanctioned public visual practices and how they differ to formal sanctioned and funded ones.

### **1.1.1 *Street art***

Although street art per se, is not the main topic of investigation in this research, this brief background allows the reader to develop a more contextual understanding of the discussion and politics surrounding ‘outside aesthetic practices’, particularly in the international scene. The term street art is employed here due to its broad nature, which allows for a full discussion of all outdoor aesthetic practices. This creates a backdrop where the validity of these practices as an art, as well as their place in a South African context can be further developed later on.

Street art sits in a precarious space between graffiti, mural art, vandalism, and the formal art world. To give it a concise and simple definition would be to diminish its theoretical and practical richness. Ric Blackshaw, author of *The Street Art Book: 60 Artists In Their Own Words* (2008) problematizes defining street art, as the nature of the categorisation of the art form is more a debate in semantics. ohn (2008:15) makes this statement obvious by pointing out that “[a]rtists as a rule, don’t [*sic*] welcome external categorisation; they prefer to be looked at as individuals... so if you attempt to categorise them, they’ll [*sic*] simply go and break the rules that have been set to define them”. Blackshaw (2008:6) also points out that in an effort to narrow down a definition “there is no worse fate for any creative endeavour than to be pigeonholed and straightjacketed”.

However, in order to clarify any future confusion it is important to note that graffiti and street art are not the same thing. Street art is best described as a sub-genre of graffiti and “[t]hrough there is a good deal of crossover between the genres, they are distinct and separate in their own right” (Lewisohn 2008:15). Graffiti as a genre dates back to the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries as some of the first unsanctioned pieces of public expression:

... the word ‘graffiti’ was born when visitors to Pompeii first started talking about the fact that there was graffiti on the walls. The graffiti had always been there, but nobody had shown any interest in it, until the study of ancient art became fashionable during this period, bringing with it an interest in the concept of graffiti as an uncultured artform and as the product of a pure urge to create. By the end of the nineteenth century, we see the beginning of negative attitudes towards graffiti. ‘The pure creative act’ starts to be associated with activities related to lower elements of society (Lewisohn 2008:26).

The graffiti that occurred during this time was very different from graffiti as it is known today. There are two main reasons for this; firstly the content consisted mainly of words and poetry with little imagery and secondly, people’s relationship to ownership was better understood as something like a water pot or a slave than it was by a wall (Lewisohn 2008:26). This object-based understanding of ownership presents a different contextual scenario from a modern day spatial understanding. Here, people demarcate ownership through the construction of boundaries, walls or signifiers of ownership within a particular space. Therefore an attack on a wall would constitute an attack on the boundary of ownership itself. The movement from messages scribbled on drinking pots in the early nineteenth century to tags on the subway carriages in The Bronx in 1980 is not as radical as it might seem. The art historian Kristina Milnor points out that both of these platforms served as canvases or message boards that relate to the public and visual nature of the space around them and provided a place for pure unsanctioned public creation (Lewisohn 2008:27). What did change was the public opinion about the importance of graffiti and its status as a pure art form.

Historically, graffiti was seen as a decorative medium that was not confined to specific spatial classes (Lewisohn 2008:27). It also had a great deal of social relevance and involvement in communication with figures of authority.

This can be seen in Ancient Roman graffiti that served the role of the public voice and often spoke back to authority through messages of complaint or ridicule on city walls (Lewisohn 2008:27). After the destruction of Pompeii, graffiti disappeared off the historical record for a while, yet it resurfaced again in the middle ages.

The middle ages are noteworthy in this context because a widening gap between different modes of production was created by the Industrial Revolution. Lewisohn (2008:27) points out that this resulted in a drastic changing of public opinion with regards to graffiti:

[t]his was due to the relationship between the working classes, who are imagined to be the authors of the graffiti, and the elite, who dominated cultural production. During this period, people became much less sympathetic to those 'down below'. After the Romantic interest in graffiti as 'pure creative act', the Victorians returned to 'real art', losing interest in art that was being produced in the streets.

The modern-day implications of this socio-economic division can be seen spatially in the layouts of cities and the type of art forms that each area, divided along class lines, produces. Of particular interest to this research and graffiti forms today, is the 1987 work of the sociologist Henry Chalfant. Chalfant's pioneering work moved graffiti away from the realm of careless vandalism and repositioned the parallel graffiti and hip-hop scenes as creative responses to beleaguered urban communities. Communities such as the South Bronx in New York were "victims of the urban renewal schemes and highway building that took place in the middle of the last century" (Chalfant 2008:8).

As neighbourhoods started to disappear, residents took to the most visual and striking form of protest they knew- by simply writing on the walls. This became a form of visual protest against the urban renewal schemes that Chalfant (2008:8) calls a double-edged capitalist sword that makes money by bulldozing 'dangerous' communities to make space for new non-threatening developments. In this way, graffiti served as a visual tool with which members of the community could claim back places they believed to be rightfully theirs. This was done by tagging their names, family names or gang names onto open and public structures where they had the most visual impact.

Chalfant (2008:8) aligns this thought with Le Corbusier's notion of '*kill the street*' where "[t]he underlying political idea was to isolate and break up potentially rebellious communities, to prevent the formation of critical mass for unrest". This idea, combined with Frank Lloyd Wright's *Usonian*, a "suburban ideal intended to be affordable for the common people, drove a change in economic development in the United States after the Second World War" (Chalfant 2008:8). However, in the midst of this destruction, erasure and capitalist control a new community that could not be bulldozed was born. This community left their anonymous markings all over the city space; adorning every blank wall and train carriage they could find in order to contest ownership of and rights to New York City.

In this way, graffiti can be understood as an internal language between the different crews or gangs that is used as a territorial marker. The emphasis is placed on the name or word being communicated, and says nothing to the audience other than "this person or crew was here". This form of graffiti is called the *tag* or the signature of the author (Lewisohn 2008:15). If understood only as a simple act of representation, then graffiti would struggle to fit into any artistic category. However, the work of urban photographer Martha Cooper changed all that. In the book that she co-authored with Henry Chalfant called *Subway Art* (1984), Cooper and Chalfant presented graffiti, particularly the 'throw-ups' or large, illegal tags that appeared on the New York Metrorail as an artform.

This documentation culture allowed graffiti to exist beyond the time and place where it originally occurred. Therefore the genre expanded and reached a global level where it could develop and change. Out of this, several aesthetic and audience related-developments occurred that brought about the beginnings of street art. Lewisohn (2008:15) describes street art as a sub-genre of graffiti, whilst Chalfant (2008:8) sees street art as graffiti's "natural heir... rooted in the creativity of the dislocated and alienated urban communities...".

Today, the street art scene continues to grow and flourish at a rapid pace due to the real-time currency of digital cameras and the Internet that in turn has created a steadfast community (Schiller & Schiller 2010:11).

Therefore although street art and graffiti both have specific relationships to the space in which they occur, a distinguishing feature of street art is that it “is often highly reflective of the place where it is installed... and is reflective of its creator’s political opinions and creative desires ...” (Lewisohn 2008:65). Part of this relationship with space is the contestation of its ownership against bodies of authority such as the government and advertisers.

According to Schiller and Schiller (2010:11) “[s]treet artists bemoan the rapid disappearance of public space... with each piece of free public art, they reclaim a part of the city that has been sold off to advertisers”. Space also becomes relevant when considering the parts of the city that street art most often occurs in. Chalfant (2008:8) describes street art as a product of urbanisation categorised by growing gaps between the rich and the poor as well as a culture of migration and dislocation in the *favelas* (slums) of city spaces.

Lewisohn (2008:9) makes an observation that over time and across different places, the definition and appreciation of the intertwining scenes of street art and graffiti has changed considerably. Borrowing and developing from its graffiti roots, street art style is “in your face, anti-authoritarian, irreverent, irrepressible, wise, ironic, a voice for the powerless and the have-nots. Street art inherits its spirit from hip hop: an autonomous subculture, not for sale, free of direction from any force of society or government, and free of the dictates of the market place (Chalfant 2008:8).

Today street art forms include but are not limited to; uncommissioned murals, public performance pieces, street installations, stickerbombing, stencils, ‘green art’ and billboard defacement to name a few. To try and categorise all of these forms under the simple definition of street art is futile. Instead, what should be understood is the relationship of street art to its canvas (the city space), and its uncommissioned nature.

Therefore in the spirit of providing terminology and differentiation yet avoiding categories, Lewisohn (2008:9) points out that “[i]n the end, it’s up to you as the viewer to decide what is art and what is not and what is interesting, and what is not”. The focus is not on a distinct definition of street art, but rather the relationship that street art has with the city space and the manner in which the artists create it.

### 1.1.2 Visual communicative practices

The highbrow cultural practices of the art world could not be more distinct from the lowbrow cultural norms of graffiti practices. Previous distinctions between artistic practices and cultural ones have only succeeded in as far as they have attempted to create neat and clearly defined categories that further enforce this schism. Within this space high art is “ associated very closely with aesthetics, and its commitment to reason, order, clarity and refined judgement; [whereas popular culture] is associated with sentiment, emotion, ‘mere’ entertainment” (Schirato & Webb 2004:116).

Perhaps instead of thinking of the spaces between graffiti, street art, public art and advertising as clearly distinct, it would be more beneficial to see the space of overlap. The further exploration of these ‘categories’ allows for an all encompassing term to develop, that both notes their unique distinctions yet also acknowledges the common terrain that they occupy. Table 1 provides key differentiation pointers whereas Figure 1 shows the interwoven space that visual communicative practices in the public space occupy. This illustrates the interwoven nature of the dialectical relationship between each visual communicative practice.

	GRAFFITI	MURAL ART	STREET ART	PUBLIC ART	MONUMENTS	FORMAL ARTWORLD	ADVERTISING
<b>Location</b>	Walls, trains, signage.	Walls.	Walls, pavements, billboards.	Public areas.	Public areas, Heritage and remembrance sites	Galleries.	Billboards, trains, street poles, print media.
<b>Legality</b>	Illegal.	Quasi-legal.	Quasi-legal.	Legal.	Legal.	Legal.	Legal.
<b>Funding</b>	None.	Sometimes sponsored.	None.	Commissioned by government and/ or corporate sponsors.	Commissioned by government or heritage trusts.	Commissioned and/ or sold.	Selling of ‘advertising space’.
<b>Permission</b>	No.	Yes.	Sometimes.	Yes.	Yes.	Yes.	Yes. Strict codes.
<b>Persistence</b>	Depends on placement and notoriety.	A few months, sometimes years.	Short lifespan, usually depends on nature of work.	A few years, depending on how space is managed.	Supposed to be forever.	Written into history.	Changes every few weeks.
<b>Issue</b>	Territorial, representational practice. ‘Getting up’.	Social issues, or decorative. Can also be an educational tool.	Political issues, anti-capitalist, reconceptualisation of space.	Social and/ or political issues or sometimes decoration of space.	Commemorates certain people and places that hold historical importance.	Broad range of issues- however, artists ultimately create art to provide an income.	Promotes a particular brand/product/ideology/lifestyle or experience.
<b>Audience</b>	Other gangs (internal language).	People within the area or those who encounter mural.	People within the city, forces them to stop and do a double take.	People within the city, forces them to stop and do a double take. Also sponsors.	General public. Acts as educational and remembrance tool.	Art critics, curators, collectors, art historians, people who go into galleries.	As many people as possible within given spatial location. Demography of target audience specific to location is carefully considered before advertising is considered.

Table 1: Differentiating categories between visual communicative practices. (Table by author).



benefits of art, we need to think of those works as the most evident results of a more universal effort to give visible form to all aspects of life”.

It is in this visibility spectrum that art meets culture. When placed in a public arena, the autonomy of art meets the heteronormity of culture where art made for a commercial motive is designed to attract a mass audience though its being as accessible as possible (Schirato & Webb 2004:115). This combination of the artistic technique, structure and mechanism is best disseminated when the cultural conditions of social and ideological understandings are applied (Schirato & Webb 2004:107). Therefore it is in the common terrain of visibility and ability to communicate that public art, street art and graffiti exist. This emphasis on visibility allows a broader space to open up, where “all those visual artefacts, natural forms and ways of thinking that make up perception in our everyday life, as well as a the interdisciplinary technologies of analysis...” (Schirato & Webb 2004:4) are considered.

Through investigating the common ground of visibility between these three otherwise distinct practices, this research allows for a broader field that moves beyond the scope of the art object and into “every kind of visual phenomenon from advertising to virtual reality, with an emphasis on the everyday” (Arnold 2004:12). This emphasis on the everyday creates a space where differing modes of reception from the people who interact with these visual practices and the space they occupy can be better understood. The importance of this is paramount due to the contemporary nature of this research subject as well as the fact that it primarily makes use of mediated responses towards these visual practices.

Situating this research in a contextual paradigm where the forms not only communicate to the Cape Town public but also to each other is therefore of the utmost importance. Mirzoeff (2009:2) points out the power of this mode of comparison, as he stresses that it “is not a lofty gaze from the ivory tower but a place in the midst of conflict. Visual culture compares in order to understand such conflicts”. Therefore, the term *visual communicative practices* is employed for the remainder of this research as an umbrella term under which street art, graffiti, and public art operate. This not only highlights the common visible terrain that all three

practices occupy, but it also allows the reader to interrogate their methods of communication.

## **1.2 Rationale and need for the study**

As soon as a visual practice is placed into public space, it immediately demands attention and often through that attention, gains power. A study of a spectrum of visual public contestations is necessary as Waclawek (2011:193) points out that “[c]ategories of style, subject and signature – or who made it and who paid for it - are exceptionally pertinent to the study of works of art that fully fit into art historical ways of seeing, but simultaneously disrupt these fundamental classifications”. In light of considering the full spectrum of this disruption, Media Studies provides an interdisciplinary perspective that “challenges the reality of these productions” (O’Shaughnessy & Stadler 2012:89). It does this by making implicit structures of power and unspoken norms explicit and spoken. As Seno (2012:22) points out that “[a]t its most apolitical, work done without permission in places that make others bear witness to the affront still embodies an intuitive rebellion against the assumption that the rules of property take precedence over the inherent rights of free use and self expression”.

The relationship between official and unofficial artistic or visual practices in public space has gained academic interest in recent years. Internationally, several studies in the realm of street art have highlighted key issues. These include the transformation of public commonplaces (Riggle 2010) street art’s potential to reclaim a sense of democracy in public visual spaces (Visconti, Sherry Jr, Borghini & Anderson 2010), the politics of erasure (Halsey & Pederick 2010) and the relationship of street art and the city. Some theorists have even gone as far as to herald street art as the new form of visual culture that merges lowbrow public culture with highbrow artistic thought and aesthetic (Austin 2010, Irvine 2012).

In 1989, Albie Sachs celebrated the transformation that South Africa was about to undergo and pointed out that through the advent of democracy artists now had “the enormous gift of freedom to engage with the entirety of the human condition in their creative work” (Dubin 2012:237). He also acknowledged the difficulties that this

freedom would bring about, as not all voices would want to be heard. However, he implored the country to embrace a spirit of mutual understanding and asked only that its citizens remember to speak to one another (Dubin 2012:237).

Today the South African landscape is fraught with culture wars over contesting representative practices. Dubin (2012:235) calls these culture wars “contests for relative position, struggles over status and power, [that reduce] the discursive space within which moderate opinions and conciliatory gestures can be expressed”. Therefore the need for this research is paramount, as it provides a localised platform where these conversations can take place. Perhaps the enormity of public art’s implicit social responsibility was not completely comprehended until the advent of *Perceiving Freedom* (2014). From the moment of its unveiling on Sea Point Promenade in early November 2014, this giant Ray-Ban sculpture linked to Nelson Mandela’s legacy has been surrounded by a cloud of controversy that only seems to thicken with time. It raises some pointed arguments that include a “combination of factors – the permissions process, corporate sponsorship and artistic integrity – and it is this combination that makes the debate a convoluted one” (Schäfer 2014).

This research unravels Art54’s efforts to create a ‘public gallery’ and examines what that means for visual communicative practices in Cape Town. A comparison is employed as the most effective strategy to understanding the total effect of public visual communicative practices. This comparison also allows official artistic practices to be situated alongside unofficial visual communicative ones so that the complex dialectic relationship between them can be better understood. It is exactly for this reason that artists like Freddy Sam and The Tokolos Stencil Collective need to be situated in academic debate and discourse so that visible occupations of public space can be understood on a spectrum and not in a simple linear way. Failure to do so amounts not only to censorship but also an insular view of an inherently complex problem.

The employment of Marshall McLuhan’s (1964) ‘total effect of media’ understanding is necessary, as McLuhan does not operate in a linear way. Instead he privileges an “open-ended, dialectical and process-orientated” (Bobbit 2011) perspective where all aspects of the medium are seen as communicative mechanisms. This is important for

this research, as earlier quotes from both Dubin and Schäfer highlight the contentious and convoluted terrain that this debate occupies.

### 1.3 Brief literature study

In order to understand the fundamentals of street art, a basic introduction into how graffiti operates is needed. For this, Henry Chalfant's (1987) book *Spraycan Art* becomes essential, as it explains the basics of graffiti and how it emerged as an art form. Another pivotal work is *Subway Art* by Martha Cooper and Henry Chalfant (1984). The South African version of events is documented nicely in a series of interviews with several graffiti artists in the book *Painting Cape Town: graffiti from South Africa* by Matthew Olckers (2013). Here the emergence of the graffiti scene during the days of apartheid, as well as subsequent developments and motivating social, international and artistic influences are discussed. Readers are given a first-hand glimpse into the bittersweet life of the graffiti artist in Cape Town.

Situating street art after the discussion of graffiti becomes easier. However, several crucial sources aid an understanding what street art is and how it functions. Firstly, Cedar Lewisohn's (2008) book, *Street art: the graffiti revolution* differentiates street art from its predecessor, graffiti in a clear and understandable manner. Lewisohn expands several arguments on art, history, politics and placement to shed light on creative acts of rebellion. Another imperative source is a book by members of The Wooster Collective, namely Carlo McCormick, Marc Schiller and Sara Schiller and edited by Ethel Seno. The book, *Trespass: a history of uncommissioned urban art* (2010) looks at the interplay between uncommissioned art pieces and the attention they demand from the uncurated urban space. It highlights some key moments in history and points to the ways in which creative expression from around the world has responded to them. *The street art book: 60 artists in their own words* edited by Ric Blackshaw and Liz Farrelly (2008) explains the street art movement from the mouths of some of the most prolific international street artists. It does not provide straight-set answers as to what the street art scene is, however it is helpful in highlighting the means and methods through which to approach them.

In terms of situating street art, public art, graffiti and other outdoor artistic practices within a scope of critical study, the transition from art historical thought towards one of aesthetics and finally visual culture needs to be explained. Several key works are discussed in this research. Nicholas Mirzoeff's (2009) compilation of critical essays in his book *An Introduction to Visual Culture* explains the progression from art history towards a focus on the process of visibility. Charles Harrison and Paul Wood's (1992) collection of essays in *Art in theory 1900-2000: an anthology of changing ideas* chronicles the movement from modernism towards postmodernism to provide an understanding of the thought patterns that changed ideas about the art object and how it is engaged with. Lastly, Tony Schirato and Judy Webb's (2004) book *Understanding the Visual* provides key insights into the progression of and distinction between high art and visual culture.

Marshall McLuhan's (1964) book *Understanding Media: Extensions of Man* provides the methodological outlook for this research. By applying this theory, an understanding of the nature of the medium as a factor in the creation of the power dynamic and rhetoric around South African arts is gained. It also stresses the importance of the artist as one of the most important communicators in society.

In terms of understanding the South African context, Steven Dubin's (2012) book *Spearheading the debate: culture wars and uneasy truces* provides a glimpse into the rocky terrain that South African cultural practices occupy by examining selected contemporary cultural conflicts. Sarah Nuttal's (2006) book *Beautiful Ugly: African and diaspora aesthetics* explores issues around the usage and understanding of aesthetics in Africa through a carefully cultivated selection of essays.

#### **1.4 Aim of study**

This study aims to understand the ways that public visual communicative practices operate in Cape Town. Through the investigation of three different artists, three contradictory manners of visually interacting with public space are explored. This creates a comprehensive understanding of the issues at play when creating public visual works. It also draws attention to the manner in which each differing practice engages both the space it occupies and the audience who interact with it. Furthermore,

this research aims to highlight that studying unsanctioned, unsolicited practices is not only important but also completely necessary if the entirety of this problem is to be properly understood.

By applying Marshall McLuhan's (1964) total media effect theory to these three artists, this research aims to emphasise the often underemphasised role of the form and context that visual communicative practices take. McLuhan (1964:26) stresses that the examination of these factors is important because "[i]n fact it is the technique of insight, and as such is necessary for media study, since no medium has its meaning or existence alone, but only in constant interplay with other media". Perhaps most importantly, this study considers the many levels that visual communicative practices operate in Cape Town public space. By doing this, it aims to provide a comprehensive and dialectical understanding of the ways in which the Cape Town works of Michael Elion, Freddy Sam and The Tokolos Stencil Collective elicit engagement, collaboration and participation. This understanding could lead to more informed policy and procedure surrounding the creation of a public gallery.

### **1.5 Methodological approach**

It is important to note that the artists, by nature of their unofficial and/or contentious visual communicative practices, benefit from situating themselves outside of any academic or institutionalised context. Therefore their responses, particularly those of the graffiti artists were aggressive, rude and dismissing. I understood this to be part of their carefully cultivated street persona and as such continued my research with a changed angle. In order to make this topic subject matter for an academic study, I needed to create a methodology that understood the contemporary and unofficial nature of these practices. This makes a simple, linear approach towards my subject matter irrelevant.

Therefore I decided to approach my subject matter by focusing my study more on the visible occupation of public space as opposed to distinct visual communicative practices. Gaining official information about something unofficial proved to be tricky, and therefore I had to consider unconventional ways of obtaining my data.

In this way, the social media photo-sharing platform, Instagram exposed me to some of the murals and main ‘players’ in the graffiti and street art game. Through following their Instagram, Facebook and Tumblr movements I started to gain a basic understanding of how the scene in Cape Town operated. I gained my access point later on in 2014 when I went on street art tours in Woodstock and Khayelitsha. Later on, as part of the practical coursework I built up a photo essay that documented some of the murals and street art that I came across in Woodstock and Khayelitsha (Appendix E). I met Juma Mkwela on the Khayelitsha tour, and he later put me into contact with Freddy Sam. Out of all the artists I approached, Freddy Sam was the only one willing to talk to me (Appendix B).

Michael Elion on the other hand, had originally agreed to meet with me in early November of 2014, however on the day we were supposed to meet The Tokolos Stencil Collective decided to re-appropriate *Perceiving Freedom* (2014). Elion immediately cancelled the interview and refused to say anymore (Appendix C). After that point, not only did he refuse to engage in any dialogue around his artwork, his website also removed any links (press or otherwise) to any artwork after June 2014.

The Tokolos Stencil Collective are as such, a collective and therefore do not have a singular voice but rather pride themselves on having no desire to speak outside of or beyond their artworks. Therefore the only way to engage with some of their ideas, if not through their Tumblr or Facebook pages, is through two selected interviews, after which Tokolos proclaimed they would say no more. When the artist chooses not to speak (directly) or has effectively been silenced due to thoughtless speech, the media effectively takes over and becomes the mouthpiece of the public. After careful consideration, I realised that in order to understand the complexity of this debate, I needed to dissect it from several different theoretical perspectives as well as considering the debates that had taken place in the local media.

Only after different and intersecting points of the debate had been duly considered, could I apply any methodology. It is in this light, that Marshall McLuhan’s (1964) total media effects theory from his book *Understanding Media: the extensions of man*, is applied.

This postmodern theory allowed me to understand the dialectal forces at play within my subject matter as McLuhan (1964:52) points out that “[e]xcept for light, all other media come in pairs , with one acting as the ‘content’ of the other, obscuring the operation of both” In this case, the exclusionary public artwork needs to be paired with its content from the media- where the public debate is taking place- in order to be properly understood.

## 1.6 Overview of chapters

Chapter One has given a brief historical overview of the international street art and graffiti scenes in order to provide a contextual background to public art practices. It has provided a basic understanding of the differentiating factors between street art and graffiti as well as the way in which graffiti paved the way for street art. Various elements of street art have been discussed, based on key critical sources from the international scene. Chapter One serves as a historical context for some of the main debates surrounding art practices outside of the gallery space, thus highlighting key themes that later shape discussion in the South African context.

After the first chapter, Chapter Two provides a brief theoretical framework to explain the further usage of the umbrella term ‘visual communicative practices’. After this, it situates this debate within both a South African but more specifically, Cape Town perspective. This creates a space for Michael Elion, The Tokolos Stencil Collective and Freddy Sam to be introduced and contextualised.

Chapter Three expands on the contextual component of this research by exploring the spaces of intersection between the work of Michael Elion, The Tokolos Stencil Collective and Freddy Sam. It first considers the debate surrounding *Perceiving Freedom* (2014) and Candice Breitz’s online petition to have the work removed (Appendix D). After that it details the point where the Tokolos Stencil Collective attack *Perceiving Freedom* (2014) and how their reclamation of space ties into the Woodstock work of Freddy Sam with the use of their ‘*Gentrinaaiers*’ tag.

Chapter Four provides an alternative method of approaching the debate surrounding the manner in which visual communicative practices occupy public space. It starts off by presenting the main arguments of the previous chapters and then situating them within a larger debate. This debate considers the different modalities of interpretation that occur at each level of each visual communicative practice. The debate is firstly localised by referring to Michael Elion's aesthetic content and why that fails in a South African setting. After that, Marshall McLuhan's (1964) total media effects theory is presented as an alternative way to understand the context in which each visual communicative practice operates. This is done by unpacking and then subsequently applying key components in McLuhan's (1964) ideas such as the cultural matrix, the temperature of the medium, the way in which the medium reverses, the extension of man and media hybridisation. This leads on to discussion about the responsibilities of public artworks and what a genuine meeting point of form and content look like in practice. Lastly, it considers the importance of the role of the artist in communicating the cultural condition of the times, and how this can call the space the artwork occupies into question.

## CHAPTER TWO: CAPE TOWN CONTEXT

“Cape Town has raised me. Taught me about separation. Segregation. About community. Violence. Theft. Openness. Hospitality. Fun. Ignorance. Nihilism. Responsibility. Love and heartache. Friendships. It has bored me and kept me in awe. I sit at the foot of the mountain and wish it could integrate faster...” (Faith47 2011:34).

This chapter provides a brief theoretical framework to explain the further usage of the umbrella term ‘visual communicative practices’. After this, it situates this debate within both a South African but more specifically, Cape Town perspective. This creates a space for Michael Elion, The Tokolos Stencil Collective and Freddy Sam to be introduced and contextualised.

### 2.1 The semiotic marketplace of the South African city

Visibility and representation are contentious practices in the South African city space. Any space that is declared public automatically elicits a site for collective cultural representation. This is no easy feat, as South Africans have yet to establish a common and sustainable nationhood and therefore any representation that aims to speak for the collective automatically falls short. Furthermore, the public that responds to any visual communicative practice is not static or essentialist. Perhaps the best way to conceive of this ‘general public’ is not through a shared identity, but rather an intricate and complex entanglement of hybrid identities in a constant state of flux between past, present and future modes of representation.

In light of this, this research considers the South African nationhood as best articulated by Dubin (2012:219) when he states that South Africa presents itself “as a nation continuously redefining what it represents and one being created through ongoing clashes over values, symbols and ideas. Collectively [characterising] episodes in an ongoing culture war”. This ‘culture war’ is multifaceted and as such, occurs on many different levels.

If defining a South African audience has been a complex exercise, then defining the mode of reception becomes even more intricate. Dubin (2012:235, emphasis in original) succinctly articulates this moment of reception. He describes the point where:

South Africans *as a whole* have been impacted by living through the on-going, fundamental transformation of their society, once resting upon a system of acute racial privilege and exclusion and now being based upon democratic entitlement. They have been propelled into an utterly new world, in crucial ways being shaped through their own efforts, but partially moulded by global events as well... and cultural tensions, once diminished or suppressed through the deliberate segregation of racial and ethnic groups, now emerge with greater likelihood as different constituencies recover, create anew and promote distinctive values and beliefs, rituals and symbols. This liberated and expanded semiotic marketplace has become a crucible for generating cultural conflict as different segments of people confront one another, each rallying under the banner of their own special sense of identity.

Dubin's idea of the South African space being a 'semiotic marketplace' occurs due to the polysemic nature of the visual communicative practices that occur in this space. Schirato and Webb (2004:16) explain this polysemy as "[a]rt and pop culture [are not] neutrally aesthetic practices, but meaning making symbolic practices which both reflect and inflect social values- with the capacity to establish and confirm (or sometimes challenge) those values". Therefore due to the complexity of its communicative potential, South African public art is imbued with great responsibility towards the city space that it occupies. Bronwyn Law-Viljoen (2010:1) sets out the parameters for this relationship:

African cities, especially, are being intensely theorised, and many critics are pointing to ways of city-making in African urban environments that force a profound rethinking of city space. In South Africa, rethinking this space means grappling with what is to come *and* rereading the fragmented city that history has left us. If art is to have any presence in the city, it too must radically rethink this space. And by presence I do not mean only grand occupations of space, but the subtle presence of that is possible through a number of art forms and through a new architecture. It must tell the history of the city, its possible futures, its many and various inhabitants. But it must also create the city, give us the city as our home, if indeed it is to be the only one that we will know. It can only do this in conversation with the real readers of city space; its tenants, vendors, pedestrians, small-business owners, long time residents, commuters; the people, in other words who traverse the city daily, and live in it at night. A failure to understand these intimate human trajectories will be reflected in art that does not know the difference between solid and liquid space.

Perhaps what is most notable about Law-Viljoen's statement is her idea of space being solid or liquid and the artistic object's responsibility to identify and respond to that space. It is in this response that a clear differentiation needs to be made between spaces that represent concrete memories, and spaces that have been moulded into malleable collective sites of aspiration and representation and are therefore liquid.

When situating Cape Town in this debate, it is important to remember that its turbulent history of segregationist practices still has modern day implications. As Besteman (2008:47) notes that "[t]he way one moves through and experiences Cape Town has everything to do with where one was placed during the massive urban geography campaign engineered by the Group Areas Act of 1950". The creation of the 'white' southern suburbs stood in stark contrast with the creation of coloured areas that served to expel people of colour as far away from suburbia as possible (Besteman 2008:47). However, the city space can be described very differently as it becomes a singular place where multiple identities form, interact, fragment and reform. Its fluidity is largely due to its economic purpose as opposed to the habitation purposes of suburbia. Besteman (2008:13) best describes Cape Town as a place where:

... it seems that nothing has changed and everything has changed. The city's urban geography, its apartheid-era separations and segregations, its racial terrors, and its ignorances remain; but at the same time newly imagined identities and selves, border crossings and cultural creolizations [*sic*] are happening all over the place... Cape Town seems to offer more opportunities for imagining border crossings. Urban living, in particular offers opportunities for coming together with those of different backgrounds, because of the cosmopolitanism that characterises urban environments such as Cape Town.

If Besteman's (2008) statement is to be understood as Cape Town presenting itself as place where reimagined identities can exist by virtue of its cosmopolitan nature, then special attention should be paid to the visual communicative practices that take place in this public area. This is largely due to the complexity of an all-encompassing representation in shared space. Tonkis (2005:60) best articulates this dynamic when he states that "[o]ne of the most visible ways of exercising power, after all, is to occupy or to control space...".

## 2.2 Michael Elion's public art occupation of Cape Town

Michael Elion (b.1975) is a Cape Town based artist who is formally trained as an architect. After graduating from The University of Cape Town in 1998 with his architecture degree, he enrolled in the London Architecture Association and then subsequently for an MPhil in aesthetics in Paris (Michael Elion 2015). He describes himself as an artist that creates large-scale artworks that engage with the environment and his basic principle is to “seek beauty in all things” (Hunkin 2014). He does this “[t]hrough large-scale urban art installations, [whereby he] reimagines the environment we inhabit infusing what he refers to as a ‘layer of fantasy’ into the everyday experience” (Hunkin 2014). Elion also owns a fabrication company that creates large-scale works for corporate clients.

Although Elion's oeuvre includes a large amount of pop art, large scale installations and statues in Paris, London, and Johannesburg, the scope of this research focusses particularly on Elion's work in Cape Town. Elion has a notable preoccupation with creating an aesthetically pleasing outside world that can correlate with an inner sense of harmony (Hunkin 2014). This is perhaps nowhere more evident than in his *Rainbow* (Figure 2) and heart (*I Love You!*) (Figure 3) public artworks.



Figure 2: Michael Elion's *Rainbow*, Wale Street, Cape Town, 2012. Photograph by Bart Fouche. (Cape Town Magazine 2015).

Elion created the rainbow spectre through the use of a petrol-fueled pump with a very fine nozzle in order to create water droplets in a size that would allow sunlight to refract off them. Elion describes this process as painstaking to get right, but definitely worth the effort when he sees people stopping and engaging with his works (Hunkin 2014)



Figure 3: Michael Elion, *I Love You!*, 2012.  
Stainless steel, 101 faceted glass crystals, 200 x 200cm.  
Camps Bay Beachfront, Cape Town.  
(Michael Elion 2015).

The giant heart erected in Camps Bay worked off similar reflection principals, where the collection of crystals momentarily caught rays of sunlight and threw off colourful hues. Elion says that his fascination with light developed organically to the point where he began to use it as a creative material in itself. According to Elion “the interesting part, in terms of visual perception, is that light is the medium through which any visual artwork is perceived, but if you invert the equation and manipulate light itself using a crystal or water vapour in a certain way, light becomes the object of the perception. And it happens to perform uniquely and beautifully in and of itself” (Hunkin 2014).

In 2014, the City of Cape Town was named *The World Design Capital (WDC)*. Various public and street artists collaborated with WDC to create artworks in and around the city. The aim of the World Design Capital is to acknowledge cities which recognise design as a tool for social, cultural and economic development and provide a platform through which design projects aimed at transforming the city can operate (World Design Capital 2014).

Elion was one of the Cape Town artists that decided to take his work further by collaborating with *The World Design Capital* to create *City of Rainbows* World Design Capital project number 518 (WDC#518). *City of Rainbows (WDC#518)* is what Elion describes as a:

city-wide project that transforms the urban landscape in Cape Town with moments of fantasy. It has four components: real rainbows appearing in public places and over the streets and across the city; thousands of faceted glass crystals hanging from the city's lamp posts creating flashes of colour in the skyline; pedestrian crossings transformed into colourful crossings; and *The Secret Love Project* (Hunkin 2014).

The World Design Capital website (2014) describes the purpose of the *City of Rainbows* project as one that “aims to enhance the natural beauty of Cape Town by adding some magic and delight to everyday scenes, converting the urban landscape into a place of wonder”. Examples of Elion's crystals can be seen in Figure 4.



Figure 4: Sunlight catches hanging crystal as part of *City of Rainbows* Buitenkant Street, Cape Town, 2014 (Secret Love Project 2015).

As part of the WDC project 518, *Secret Love Project* is a urban art project that employs Elion's much-loved motif of the heart to experiment with the ways in which visual perception can influence behaviour. By placing heart stickers, shapes, and installments all over Cape Town, particularly in the Central Business District (CBD), Elion attempted to rebrand Cape Town. Elion states that he was inspired by the work of the United Kingdom hypnotist and mentalist Derren Brown, who carried out experiments in public space using signs, symbols and language to orchestrate public consciousness (Hunkin 2014). In fact, before adopting the name *The Secret Love Project*, the project was called The Conciousness Project (Expresso Partners 2014).

Elion's aim was to distribute a simple shape that is universally understood, throughout the City of Cape Town (Figure 5). This in turn should lead to more positive thought processes which would hopefully lead to positive actions. On the Secret Love Project website Elion draws a comparison between the negative feel created by use of swastikas and his intention of using the same repetition of a symbol but to yeild a positve outcome in collective visual consciuosness. *The Secret Love Project* made sure that cars, walls, street signs, businesses and pavements were adorned with an array of colour heart stickers.



Figure 5: The Secret Love Project, heart sticker. Kloof Street, Cape Town, 2014. Photograph by author.

The Secret Love Project team set up stalls at local markets and sold packets of stickers to the public. They also sold the public car guard vests with extra stickers so that the car guards could sell the heart stickers and make a profit. The project's website also advertises a Thundafund fund raising campaign, where money is raised to purchase yellow rainjacket ponchos that *The Secret Love Project* distributes to people in need during Cape Town's rainy winter months.

The last part of the project was Elion's hope to transform zebra (pedestrian) crossings in the city to rainbow or multicoloured ones. However, his aspirations have yet to be realized by the city council and as such, just remain conceptual drawings (Figure 6).



Figure 6: Designer unknown, Conceptual image for *Rainbow Crossing*. Kloof Street, Cape Town, 2014. (Cape Town Magazine 2015).

Whilst acknowledging the city and street's utilitarian purposes, Michael Elion also points out that "we shouldn't [*sic*] revert to function alone. For me, it's more important that a space is beautiful, that it makes you feel good and reinforces your sense of wellbeing" (Cape Town Magazine 2015). The concept of colouring in the street is one Elion has practiced before, when in 2009 he painted an entire street outside the Picasso Museum in Paris, pink (Michael Elion 2015). Elion is adamant that this sense of well-being should be a driving force when it comes to developing city policy around urban architecture that creates a space for citizen interaction. He took this idea very seriously, and started off on another collaboration with WDC to develop *Art Street (WDC#354)*, whereby he sought to transform Roodehoek Street in Gardens by converting the entire street and its contents into art objects and

subsequently creating a platform for a multitude of artists to get involved (Hunkin 2014). However, it seems that this project did not move past its conceptual stages, and remains a relatively scarce entry on The World Design Capital's website.

In October 2014 Elion won a bid with the City of Cape Town's newly established public art board, Art54, to erect a public art sculpture. Although the location was originally supposed to be Camps Bay Beach, the sculpture appeared on the Sea Point Promenade in early November 2014. For the opening event, several government officials, World Design Capital spokespeople and members of the public gathered on Sea Point Promenade to unveil Cape Town's newest piece of public art, a larger-than-life pair of Ray-Ban glasses gazing out towards Robben Island (Figure 7).



Figure 7: Michael Elion, *Perceiving Freedom*, 2014.  
Steel sculpture with polycarbon lenses (dimensions unknown).  
Photograph by the author.

### **2.3 Collective vandalism for the people of Cape Town**

The Tokolos Stencil Collective operates in the space of discrepancy between vague ideological aspirations and superficial artistic practices. Any attempt to define them would constitute an attempt to tie them to the very artistic cannon that they seek to defy.

The Tokolos Stencil Collective uses their resistance art to highlight what they perceive to be glaring racial and class-based inequalities in the City of Cape Town. In order to understand the way in which this South African street art guerilla collective operate, one need only understand their position towards 'real' art, which they see as "something that makes those with privilege feel uncomfortable" (Tokolos-Stencils 2015). This anti-authoritarian idea does not stray far from the collective's manifesto which states that their purpose is to "terrorise the powers that be, [and] remind South Africans, young and old, that freedom and justice remain elusive unless we are willing to fight for it" (Tokolos-Stencils 2015).

Although the methods of The Tokolos' socio-political aggravation are quite clear, their motives seem to be vague beyond demanding public attention. The primary contact or interaction point for The Tokolos Stencil Collective are through their social media pages, namely their Facebook and Instagram accounts. Their Tumblr page, Tokolos-Stencils, serves as a point of entry for any aspiring Tokolos members as it provides downloads of templates of their infamous stencils. Once they have stenciled a respective landmark, institution, building, statue or even pot plant, new Tokolos' are encouraged to post a picture of their work onto one of the various social media platforms.

The Tokolos point out that their collective is a loosely defined one as "whoever puts up political stencils that remain progressive and not in the service of a specific political party, is automatically considered a member" (Gedye 2014). This collectivist approach towards the city not only ensures their anonymity, but also allows their 'art' to be a participatory one. The Tokolos embrace this anonymity for various reasons, stating that "[t]he struggle should not be about individuals and celebrities but about the collective working to change things. It allows us to speak parallel to popular struggles [and] to divert attention from us and refocus it on those who are struggling publicly for justice" (Gedye 2014).

However, they are also quick to point out that "they are not engaging in this conversation as artists but as an anonymous and universalised image of the worker wearing gas masks and blue overalls, and carrying [a] luggage of shit [*sic*] to disrupt spaces in which poor blacks are not welcome" (Botha 2014).

Young (2014b) problematizes their desire not to be labeled as artists as it is unclear whether their desire is not to be recognized as artists or if they wish to be identified as non-artists. This distinction is quite important; as the latter category implies that they would still participate in the artistic world, yet refuse to be defined by it. However, artistic legitimacy does not appear to be something that they are too concerned with. They consider their work to be far from the auspices of vandalism and, instead they are quick to point out that they are merely transforming public space;

[a] more relevant question is who is already censured [*sic*] in public space by the very fact of their oppression? Poor blacks, women (especially black women), LGBTI [Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transsexual and Intersexual] shack-dwellers, farmworkers, the unemployed. This is not their public space. With a more participatory public art under the auspices of government, they will remain censored. That is why public art must be made outside such a space of sanction. Art must work parallel to the efforts of the oppressed in building a counter-power (Gedye 2014).

Recently, The Tokolos put these intersecting ideologies and practices into the public sphere with their controversial exhibition at the Brundyn+ gallery in the October 2014 edition of First Thursdays. First Thursdays is a public event where all the galleries in the city open up on the first Thursday of every month and offer free wine to potential patrons. The Tokolos (2015) wanted to show the exclusionary ways that the gallery space operated, and so they placed a “porta-potty”<sup>2</sup> from Khayelitsha in the middle of the Brundyn+ gallery space and later in Church Square in the Cape Town CBD (Central Business District) (Figure 8). According to the Tokolos’ Tumblr page (2015): “[t]hese disgusting plastic laptop toilets are completely unsanitary and yet thousands of people live with them every day. By placing the toilet in the middle of Hipster Heaven, [they] disrupted the space and made visible, even if for only a few minutes, those who are invisible”.

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<sup>2</sup> Portable toilets



Figure 8: The Tokolos Stencil Collective, *Poor Only*, 2014.  
Public toilet installation.  
Church Square, Cape Town.  
Photograph by Sarah Rohde.  
(Tokolos-Stencils 2015).

When questioned why they did not just refuse the invitation to participate, Tokolos replied by saying that through their participation, they exposed some of the hypocrisies of the art world. They elaborate on this statement by explaining the different levels of their participation to Gedye (2014):

[firstly under] the normal parameters sanctioned by the gallery... [secondly in] a grey area, unsanctioned by the gallery... [and thirdly in] a way completely beyond such sanction. Something that they could never tolerate because it shakes the very core of the purpose of the gallery space. What we wanted to show is how sanctioned work will inevitably be co-opted into the 'art industrial complex'. Even the stuff that was unsanctioned, such as spraying in areas that the gallery could tolerate such as on their front wall, could be and was coopted. This is true as you can see by their response, which is one of continuing a conversation. But the toilet 'installation' was beyond conversation. It is something they cannot tolerate. Their liberalism can only go so far. Once we brought actual poverty instead of merely representations of that poverty into the gallery that was going too far for them. This is why they removed the toilet immediately.

This statement is clearly implied in many of their public works. Examples include their infamous 'Dehumanisation Zone' stencils and wording placed on the walls of public toilets in Cape Town Townships, Khayelitsha and Gugulethu, (Figure 9) as

well as against several government institutions such as the Groote Schuur hospital and The University of Cape Town.



Figure 9: The Tokolos Stencil Collective, *Dehumanisation Zone*, 2014. Public toilets outside the Joe Slovo settlement alongside the N2 Highway, Cape Town. (Tokolos-Stencils 2015).

The website even highlights the case of a homeless man living in the bridge on Hospital Bend along the N2 Highway, who liked the message of the ‘Dehumanization Zone’ text and logo, and wanted the collective to spray paint it near his home. The Tokolos posted pictures of this on their Tumblr page along with this politically evocative statement: “The City of Cape Town and private business fund the City Improvement District network which serves to harass and evict homeless from the safe nooks and crannies they on the city streets. To make it more difficult for homeless to sleep, the install jagged rocks under bridges and design park benches unfit for sleeping” (Tokolos-Stencils 2015).

Other works include the ‘Remember Marikana’ icon and text (Figure 10) which iconically depict Mgcineni ‘Mambush’ Noki (Figure 11), a miner who lead the fatal 16<sup>th</sup> August 2012 Marikana uprising against Lonmin Platinum Mines after wage negotiations reached a standstill. Noki was one of the first of thirty-four miners to be killed when the police opened fire against the unarmed striking miners (Saba 2013). For the Tokolos, he has become the symbol of their resistance art.



Figure 10: The Tokolos Stencil Collective, *Remember Marikana* stencil. Hospital Bend (the intersection on the N2 and M3 highways), Cape Town, 2014. (Tokolos-Stencils 2015).



Figure 11: Greg Marinovich, Mgcineni 'Mambush' Noki, known as the Man in the Green Blanket. Rustenburg, Marikana, 2012. (City Press 2013).

Some of Tokolos' more recent anti-authoritarian statements include "Fuck Da Police", "This City Works For A Few", "Disown This Heritage" (Figure 12) and "EyeWie" (symbol for placement under CCTV cameras).



Figure 12: The Tokolos Stencil Collective, *Disown This Heritage*, 2014. Statue of Jan Hendrik Hofmeyr, (Onze Jan), Cape Town. (Tokolos-Stencils 2015).

Their latest tag reads "Let Them Eat T-shirts" and is a direct reference to President Jacob Zuma's deliverance of T-shirts to the poor masses during political rallies. According to The Tokolos Stencil Collective (2015) "[w]hile Marie Antoinette would have France's poor eat cake, South Africa's political elite would have the country's marginalised starve materially and mentally in party-political or government T-shirts".

#### **2.4 Wall painting and other decorative community practices**

Freddy Sam, also known as Ricky-Lee Gordon (b. 1984) is a self-taught Johannesburg artist who is now based in Cape Town. According to his website, he describes himself as an artist concerned primarily with "bringing to light relevant social issues, exploring the nature of man in present society, in history and in nature" (Freddy Sam 2015).

Although he has earned international fame and notoriety in the street art scene, Freddy Sam does not define himself as a street artist. Instead he adopts the term ‘muralist’ as his artistic practice is primarily mural or wall painting (Gordon 2014). He creates his murals for communities and for businesses. All of them are sponsored, however, the nature of the sponsorship differs depending on the relevant project. On the South African scene, he is perhaps best-known for his large scale Madiba Mural that he painted on Fox Street in Johannesburg shortly after Mandela’s passing in 2013 (Figure 13).



Figure 13: Freddy Sam, *Madiba Mural*  
Fox Street, Johannesburg, 2014.  
Photograph by Antonella Ragazzoni.  
(Demotix 2015).

However, his signature black and white murals with a combination of simple lettering and animal motifs are perhaps what he is best known for. On the international scene, Freddy Sam has completed several murals in Madagascar, Atlanta, Istanbul, Philadelphia and Baltimore (Freddy Sam 2015). In terms of his Cape Town murals, Freddy Sam's work can be seen in places like Woodstock, Gardens and even Khayelitsha (Figure 14), where he painted a mural outside the community youth centre in memory of Mphumzi Klaas who was shot and killed in a mugging incident in 2011.



Figure 14: Freddy Sam, *In memory of Mphumzi Klaas 1986-2011*. Painted mural, Khayelitsha, 2012. (Freddy Sam 2015).

In terms of other large scale projects that Freddy Sam is involved in, this research considers his two art collaboration projects namely *I Art Woodstock* (2011) and *Colour Ikamva* (2013) that form part of his larger curatorial project, *A Word of Art*.

Gordon founded *A Word of Art* in 2009. Every year since the project's original conception Gordon has introduced a new chapter, which has explored different ways of connecting people through creative practices. He believes that his project can effect social change "on a local, national and global scale [by] providing a platform and catalyst for art through facilitating collaboration through an international artists' exchange, and initiating and managing local community mural art outreach" (*A Word of Art* 2015).

*I Art Woodstock* and *I Art Soweto* collaboratively formed *All Originals I Art SA Community Mural Project*, which was the product of *A Word of Art's* collaboration with Adidas Originals (Figure 15). Ricky-Lee Gordon provided the curatorial direction, artistic connections and community collaborative aspect, whereas Adidas sponsored the project (Scully 2011). Adidas described the partnership with *A Word of Art* to be "a perfect fit" that would help to interact with the relevant communities (Scully 2011). The aim of the project was to "promote and celebrate local artists, mural art and the original culture within the communities we interact in" (Scully 2011).



Figure 15: Designer unknown, [Title page of *All Originals I Art SA Community mural project* booklet].  
(Graffiti South Africa 2013).

Therefore Adidas played on their *Original* brand and what they deemed to be the originality of Woodstock to “celebrate street art and its positive influence on local culture” (Scully 2011). The project was such a success that Adidas signed on for a second sponsorship in 2013, where they applied the same concept to Johannesburg to create *I Art Joburg* and this time included gallery work as well (Graffiti South Africa 2013). The Johannesburg part of the project focused on creating collaborative murals in and around the Maboneng Precinct, just East of Johannesburg.

Due to the artistic networks Gordon formed through his *Artists in Residency Programme* (another *A Word of Art* initiative) Gordon was able to open up a space of dialogue and collaboration between South African street artists and those from around the world. This meant that each of his *I Art SA* projects included many prolific names in both the local and international street art scene. The next section briefly describes each of these artists and their contribution towards the project.

In terms of the community collaboration aspect, the artists spent some time with the residents of Woodstock, asking them what they would like on their walls and giving art workshops to the community so that some of the children could get involved (Gordon 2014). Gordon also teamed up with members from the community, lead by Mitchie who helped him to get to know the members of the community and understand the history behind Woodstock. The idea was that Juma Mkwela, another local street artist, would team up with Mitchie and the two of them would conduct street art tours for R150 with a certain percentage of that money going back into the community and giving the local children art classes (Gordon 2014). However, Gordon (2014) pointed out that this tour mechanism is no longer in place, as the deal between Juma and Mitchie fell through.

Gordon also made use of the collaboration between Johannesburg-based photographer, Alexia Webster and the artist Mike Saal to create a Woodstock version of her Street Studios concept. Alexia Webster came up with the concept for the street studios after working in refugee camps around Africa as a freelance photographer for several years.

With this project, Webster's primary concern was "no longer just about taking photographs and feeding the daily pages of newspapers, but about being able to give people photographs that could be meaningful to them now and in the future" (National Arts Council of South Africa 2014).

Webster and Saal created their first street studio with the *I art Woodstock* project. Their outdoor photographic studio was "similar to West African portrait photography tradition, where families can sit for portraits in a 'street studio' setting" (National Arts Council 2014). The photo was then produced on site for free with a portable photo printer, so that participants could take it home for their family albums (Artracker 2014). Examples of her work with this project can be seen in Figure 16.



Figure 16: [close up of a portrait from Alexia Webster's Woodstock street studio], *I Art Woodstock*, 2011. Screenshot by author.

Many of the murals painted for *I Art Woodstock* were done by local artists such as Black Koki (Cape Town), Dathini Mzayiya (Eastern Cape), Mr Fuzzy Slippers (Cape Town), Xanele (Cape Town), Paul Senyol (Cape Town) and Linsey Levendall (Cape Town). However, there were also international artists such as ROA (Belgium), Boamistrua (Madrid) and later Urbanski (Berlin). The project continued to grow after its initial conception in 2011 and now includes murals by DALest, Faith47, Jackfox, Selahmade, Cern (New York), Elicser (Toronto) and Makatron (United Kingdom). Some of these examples can be seen in Appendix E.



Figure 17: Freddy Sam, *Our home our heart*.  
Painted mural.  
Woodstock, Cape Town, 2014.  
Photograph by author.

Freddy Sam's specific mural for this project was created as a special collaborative piece with one of the oldest residents in Woodstock (Figure 17). When asked about this mural, Ricky-Lee Gordon said that it was an interesting process for him, as the lady who lives in this house has been here for (at that time in 2011) eighty-seven years, but that there was little guarantee that she would be there for much longer as landlords were already trying to evict her (Gordon 2014). This small piece of information landed up being a much bigger part of the puzzle for Freddy Sam, as when the City of Cape Town passed graffiti permit by-laws<sup>3</sup> just after the completion of the project, he was required to go back to each original mural that was painted and ask the residents for permission (Gordon 2014). Gordon then discovered that only two residents out of the twenty different murals they painted actually owned their houses, and therefore they could be evicted by the government at anytime, in favour of the wealthy private sector (Gordon 2014).

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<sup>3</sup> City of Cape Town. 2010. Graffiti By-law 2010, in *Province of Western Cape Provincial Gazette* 6767 Friday, 9 July 2010 .

It was at this moment that Gordon realised that he had made a mistake. He articulates this when he says “go ask the families there, ask them what they think, because that art now represents... people coming on tours, not to look at them, to look at art. So the art doesn’t [sic] belong to them. It belongs to the white people that put it there, and the people that came to view it” (Gordon 2014).

It was this realisation that moved him towards his work with *Colour Ikamva* (2013), where he “decided to focus his energy on communities that actually... needed it, where it’s more focussed, like schools for example” (Gordon 2014). For *Colour Ikamva* (2013) Ricky-Lee Gordon partnered up with his fiancé, Megan King and joined forces with an already existing youth education development programme called *Ikamva Youth*. With the combination of *Ikamva Youth*’s focus on tutoring and sustainably uplifting the community through education, Megan’s writing and Ricky-Lee’s artistic capability, *Colour Ikamva* partnered up with *The World Design Capital* (Colour Ikamva 2015). *Colour Ikamva* was then awarded the ‘Emerging Creatives’ grant in November 2014 to start their first project, *Colour Ikakeng* (Colour Ikamva 2015). The basic concept was to inspire learners through beautifying their classrooms and learning spaces. However, the program also offered art lessons to children in the schools, and engaged the help of the local community to paint, fix and brighten broken spaces. Gordon also created a space for learners to use creative thought processes so that they could understand innovative problem solving (Colour Ikamva 2015).

The *Colour Ikamva* website (2015) bemoans the condition of current public schools and seeks to reinstall a sense of pride and possibility through the beautification of these once derelict spaces. The first *Colour Ikamva* project was sponsored by Dulux paint and took place at Thembalidanisi Primary School in Potchefstroom (Figure 18). In just over a month, the *Colour Ikageng* team specific to this project, repainted nineteen classrooms and eight bathrooms. They also fixed up broken windows, lights, desks, chairs and unblocked several drains (Colour Ikamva 2015).



Figure 18: Colour Ikageng finished exterior. Thembalidanisi Primary School, Potchefstroom, 2014. (Colour Ikamva 2015).

Since then, Gordon has returned to Cape Town and moved towards the gallery space. In March 2015, he opened his first solo exhibition, *The Nature of Our Presence* at Worldart gallery. The opening night formed part of the March edition of First Thursdays. When asked about this crossover, Gordon simply replied that he wanted to make a living from being an artist, and that after ten years of promoting other people's art he wanted to promote his own (Gordon 2014). He was also quick to point out that work inside the gallery space needs to be "evolved, far more mature, ... to be better" (Gordon 2014). Therefore, after nearly two decades of creating his work as a self-taught artist, he started taking oil painting and figure drawing classes so that his audience could "see the craft" (Gordon 2014). Figure 19 shows one of Gordon's gallery canvases. The series of work explores the relationship between man and nature, and provides a space for perception, fragmentation and reflection (Freddy Sam 2015:1).



Figure 19: Ricky-Lee Gordon, *Paradise is fading 1*, 2015.  
Oil on canvas, 150x200cm.  
(Freddy Sam 2015:1).

## CHAPTER THREE: CONTROVERSY AND POINTS OF INTERSECTION

“[I]t can be argued that no significant work of art has been produced in South Africa that has not at the same time confronted the obdurate edifice of the politics of the country’s divided memory. Consequently, the past is no longer a foreign country- divided between Europe and Africa- but a native land” Okwui Enwezor (2004:42).

This chapter expands on the contextual component of this research by exploring the spaces of intersection between the work of Michael Elion, The Tokolos Stencil Collective and Freddy Sam. It first considers the debate surrounding *Perceiving Freedom* (2014) and Candice Breitz’s online petition to have the work removed (Appendix D). After that it details the point where the Tokolos Stencil Collective attack *Perceiving Freedom* (2014) and how their reclamation of space ties into the Woodstock work of Freddy Sam with the use of their ‘*Gentrinaaiers*’ tag.

### 3.1 Michael Elion’s myopic perception

Since the very moment of its unveiling, *Perceiving Freedom* (2014) has been surrounded by a growing cloud of controversy. Firstly, the sunglasses bear an uncanny resemblance to Marc Moser’s *Sea Pink* (2011) sculpture in Denmark (Poplak 2014). The sculpture (Figure 20) is a pair of large sunglasses with pink lenses, situated on a beach.

It pokes fun at the idea of perceiving the world through ‘rose-tinted’ lenses. Moser (2015:1) describes his approach to art as being one with the form. Many of his artworks are large-scale public installations, much like Elion’s. He believes that the scale of the work is of utmost importance as “[a]n enlarged everyday object is given new significance in its interaction with its surroundings, its transformation and its name. Their origin is a world turned outwards, it is the materialization of impressions and situations” (Marc Moser 2015:1).



Figure 20: Marc Moser, *Sea Pink*, 2011.  
Sculpture, Unknown materials.  
Aarhus, Denmark.  
(Marc Moser 2015).

Although Elion has yet to comment on the likeness of his 2014 public art sculpture to that of Moser's 2011 work, it is quite evident that the sculptures have different artistic intentions. Whilst Moser's artistic statement clearly highlights his intention for exploring the relationship between the artwork and its surroundings, Elion seems to have different ideas about *Perceiving Freedom* (2014). In his official artistic statement about the artwork Elion claimed that it paid tribute to Former President Nelson Mandela. Elion coupled this statement with an image of Mandela wearing sunglasses from a visit to Robben Island a few years after his release, using the repeated motif of the sunglasses, as well as the shared correlation with Robben Island to add historical legacy to *Perceiving Freedom* (2014).

This statement immediately angered both the media and the general public, as at that stage, it had been less than a year since Mandela's passing and many felt that it was an insult to his legacy. Moreover, several journalists were quick to point out that during his incarceration at Robben Island, Mandela's sight had been irreparably damaged from working in the Limestone quarry and furthermore his request for sunglasses had been refused for the first three years (Jethro 2014, Sosibo 2014, O'Toole 2014). It also later became apparent that whilst the Mandela Foundation

had, in fact, allowed Elion to make use of the 1977 photograph, they did not grant permission for Elion's use or further appropriation of his legacy. Communications Director Danielle Mellville pointed out that "[s]uch permission does not constitute endorsement of the work [and that the] latter involves a complex process, including the signing of a code of conduct, and did not apply to the case in question" (O'Toole 2014).

As the controversy heated up, the public and media started asking "how Art54 and the City of Cape Town allowed public art to function as advertising?" (Sosibo 2014). In written statement to *The Daily Maverick* (2014), Art54 board member and local independent curator, Farzanah Badsha pointed out that although *Perceiving Freedom* (2014) did raise some relevant questions in the selection process, the root of the blame for the controversy surrounding the artwork lay with Michael Elion, as the artwork he eventually unveiled had nothing to do with his initial accepted project brief.

Art54 is a selection committee for temporary public artwork in the Ward 54 area. The '54' part of the name is due to the use of Ward 54. This ward is made up of a combination of the Robben Island, Sea Point and Three Anchor Bay area (City of Cape Town 2015). Badsha (2014) points out that this ward was chosen due to Councillor Schaffer's enthusiasm for public arts in her sector, as well as a need to create a process that could funnel public art proposals for Sea Point and Camps Bay.

It is also a *World Design Capital* project (WDC#685), that "[p]romotes new and innovative ways of thinking about art in public spaces, considers their unique landscape, mix of people and character" (World Design Capital 2014). According to Badsha (2014) the Art54 selection committee was created as a joint venture between the City of Cape Town's Arts and Culture Department and Councilor Beverly Schaffer (Tourism, Events and Marketing Directorate) in order to develop a mechanism to select temporary public art. According to the World Design Capital project summary, Art54 is a pilot project, whose success is "dependent on the supports and buy-in of all city departments in ensuring that art and creativity can be allowed to happen without the red tape" (World Design Capital 2014).

The Councillor and Department of Arts and Culture managed to raise "just under R200 000" for the creation of selected public art proposals (Badsha 2014). The

limited funding meant that although the initial amount was split between various artwork proposals it was not enough to cover all the projects. Therefore there was a space for public artworks with independent funding, provided that they met the stipulated criteria (Badsha 2014). Each proposal for the work was judged on artistic merit, theme and appropriateness as temporary public art (Badsha 2014).

After the works had been selected, the committee effectively dissolved with the understanding that the required work would be installed in 2014 and remain exhibited anywhere from three months to a year (Badsha 2014). At this point, Badsha and a few other members decided to stay involved in the process on a voluntary and ad hoc basis. This ad hoc involvement was important to Badsha (2014), as she wanted

...to be part of a process that could facilitate the creation of a transparent selection process for public art, which could eventually be implemented across the City. One that could balance the aesthetic and artistic with the technical/bureaucratic; that was not onerous to artists but supportive and sensitive to their concerns and that facilitated the creation of thoughtful temporary public art in The City.

Therefore, after the selection committee had presented their selections to the City Council, it was assumed that the role of each Art54 member was over (Badsha 2014). However, the selections of Art54 did not go far, as The City Council also required the artists to tender for approval and budget, therefore throwing out the original need for Art54's selection process (Badsha 2014). Badsha (2014) then remarks that the first she heard about Elion's sculpture on the Sea Point Promenade was through social media in early November 2014. Badsha's (2014) dismay was largely due to the fact that Elion's initial proposal had not been approved by the Art54 selection committee (and therefore not funded by the government). Furthermore, the public sculpture that was unveiled on The Sea Point Promenade bore no resemblance to Elion's initial proposal (Badsha 2014).

In describing the technicalities of this process, Badsha (2014) pointed out that the proposal that the Art54 committee had approved was for Michael Elion to create an interactive water installation on the beach in Camps Bay. The sprinklers would create Elion's much-loved rainbows on the beach, which would be an "unashamedly kid friendly and popular" work (Badsha 2014). However there was no funding for this, so the selection committee approved Elion's other proposal to create a large-scale pair of

sunglasses on Camps Bay Beach, for which he had corporate sponsorship (Badsha 2014).

Badsha (2014) insists that the selection committee was very strict with corporate branding and made it clear to Elion that “[t]he sponsor could use their own marketing strategy to leverage off its sponsorship of the artwork, but would only be acknowledged with a small logo on the A3 information panel to accompany the sculpture”. However, this did not appear to be the case at the public unveiling of the sculpture, as both Elion and Councilor Schaffer were pictured wearing Ray-Ban Wayfarer’s (Figure 21).



Figure 21: Photographer unknown, [artist Michael Elion poses with Councillor Beverly Schaffer at the unveiling of his public art sculpture, Perceiving Freedom] Sea Point Promenade, Cape Town, 2014. (Africa is a Country 2014).

Badsha (2014) further points out that this is the point where the selection process broke down, and as such, is at fault. This is due to the fact that City of Cape Town officials made a decision to move the work from Camps Bay to The Sea Point Promenade.

This “seemingly inconsequential decision around the location of the sculpture is in fact an important curatorial factor. Moving the sculpture to a new space with a different context changes its reading from fun and frivolous in relation to people relaxing and playing on a beach” (Badsha 2014).

However, Badsha (2014) believes that this is the part of the process where Michael Elion should take responsibility, as she sees him as guilty of using this location change to inappropriately add layers of meaning to the work that were not originally intended or mentioned as part of his proposal.

This placed Art54 in a place where they were set up to take the fall for Elion’s unsanctioned actions and the City Council’s poorly considered decision. According to Badsha (2014), the proposed artwork was

... described and selected on the basis that it was a fun work that created visual impact by playing with scale and its location on a beach, and if the association with Mandela had been made, the Selection Committee would have had a very different discussion about the appropriateness of the work. Problematically, the artist changed his intent and started to embroider new meanings for the work, claiming that it “looks out in contemplation towards Robben Island and sets up an axis and dialogue with our country’s history” and to layer on the title “Perceiving Freedom” with its opportunistic use of Nelson Mandela to try and dress up a superficial but fun piece of art as something as which it was never originally represented. This was done without any consultation/notification by the artist of either the art54 Selection Committee or apparently City politicians or officials. He willfully manipulated an admittedly flawed process for his own gain.

Although Badsha’s testimony does only present the story from one side, it highlights important information about the breakdown of the curatorial process and the lack of specified regulations and policy when it comes to approving public art in Cape Town. By making this process a bit more transparent, Badsha has allowed the public to understand how *Perceiving Freedom* (2014) managed to slip through the legislative cracks. However, it does raise some important questions about what the normative theory of public art in South Africa, particularly Cape Town is.

As Schäfer (2014) points out: “[t]he arguments and the criticisms leveled at *Perceiving Freedom* come down to a combination of factors – the permissions process, corporate sponsorship and artistic integrity – and it is this combination that makes the debate a convoluted one”. The scale and complexity of the debate

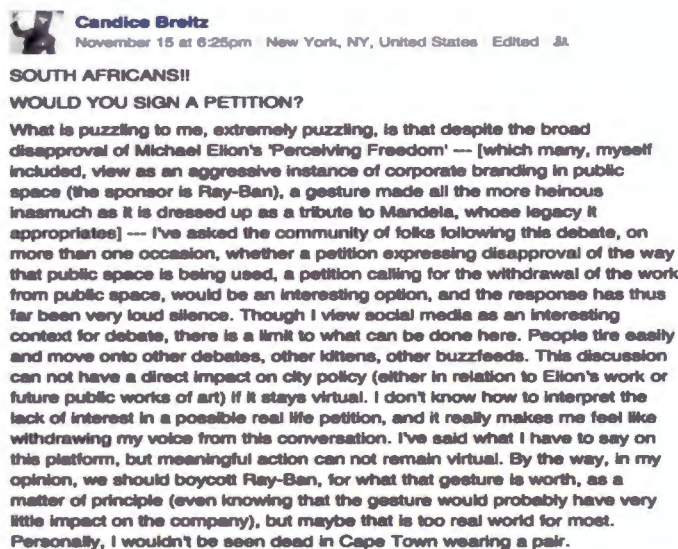
surrounding *Perceiving Freedom* (2014) did not alleviate, and the horror at Elion's "opportunistic advertising" was picked up repeatedly in the press (Schäfer 2014, Sosibo 2014, O'Toole 2014 & Young 2014). Perhaps one of the most vehement voices was that of the opinion blog, *Africa is a Country*. Writer Duane Jethro (2014) describes Elion's sculpture as "a pathetic appropriation of commemoration as cover for a commercial promotion. Really, it's a stunning emetic trigger that suggests that Nelson Mandela is beckoning us from the afterlife to buy Ray-Ban sunglasses, to do our duty for reconciliation and nation-building by consuming this luxury product".

The alignment of corporate interests to public art is deeply problematic, without even considering any links to a communal historical reference. This is because art created in a public space has a definite responsibility towards social significance. Jill Williams, Communications Manager at the African Arts Institute (AFAI) berated the lack of funding that landed Art54 in this dilemma in the first place. She further went on to respond to Elion's sculpture by saying that: "[y]ou can say what you want regarding conceptual motivation, but at end of the day, it's funded by a sponsor that is branding itself, so is that really public art?" (Schäfer 2014). Williams also went further in suggesting that city spaces used for public art should be governed by an independent board of artists from a variety of backgrounds in order to spark "transformative and necessary conversations" (Schäfer 2014).

Since this mechanism was not effectively in place, the almost immediate negative response by other South African formal and informal artists surprised few. A *Mail and Guardian* article by Sean O' Toole (2014) touches on some of these tensions when he includes statements from other South African artists such as Gerald Machona and Candice Breitz. Breitz publically condemned Elion's work and asked "[w]hose freedom is being celebrated here really?" (O'Toole 2014). In fact, Breitz was so angered by Elion's work and its subsequent message (or lack thereof) that she started an online campaign requesting the City Council to remove the offending artwork. Figure 22 shows a screenshot of part Breitz's initial response on Facebook.

In Breitz's extensive and very public Facebook debate, fellow South African artist Herman Niebuhr posted a comment that read "[t]ell that charlatan Michael Elion that we're [*sic*] sending a Jo'burg [*sic*] street fighter [artist] Stephen Hobbs down to settle this" (Sosibo 2014). Elion did not realise that Niebuhr was referring to another public

artist and as such understood the comment to be a threat to his personal safety. Elion responded by laying charges against Niebuhr and Hobbs for an incitement to violence and included Breitz in those charges because she ‘liked’ Niebuhr’s comment and as such was a participant in the threat (Sosibo 2014). Niebuhr responded by pointing out that he did not feel that Elion was qualified to create such a public piece as no public consultation went into the creation of his artwork (Sosibo 2014). Excerpts from the Facebook debate can be found in Appendix D.



The Bullshit Files: The "Mandela" Ray Ban "Sculpture" in Cape Town

Figure 22: [Candice Breitz’s Facebook response to Perceiving Freedom], 2014. (Screenshot from The Journalist).

When asked what he thought about the response to his work, Elion responded by saying that “[m]aybe its meaning should change... it does not have to be fixed in space and time. My major error was sending an oversimplified explainer to the arts intelligentsia. It’s a public piece and I didn’t [*sic*] want to write something too intellectual for passers-by to read” (Sosibo 2014).

### 3.2 The Tokolos' improvement tactics

However, the dialogue around *Perceiving Freedom* (2014) was not limited to the artists of the elite art world. In the early hours of the morning of the 18<sup>th</sup> of November 2014, the anonymous Stencil Collective, Tokolos released the following statement: “[a]s requested, Tokolos has heeded the call. You’re [sic] welcome to have someone check out the new and improved Ray-Ban Madiba glasses this morning before the authorities arrive... Aluta continua... Tokolos” (Young 2014a).

The Tokolos' idea of improvement was a defacing of Elion's *Perceiving Freedom* (2014), with their trademark 'Remember Marikana' stencils and the words, 'Myopic Art' and 'We Broke Your Hearts' (Figure 23). However, regardless of what light the actions of The Tokolos collective are seen in, their wording is extremely significant. Young (2014a) points out that 'Myopic Art' refers to Elion's inward (or shortsighted) conceptualization of Mandela's legacy, without considering a broader public context or possible implications.



Figure 23: The Tokolos Stencil Collective, *Improved version of Michael Elion's Perceiving Freedom*, 2014. Sea Point Promenade, Cape Town. (Tokolos-Stencils).

Furthermore, 'We Broke Your Hearts' alludes to Elion's work with *The Secret Love Project* and his heart stickers that were an experiment in creating a happy, positive city. Young (2014b) points out that the manifesto of The Secret Love Project goes against the fundamental beliefs of The Tokolos who, "are part of a rising wave of resistance art, one that shatters the notion that Cape Town city management apparently likes to present to tourists – that we are living in a happy, transformed rainbow nation".

This is particularly relevant to Elion's work, as *The Secret Love Project's* website proudly links to an article regarding graffiti vandalism in Cape Town and applauds Michael Elion's artistic efforts to restore beauty to the city. It also implicitly raises some interesting questions about the importance of aesthetic versus artistic intent as well the relevance of community sanctity. The article, *Gagged, bagged and tagged* was published by *Times Live* in April 2014. In it, City Councilor JP Smith spoke of the city's continuous efforts to erase graffiti and gang-related tags as he deemed it to be "dubious art" (Williams 2014).

Smith makes his intentions clear when he states that "[t]hough the city promises to continue to 'expunge' invasive and obtrusive art, plans are afoot to engender 'a sense of love and happiness' by utilising the talents of artist Michael Elion [as he] aims to turn Cape Town into the 'city of rainbows', complete with arcs of crystals and hearts" (Williams 2014). Later on in his statement, Smith goes further and states that "the only criterion for public art in Cape Town, whether graffiti, statues, or any other form of visual expression, was that it be displayed with the consent of the community and did not pose a threat to the public [as] communities must have a voice as to what happens in their back yard" (Williams 2014).

Perhaps the entirety of the controversy is best understood through humour. In a satirical article entitled *Michael Elion revealed to be an elaborate piece of performance art* published by ZA Wire (2014), the anonymous journalist dissects some of Elion's statements in the press:

[w]hen the artist says that he doesn't [*sic*] know black people because of his environment, he is recapitulating the idea that whiteness does not co-exist with blackness. The truth is that whiteness has a lot of edges, and all of them are sharp. Similarly, when unsanctioned graffiti artists have to creep into a public space under the cover of darkness, they are making a political statement against the arbitrary allocation of public space, by civil servants for their favoured white sons. When the artist says that his vandalised work is like a genocide, he is referring to the attempts to kill whiteness by reclaiming the public space.

### 2.3 Freddy Sam's space

It seems that the issue of who public space really belongs to is one that artists operating in Cape Town have been problematizing for a long time. Freddy Sam ponders this when he asks "what right do you have to make what you want in public space, just because you can afford to make it?" (Gordon 2014). When referring to Elion's *Perceiving Freedom* (2014) specifically, he proclaims:

[s]o he can afford to make this thing, and it's a tribute to Nelson Mandela, and it's this amazing thing, but I mean fuck [*sic*], it's not necessarily truant... my personal view is to create dialogue with people that see the work... create a compromise and a sense of ownership, because then you walk away from it... and it doesn't [*sic*] belong to you anymore, it belongs to the people who are exposed to it on a daily basis. So you should at least give them a voice before the artwork is created (Gordon 2014).

Although it is clear that Gordon, Breitz, Niebuhr and The Tokolos Stencil Collective are against Elion's appropriation of public space, this does not necessarily situate them on the same side. In fact, there is also a dialogue occurring between one of Freddy Sam's older murals (Figure 24) and a more recent Tokolos tag, the "Gentrinaaier" (Figure 25).



Figure 24: Freddy Sam, *Freedom Day Mural*, 2014.  
Painted mural, Albert Road, Woodstock.  
(Freddy Sam 2015).

A combination of the word *naaiers* (heralded by Afrikaans rappers *Die Antwoord*—directly translating to ‘fuckers’<sup>4</sup>) and “gentri” short for gentrification<sup>5</sup>, is used to identify local businesses in the Woodstock Area that are contributing to its gentrification process. The Tokolos angrily observed this process and have set out to identify the businesses responsible. The Tokolos Stencil Collective (2015) berated the

... community that was no longer a community as its residents of decades have been displaced by the winds of change. In its place, are the well-to-do who go to and from their work, spend money at overpriced restaurants but do not know their neighbours as they, unlike their predecessors, are too afraid to sit on the stoop. This landed gentry have been aided and abetted by what can only be described as *gentrinaaiers* - property developers, real estate agents, restaurant entrepreneurs, hipster creatives, and of course, the Old Biscuit Mill.

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<sup>4</sup> Krueger, A. 2012. *Part II: Zef/Poor white kitsch chique: Die Antwoord's Comedy of Degradation*.

<sup>5</sup> The process of renewal and rebuilding accompanying the influx of middle-class or affluent people into deteriorating areas that often displaces poorer residents (Miriam Webster 2015).



Figure 25: The Tokolos Stencil Collective, *Freddy Sam mural Gentrinaaiers* Woodstock, 2015. (Tokolos-Stencils 2015).

However, as previously discussed, Freddy Sam noted the process of using street art to beautify an area was problematic. However, this does not seem to satisfy The Tokolos Stencil Collective, who still recognise the *Freedom Day* mural as a 'gentrinaaiers'. Perhaps then, this is more a dialogue about art form, as The Tokolos use stenciled and graffiti tags to reclaim public space whereas Freddy Sam makes use of murals.

Freddy Sam, who started off as a graffiti artist, today sees little point in pursuing what he calls "pointless vandalism" (Gordon 2014). He goes further and points out that to him graffiti is "just a club, it's a fraternity club. And it's meant to be anti-establishment, but in fact they are actually just following the rules of the club that says bomb<sup>6</sup> your city, vandalize, take space back from your city" (Gordon 2014).

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<sup>6</sup> Graffiti term 'bomb' - "the illegal painting of graffiti- usually involves painting with chrome and black, colours which are easy to work with in the dark" (Olckers 2013:270).

## CHAPTER FOUR: MODALITIES OF INTERPRETATION

“The powers that be who approve public art in strategic places in and around our city need to be voted into their positions by the artists themselves and when I say artists themselves I don’t just mean those who studied it at a tertiary institution... I’d also love to see the hidden creatives lurking in over-looked disadvantaged communities exercise their rights to create powerful pieces...”- Jill Williams, Communications Manager at African Arts Institute (Shafer 2014:1).

Since the last two chapters have already laid out the contextual backgrounds and points of intersections for these three specific visual methods of communication, this chapter solely focuses on the methods through which each form is decoded. This is not carried out through a singular theoretical idea, as that does not allow for a hermeneutical understanding of a three-dimensional problem. Rather, a combination of theoretical understandings is employed in order to make sense of a complex and multifaceted phenomenon. The purpose of this approach is not to place a value judgment on any of the forms, but rather to present new and innovative ways to think about art, artistic and non-art practices in the Cape Town city space. This is done by localizing the discussion within McLuhan’s (1964) idea of the ‘total effect’ of media and how it can be applied to these three specific examples.

Firstly, the information from the previous chapters is summarized into a comparative table. The three visual communicators (artists) are compared according to Table 1 in chapter two, which provided differentiating factors for each public visual communicative practice. Although the expansive arguments presented in previous chapters are by no means reductionalist or essentialising, this table summarises the important points of some of the issues that this research has raised. It then leads on to further discussion around three prominent themes, namely context, form and content of each visual communicative practice.

	<b>Freddy Sam</b>	<b>Michael Elion</b>	<b>Tokolos Stencil Collective</b>
<b>Location</b>	Woodstock, Gardens, Khayelitsha	Sea Point, Camps Bay, Wale Street, Company Gardens, Cape Town CBD	Khayelitsha, Langa, city highways, Church Square, formal gallery space, statues, shacks, taverns.
<b>Legality</b>	Self-permitting artist. Just needs permission of wall owner.	Legal, granted Art54 award. Approval of City Council.	Illegal.
<b>Funding</b>	Adidas, Dulux, Plascon, Prominent Paints, Shelf life, residencies in artistic precincts, World Design Capital.	Government, Ray Ban, own fabrication company, World Design Capital.	Not funded.
<b>Permission</b>	Has to request.	Proper policy not followed.	No permission given
<b>Permanence</b>	As long as they are not exposed to the elements, graffitied over or removed.	6 months to 2 years.	Usually a short amount of time due to illegal status.
<b>Audience</b>	Members of relevant communities.	Perhaps has not fully considered beyond his racial and artistic perspective in terms of his audience.	The working class citizen.
<b>Issue</b>	Creative collaboration. Man meets nature. Ubuntu.	Playing with aesthetics and scale. Lofty linkages to historical legacy.	To terrorise the powers that be.
<b>Form</b>	Muralist.	Public artist/ sculptor.	Street art tags, graffiti tags.

Table 2: A comparative table of differentiating categories between Freddy Sam, Michael Elion and The Tokolos Stencil Collective.  
(Table by author).

Although each artist is different by definition, the one thing that they do share in common is their use of public space in Cape Town. Therefore a comparison becomes necessary so that uses of public space in Cape Town for visual communicative practices is better understood. This concentric approach towards media studies belongs to Marshall McLuhan (1964). He calls it “the technique of insight, and as such [it] is necessary for media study, since no medium has its meaning or existence alone, but only in constant interplay with other media” (McLuhan 1964:26). However, before the total effect is discussed, this research considers why a debate leveled only on the suitability of content is not sufficient in terms of drawing up a public arts policy.

#### **4.1 Content**

Due to the fact that Elion’s primary concern was his aesthetic manipulation, he paid little or no attention to investing his public artwork with valid content. This primarily made his aesthetic his content and as such produced a superfluous artwork. This lack of in-depth content and the lofty linkages to Nelson Mandela allowed the public to embrace the fluid structure of his boundaries and fill the work with their own content. In a sharp juxtaposition, both The Tokolos Stencil Collective and Freddy Sam have invested a great deal of thought and time into their work. The Tokolos finds his/her inspiration in the struggle of the everyday man, whilst if Freddy Sam is not collaborating with the community, he forces man to question his relationship to his surrounding ecosystem.

Therefore, this section explores the implications of not impregnating a public artwork with significant engaging content and instead making it primarily an aesthetic investigation. After discussing the insularity of aesthetics, it moves on to emphasize why a culturally engaged approach is necessary for public visual communicative practices in Cape Town. After that, it proposes a total effects methodology in order to explain the different ways that these three visual communicative practices operate in public space.

#### *4.1.1 Aesthetics for Africa*

One of the most prolific labels levelled against *Perceiving Freedom* (2014) was that it represented “white supremacist art”. This statement can be understood on two levels. Firstly, it enters into a purely racial discourse, where a white man terribly misappropriated the use of public space to represent his own needs instead of those of a larger (and not necessarily white-like-him) public. However, it can also be understood on another level. On this level racial Othering is supported by the isolated methodology of art history and the aesthetic pursuit of the art object that is directly tied to the white, Eurocentric man.

While Elion’s work is perhaps more pleasing on the eye than The Tokolos’, The Tokolos Stencil Collective seem to have a better understanding of cultural context. This questions the type of art that should be incorporated into public space and what should be banned, censored or removed from public space. Elion’s sunglasses and his ideas about beautifying Cape Town through his aesthetic experiments were not only legalised but also partially funded by Cape Town.

City Councillor JP Smith also heralded his aesthetic art form. On the other hand, graffiti and the street art stencils of the Tokolos are dubbed ‘dubious’ and defacing artistic practices that amount to vandalism and are thus illegal. Furthermore, the 2010 Graffiti by-law states that “graffiti affects the quality of life of all residents and visitors, and constitutes a public nuisance which damages the image of the City known worldwide for its beauty and makes it a less desirable place to visit, live and work in” (City of Cape Town 2010:1093).

When Elion’s European education and artistic practices are taken into consideration, it seems natural to brand him a successful public artist and large-scale sculpture fabricator. However, his aesthetic experiments that worked in Paris do not necessarily translate into successful and well-received Cape Town public artworks. Elion’s failure to engage with the social, political and economic climate around him is precisely why Tokolos were so quick to brand his work as myopic and supremacist as they pointed

out that “only the privileged can afford to be ignorant” (Tokolos Stencils 2015). Nuttal (2006:13) expands on this problem in her work on investigating the discourses of aesthetics, when she points out that:

in view of the forms of human degradation of which the African continent is seen to speak, to talk about beauty has been implicitly encoded as not simply superfluous but indeed morally irresponsible if not reprehensible. According to such a view, a study of beauty would distract our attention from the multiple permutations of social distress with which we are confronted.

Nuttal’s explanation points to the fact that the employment of beauty and aesthetics in an African context only pulls the audience’s eyes away from a cultural understanding of current socio-political contexts. Furthermore it highlights the importance of the South African public art object as having a moral responsibility to go beyond aesthetics. It seems that this was the argument raised by other artists like Freddy Sam, Candice Breitz, Stephen Hobbs and Herman Niebuhr against Michael Elion.

By primarily engaging in aesthetics above cultural relevance Elion set himself up to take the same level of criticism that European aesthetic enquiry had historically faced. This is best understood by seeing aesthetics as something found in the art object and not in the everyday object. This distinction was first pioneered by A G Baumgarten in 1735 and later published in his 1750 writings, *Aesthetica* (Winter 3:2004). Although it developed and changed over time, it resulted in an approach that focused solely on the artistic cannon, ideas of connoisseurship and taste. This approach is reminiscent of ideas about exclusivity that were first pioneered by art historians like Pliny the Elder (Gaius Plinius Secundus CE 23/24-79) and Giorgio Vasari (1511-1574) who sought to systematically create categories that could arrange art history and judge the art object based primarily on its quality and the genius of the artist (Arnold 2004: 30). One of the first intellectuals to point out the shortcomings of this approach was the cultural theorist William Hogarth in his 1753 writing *Analysis of Beauty*. Hogarth anticipated racial and cultural difference in aesthetic criteria and response, however his works were prematurely dismissed at the time (Winter 2004:4). This dismissal was unfortunate, because it further propagated a singular Eurocentric narrative that Arnold (2004:35) describes as a “... ‘caveman to Picasso’ linear, teleological narrative of art”. This narrative did not take the polysemic nature of visual texts and art objects into

account, and as a result privileged singular viewpoints over multiple interpretations based on differing contexts.

This singular perspective only took artists to the point where they had mastered the aesthetic, and could not move beyond that. Sir Ernst Gombrich (1903-2001) best articulates this sixteenth century crisis point in his book, *The Story of Art*:

[r]ound about 1520 all lovers of art in the Italian cities seemed to agree that painting had reached the peak of perfection. Men such as Michelangelo and Raphael. Titian and Leonardo had actually done everything that former generations had tried to do. No problem of draughtsmanship seemed too difficult for them, no subject matter too complicated. They had shown how to combine beauty and harmony with correctness, and had even surpassed-so it was said- the most renowned statues of Greek and Roman antiquity (1950:361).

Gombrich's statement serves as a particular example of one of many instances in which the manner that art objects and artistic practices were constituted as a solitary aesthetic and canonical pursuit. Therefore when artists could no longer improve the sensory affective response to their perfectly cultivated aesthetic they chose to react to this period. Their reaction took the form of artworks that "deliberately sought to create something new and unexpected, even at the expense of natural beauty established by the 'great' masters, [and these artists] were perhaps the first 'modern artists'" (Gombrich 1950:367).

The swivel point here lies not in the direct rejection of beauty, but in what constituted the art object. As before that point art history had, according to Lauwrens (2005:60) "produced, sustained and perpetuated humanistic (and Westernised) values, through the ideological operation of inclusion and exclusion of objects within the discourses of modernity". Since then, the genesis of ideas about the importance of the aesthetic and the artistic object have "challenge[d] some of the normative aspects of philosophical discourse on aesthetics, freeing us from the need to measure... artistic production by an exclusively Western yardstick" (Winter 2004:6). The progression away from a contextually based approach meant that the fine art aesthetic managed to make itself redundant.

This is largely because it only catered to an elite, small segment of society and therefore very few could afford to even appreciate it. In his book *The end of art*, Donald Kuspit (2004:2) points to several shortcomings and class-based distinctions that high art created as:

[h]igh art may speak to the happy few, but it doesn't [*sic*] speak to the unhappy many. It certainly seems too obscure to help them understand the people, places and things they encounter in their everyday lives. Lacking the common touch, it lacks what seems most human. What's [*sic*] the everyday point, after all, of the aesthetic experience...in contrast to the everyday experience... that high art professes to offer? What's the use of high art's subtleties and refinements in the low, practical, demanding world or everyday life?

In order to liberate itself from pure aesthetics, art needed to become relevant again. Arnheim (1969:295) explains that the liberation of art from its 'unproductive isolation' happens when "... a normal view of art must be supplemented by a psychological and educational approach that recognizes [*sic*] art as visual form, and visual form as the principal medium of productive thinking". This means that the visuality of the artistic object should be regarded as a mechanism that engages the viewer and enforces a mode of critical reception.

Since Elion did not move past the aesthetic, he did not move past the Western yardstick or the insular practices. Therefore he failed to fully comprehend the second part of Arnheim's statement and his art missed the most important part of the process; engagement. However Elion should not shoulder the blame alone. The lack of comprehensive and sustainable policy surrounding the creation of Art54 as well as the vague manner in which The City of Cape Town followed through, ensured that Elion was not held accountable to any level of cultural engagement or collaboration *before* he erected *Perceiving Freedom* (2014). Therefore this lack of cultural and contextual engagement also occurred on the side of Art54 and The City of Cape Town.

Furthermore, Farzanah Badsha's comments earlier on in this research, highlight the fact that the selection mechanism and process was initially flawed, so any artwork that was granted out of that process could not take sole responsibility. When looking at the selected artworks that have appeared on the Sea Point Promenade, very few of the artists are white (Brown 2014). This leads one to question what exactly the Art54

council had in mind with their creation of a public gallery and what type of art was given preference?

Furthermore, the formation of Art54 was first suggested by Elad Kirshenbaum, a local entrepreneur with an interest in street art and the owner of Side Street Studios in Woodstock. According to Brown (2014) he “proposed the creation of a curatorial committee, composed of a mixed group of individuals who have specialist knowledge of contemporary art practices, and an interest in public life and the city”. After many years of working alongside street artists and being a street-art enthusiast himself, Kirshenbaum had noticed that tensions between artists wanting to work in public space and the government controlling that space had risen. This was mostly due to the passing of the 2010 graffiti by law that had made the process “bureaucratic and tedious” (Brown 2014).

Freddy Sam reiterated this point when he spoke of his struggles with The City of Cape Town in terms of his murals. He pointed out that after the graffiti by-law was put in place, artists needed to get permits to put anything up in public space. This included retracing his steps and asking the residents whose walls he had already painted on if they would like to keep their murals (Gordon 2014). According to Freddy Sam when the by-law was passed, he and Faith47 consulted with the City Council in order to let them know what was happening with the street art scenes around the world so that they would be more fair with the permits granted (Gordon 2014). The city allowed an artist to be self-permitting after they have received five successful permits. This means that instead of waiting for the city to first grant permission, an artist can start on a wall as soon as the owner grants permission and then a request can be sent later to The City Council so that they do not paint over it (Gordon 2014). Freddy Sam and Faith47 are two of the only self-permitting muralists at the moment.

#### ***4.1.2 Art forms that The City of Cape Town sanctions***

The relationship dynamic between muralists and The City Council is a complex one, as Faith47’s collaboration with The World Design Capital in the form of her mural alongside De Waal Drive, *The Harvest* (2014) took six months to complete due to

delayed permissions from city council (Brown 2014). However, it is one of the most recognizable and celebrated creations from The World Design Capital reign.

*The Harvest* (2014) was conceptualized by Faith47 and is a collaboration with The World Design Capital and the #Anotherlightup project (Figure 26). The mural is painted against the side of one of the several houses on the outskirts of what was once District Six and infuses street art with the capacity of crowd funded community collaboration. According to the project description “[t]he multi-storey artwork has a visual feedback loop: the wall lights up at night each time enough money is raised for one new light to be installed on a pathway in the informal settlement of Monwabisi Park, Khayelitsha, through the organisation VPUU (Violence Prevention through Urban Upgrading)” (Anotherlightup 2015).



Figure 26: Faith47, *The Harvest*, 2014  
Painted mural with electric light installation.  
De Waal Drive, Cape Town.  
(Faith47 2015).

*The Harvest* (2014) was used as a banner image on The World Design Capital’s website and is one of the most recognizable and visible public art works after Christopher Swift’s Signal Hill light construction called *Sun Star* (2014). *Sun Star* (2014) was commissioned by Sun International and The World Design Capital. Although Christopher Swift, unlike Michael Elion, is formerly trained as an artist, and

chose a less contentious location, *Sun Star* (2014) has been surrounded by many similar if not the same controversies<sup>7</sup>.

The description for the work found on the Sun International website encourages South Africans to contemplate their democracy:

[t]wenty years into a new democracy and almost a year since the passing of global icon and former South African President Nelson Mandela, Sun International would like to encourage Capetonians and visitors to the City to express their hope for the country's future. The dramatic "SunStar" sculpture stands on the historic Signal Hill in Cape Town, overlooking both the City and Robben Island, as a reminder of South Africa's greatest story and a shining symbol of hope for the country's future. Sun International has sponsored the materials used in the design and construction of the structure (Sun International 2015).

Perhaps then, the question that should be asked is what type of visual practice is currently being sanctioned and funded in Cape Town? If culturally engaged practices like those of The Tokolos Stencil Collective or Freddy Sam are not getting supported in the same way that the 'beautifying' aesthetic of Michael Elion or Christopher Swift are, does this mean that The City of Cape Town privileges aesthetics over engagement? Or does the failure of the successful completion of the Art54 process show that the city does not pay enough attention to the dialogue occurring around these visual communicative practices?

A good place to start would be to cross-examine Art54's idea of converting Ward 54 into a public gallery space. Simply by using the word 'gallery' they are already subscribing to exclusionary principles. Public space is by its very definition inclusive and engaged. Therefore due consideration should be given to the cultural climate of prospective artworks as Harrison and Wood (1992:2) aptly point out that "[t]o consider the extensive literature and the extended history of modern art is inescapably to feel the force of questions raised in practice, questions about the definition of art itself, and about the lines of demarcation between art and that which is not art".

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<sup>7</sup> Pietersen, Carlo. 2014. Sparks fly over signal hill star, *Cape Times*, 15 December.

If the debate around Elion's work has shown anything, it is that a work of art in the public realm cannot be solely critiqued on its content or suitable lack thereof. This is because it engages on so many different levels, before any message is even disseminated. Furthermore, public art is made an exclusionary practice by sanctioning, by-laws and corporate funding that effectively privatise it. When this happens, audiences go to other public platforms to make their voices heard. Therefore this debate cannot simply be reduced to one or two intersecting angles, as varying modalities of interpretation need to be comprehended so that the total effect of the visual communicative practice on public space is understood.

In light of this, this research employs a non-linear and dynamic theoretical application to make these varying modalities of response visible. This is suggested as a mechanism to provide insight into a complex and intricate problem where possible solutions can only be generated by properly understanding the forces at play.

## **4.2 Context**

In his book, *Understanding Media* (1964) Marshall McLuhan wrote about media in an entirely new way. McLuhan's simple statement "*the medium is the message*" has changed the way that media is practiced, analysed and disseminated. The importance of this theory in Media Studies is pivotal as it considers "the personal and social consequences of any medium- that is, of any extension of ourselves- result from the new scale that is introduced into our affairs by each extension of ourselves, or by any new technology" (McLuhan 1964:7). This recognises the communicative and transformative potential of the medium through which the message is disseminated. In other words it is a shifting of emphasis of the content of media to the form in which it is delivered. The medium is important because it determines which senses and levels of interaction take a primary role.

By going through the age of automation, the invention of the machine and the light bulb, McLuhan considers how each medium changes the nature of the message received by highlighting "the psychic and social consequences of the designs or patterns as they amplify or accelerate existing processes. For the message of any medium or technology is the change of scale or pace or pattern that it introduces into

human affairs” (McLuhan 1964:8). Therefore McLuhan argues that the content of the message almost becomes irrelevant, as it could not exist without the existence of the medium itself.

McLuhan (1964:9) states that the primary focus of his theory is not on the content of the medium as primary communicating device. Instead it considers the indirect communication of the medium that occurs simply by the user interacting with it. This indirect communication occurs on the level of what McLuhan (1964:9) calls the ‘cultural matrix’ within which media operates, as this forms and shapes understanding even before any message is disseminated.

McLuhan (1964: 9) emphasises the (almost invisible) centrality of the medium by referring to electric light as it “escapes attention as a communication medium just because it has no ‘content’. And this makes it an invaluable instance of how people fail to study media at all. For it is not till the electric light is used to spell out some brand name that it is noticed as a medium. Then it is not the light but the ‘content’ (or what is really another medium) that is noticed”. In other words, only when the form is devoid of content, does the form become the content itself, as illustrated by the previous sections argument regarding Michael Elion’s use of aesthetics.

McLuhan (1964:17) also makes reference to process he calls ‘cultural homogenisation’ whereby the “greatest flood of misbegotten standards” are created through IQ testing, where testers are oblivious to typographic cultural biases and as a result discard the cultural value of the ear man and the tactical man. Therefore if visuality is prized over any other sensory accumulation of knowledge, it creates a culture of conventional responses where all other senses are rendered numb.

This idea then links in with earlier discussion that the use of the media determines its potential instead of the nature of the media itself. Failure to recognise this results in what McLuhan (1964:18) describes as the “numb stance of the technological idiot”. The only way to cure this idiocracy would then be to acknowledge the expression devoid of the content. If this does not happen then media users are rendered into a subliminal and docile state where they become prisoners in prisons without walls (McLuhan 1964:20). In other words, if the recipient of the message cannot understand

the power of the medium being used to communicate then there is no way for that recipient to understand how the same message can change depending on the medium in which it is delivered.

McLuhan then set about creating categories for media so that the form can be wholly understood before the content is considered. This is important as it allows for a more in-depth understanding of the ways in which cultural homogenisation is either being reinforced or subverted by a particular medium depending on its cultural temperature. McLuhan (1964:21) sums up this relationship when he states that “[h]ot media are, therefore, low in participation, and cool media are high in participation or completion by the audience”.

#### ***4.2.1 The effects of hot and cold mediums***

Firstly, McLuhan (1964:22) considers the extent to which the media extends one single sense with a large amount of data or information. He refers to this as the media’s definition, or in a sense, ‘filling-in’ capability. This means that cool media would have very little definition as the user is given a low amount of information. If hot media is understood as the opposite of cool media, then extensive amounts of definition or information are given. Therefore the audience of a hot media would not have to ‘fill-in’ and the media is thus low in participation.

A cool medium is only effective if the audience has a vested interest in participating. If this is not the case, or audience participation is not required, then the hot medium keeps on generating into further degrees of abstraction and visual intensity. This repeatable intensity of the hot medium lands up eliminating participation until it is purely definition and as such, the hot medium becomes explosive (McLuhan 1964:23). McLuhan (1964:23) describes this as “the principle that hot form excludes and cool form includes”. This exclusion creates a culture of specialisation that results in a dissociation or fragmentation where it occurs. Therefore, McLuhan (1964:24) cautions that any intense experience must first be censored and then cooled so that it can be learned or assimilated.

The downside of this cooled-off condition results in a lifelong state of psychic rigor mortis or somnambulism where users go about performing routine aspects of their everyday life without any intellectual engagement (McLuhan 1964:24). This repetitive somnambulistic state either has fragmentary or retribalising repercussions depending on how it is used.

McLuhan (1964:24) describes this relationship: “[s]pecialist technologies detribalise. The nonspecialist electric technology retribalises”. When man extends himself he also fragments himself. McLuhan (1964:25) sees unified consciousness ending with the idea of the machine becoming an extension of man.

However, to counteract this single-narrative the idea of *myth* is used. Myth is employed by William Blake to counteract meeting the electric challenge with a repetition of the electric form, and instead provides the instant vision of a complex process (McLuhan 1964:25). This means that myth provides an instant snapshot of a much more developed, intersecting process. Employing mythical understanding points to the fact that there is a discrepancy between the treatment of the subject (not linear) and the subject itself (linear). This moves the study away from the content of messages and towards the total effect. McLuhan (1964:26) reiterates this when he states that “[c]oncern with effect rather than meaning is a basic change of our electric time, for effect involves the total situation, and not a single level of information movement”.

In applying a total-effect approach it is important not to forget the culture in which the medium is applied, as applying a hot medium to a cool culture and visa versa can have a violent effect (McLuhan 1964:31). This is because the media of a different temperature does not operate at the same frequency of understanding as the culture it is being introduced to. If a cool culture thrives on low definition and high participation, then introducing a hot medium is perceived as a violent threat because it comes across as an assertion of non-negotiable authority.

Perhaps the best way to counteract this phenomenon is through the cultural strategies of play and humour (McLuhan 1964:31). However, this should be carried out with caution, as “[w]hat we consider entertainment or fun in our media (hot media) inevitably appears as violent political agitation to cool culture” (McLuhan 1964:31).

McLuhan (1964:31) further goes on to stress that hot cultures prefer their cultural messages neatly packaged whereas cool cultures need the aphorisms, or participatory structures that in their incompleteness require further engagement, or the concept of play.

The concept of humour can be tested through the practical joke where the hot literary medium removes both the practical and participant aspect of the joke to the point of complete abstractness. This makes the practical joke seem like an interruption to the rhythmical flow of order (McLuhan 1964:32). This interruption is predominantly an interruption in the comfort of participation. When a medium is heated up through its prioritisation of the visual then it assumes dominant command of a situation and thus pushes users out of their cool positions (McLuhan 1964:32). McLuhan (1964:32) explains this phenomenon as “the hotting up of one sense tends to effect hypnosis, and the cooling of all senses tends to result in hallucination”. In the hot scenario, the brain is directed towards thought, whereas in the cool scenario the brain over-processes and engages to the point where it goes beyond the medium.

McLuhan (1964:35) explains the process whereby the medium extends to the man by pointing out that man’s knowledge is almost as great as his ability to obtain knowledge. This means man’s knowledge is only as great as his ability to access the world around him. As time and space flatten through the concept of the instantaneous global village, so do barriers to man’s knowledge. But is there such a thing as knowing too much? McLuhan (1964:35) argues that there is, as the instantaneous electrical age brings information into an uncomfortably close proximity to man. This global village phenomenon results in a step up from the mechanical age to the instantaneous one where explosion is reversed into implosion (McLuhan 1964:35). Unable to deal with barriers that no longer exist, and realities that have turned illusionary, man implodes towards himself.

When this happens, the commodity assumes the character of the information. McLuhan (1964:36) explains this theory by stating that as information levels rise, the function of the electric material becomes pliable and adaptable to many different uses. Therefore both the intellectual and the artist are forced into a situation where their subject matter moves closer towards the realm of everyday culture. McLuhan

(1964:37) explains this relationship succinctly when he states that: “it has always been the role of intelligentsia to act as liaison and as mediators between old and new power groups”.

McLuhan (1964:38) explains this process by pointing out that the power does not belong to the intelligentsia as they only communicate the movement, not the dynamic. To understand the dynamic would be to foresee the implosive reversal of roles that takes place with the shift from the machine towards the electrical age (McLuhan 1964:38). This reversal potential has far-reaching consequences. For example the improvement of roads and transport has made the countryside a place of leisure and recreation whereas cities have become the centres of work. This thus reverses the ancient pattern of cities being a place of leisure and the country being a place of work (McLuhan 1964:38). Therefore the dynamic city produces sedentary, specialist citizens who are both progressive and explosive (extend outwards). However, the medium gets overheated to the point where it cools down. It then once again reverses and creates the global city that is static, iconic and inclusive (McLuhan 1964:38). This shows that the reversal process is a constant response to the overheating and overextension of a particular medium.

This reversal is often characterised by breaks in the system when one medium cross-fertilises another (McLuhan 1964:39). Eventually this cross-fertilisation gets to the point where private and public intersect so drastically that tribal collective authority completely collapses to the point where the individual can be held responsible for group action (McLuhan 1964:39). This hyperextension results in a complete closed system. Here the individual cannot extend beyond himself and his own work system and a result becomes numb to the world around him (McLuhan 1964:40).

#### ***4.2.2 Narcosis is only cured by hybridisation***

McLuhan (1964:45) describes this condition as one of narcosis where limited perception and induced numbness is a worrying consequence of man moving towards the global village that is a constant attack on the buffering acts of the body. As a response to this phenomenon, the body sought to maintain a new equilibrium in

accordance with developing sense ratios that determine which sense has the highest prioritisation in a particular culture (McLuhan 1964:45). This cross hybridisation results in an audio culture becoming more visual. In an already visual culture or a culture with a high visual sense ratio, the introduction of more visuality results in other senses, such as the tactile sense, taking on a visual aspect.

In this way, the medium starts to shape the man. McLuhan (1964:46) echoes this statement when he points out that “[t]o behold, use or perceive any extension of ourselves in technological form is necessarily to ... accept these extensions of ourselves into our personal system and to undergo the ‘closure’ or displacement of perception that follows automatically”.

Although the picture that McLuhan paints seems rather gloomy, he does note that man’s one salvation is that through the extension of the electrical medium man is now conscious of his unconsciousness. McLuhan (1964:47) explains this when he states that “this could not have happened before the electrical age gave [man] the means of instant, total field awareness... where [man is able to] wear all mankind as [his] skin”. This total perception of all aspects of the subliminal, social and private aspects of human life has allowed man to a sense of awareness of the global village thus drawing away from myopic social vision.

McLuhan takes his media as extensions of man argument even further, by looking at the interplay between different medias that he likens to a type of civil war. McLuhan (1964:49) attributes this to the hybridisation process that occurs when one medium “cries out for another” in a complex interplay that depends upon the participation of the user for its evolution. However, this participation is not a peaceful one, and the user is often only made aware of the effects of the medium in retrospect, once his life has been significantly altered. This is due to the fact that the media at war is the same media that man extends himself with. Therefore this has a profound psychic effect on man and he reacts with a sudden shock to the vast changes that have occurred in his life (McLuhan 1964:48). The hyperextension of media has also meant that it has been rendered invisible and thus attention is only paid to the effects of the outcome and not the process itself (McLuhan 1964:48).

Perhaps a comprehensive understanding of this phenomenon is simply best understood with McLuhan's (1964) simple "the medium is the message" idea. To attribute a product of the mechanical or electrical age to rapid developments in infrastructure and social systems in society is to side-step the initial medium that brought about any social organisation in the first place.

McLuhan (1964:49) heralds language and linguistic patterns as this initial medium: "[t]he giving to man of an eye for an ear by phonetic literacy is, socially and politically probably the most radical explosion that can occur in any social structure". Recognition of this first media is important, because it has become the structure through which different thought systems, ideas, oral traditions and tribal ear cultures have rapidly disseminated across the world.

The process of dissemination of information, or *hybridisation*, takes place in the form of fusion (joining of smaller pieces to make a whole) or fission (the whole fragments into smaller pieces). McLuhan (1964:50) explains this process as fusion occurring when literate individuals are gripped by electromagnetic energies resulting in an implosion, whereas fission can be seen when oral cultures are (violently) exploded and fragmented by literacy, which results in detribalisation. The products of these hybridisation processes are testament to the constant heating up and cooling down processes as a fission results in more homogenised culture whereas a fusion results in a far greater cultural complexity. McLuhan (1964:50) describes this process:

[f]or the fragmented man creates a the homogenized [*sic*] Western world, while oral societies are made up of people differentiated, not by their specialist skills or visible marks, but by their unique emotional mixes. The oral man's inner world is a tangle of complex emotions and feelings that the Western man has long ago suppressed within himself in the interest of efficiency and practicality.

Although the effects of the interpenetration of one medium by another seem like a helpless closed system- McLuhan's central task is to understand the causal effects of media in order to give man a sense of autonomy from the fission and fusion at play.

- Applied context

The application of McLuhan's (1964) ideas allows for a greater understanding of the initial levels of encoding that occurred before the content of each public visual

communicative practice is considered. Furthermore, the importance of the cultural matrix and the effect of the form and speed of the media in terms of the response it elicits help to comprehend the differing levels of public response to each practice.

The cultural matrix that precedes direct communication in terms of Elion's *Perceiving Freedom* (2014) occurs simply by Elion choosing to place his sunglasses on the Sea Point Promenade, instead of the Camps Bay Beach. This already influences the audience's understanding of the sculpture as if it was placed on the beach; similar to Moser's rose-tinted glasses, then the work would have been received with an automatic sense of playfulness and light-heartedness often associated with the beach.

By placing his work on the Sea Point Promenade and looking out towards Robben Island, Elion loses that sense of playfulness twofold. Firstly, he chooses to enter into a heavy political discourse by aligning his work towards Robben Island and memories of a national icon, Nelson Mandela. This situates his work in dialogue with the painful history of oppression that the pairing of Nelson Mandela with Robben Island has come to represent. Secondly, he places his sculpture in a place of recreation, as Sea Point is a place where joggers, strollers, and park-dwellers alike come to relax. Here, there is no rushing past Elion's work. Instead it is set up in dialogue with other public artworks such as the Woolworths Rhino. This is significant, because then instead of seeing Elion's work as a piece of playful public sculpture that just happens to be partially sponsored by Ray-Ban, his work is situated as a piece of public art that comes into contact with many different people from all classes, stages and racial backgrounds. Therefore, Elion allows his work to be "assigned a cultural value that advertisements lack, so it attracts a long, slow gaze" (Schirato & Webb 2004:106). This cultural matrix already makes the work problematic before any level of meaning is applied.

In a similar manner, where Michael Elion did perhaps not take the time to consider the cultural matrix of his work, The Tokolos Stencil Collective thrive off the positioning of their stencils. Their stencils seem to occur in places that do not attract the 'long slow gaze' of art, and instead therefore adopt the sweeping gaze often applied to advertising. This is important, because it is only in this modality that the viewer is forced to look again because his/her surroundings have been disrupted. In

this way, The Tokolos tags work against the pre-existing cultural matrix in order to bring the space and its practices into question.

Freddy Sam on the other hand, is very particular about understanding the cultural matrix of his works, and only creates a work once he has found a suitable area, not the other way around. All of his murals have also been collaborative-thus reinforcing a sense of myth, as they serve as a continuation of the surrounding communities stories. It is important to Freddy Sam that his work “belongs to the people who are exposed to it on a daily basis, so you should at least give them a voice before the artwork is created” (Gordon 2014).

Elion’s sculpture required a huge amount of material, labour and financial resources in order to craft the giant steel frames. Freddy Sam takes about a day or two to paint a mural. However, he spends a great deal of time engaging in dialogue with the community before. On the other hand, The Tokolos Stencil Collective creates tags instantly. Once the stencil has been downloaded, printed and cut out, the placement takes a matter of seconds and is relatively small scale. The location or cultural matrix is intrinsic to the reception of their tags as it forms part of the larger interpretation of their message.

The Tokolos Stencil Collective have a very specific message, and therefore make use of linguistic (textual) anchors with a limited inclusion of icons such as the T-shirt, ‘Mambush’ or their dehumanisation zone symbol. The Tokolos is quick to point out that they do not speak for anyone in specific, and rather “aim to amplify the voices of those whose words are ignored” (Gedye 2014). This easy-to-read, visual level limits alternative readings of their messages and promotes instantaneous reception, which ties in with their ‘in-your-face’ anti-authoritarian message of amplification. Furthermore, they propagate the myth of the working class struggle and the real, tangible effects of poverty as a failure of the socio-political climate around them.

Freddy Sam makes use of primarily black and white fragmented forms of people and animals, with some lettering in his murals and this allows for a relatively polysemic understanding of his work in a fixed space. He also encourages members of the community to participate in his painting process. Many of his recent works have

focused on the theme between man and nature and question man's ability in working towards a greater community of ecosystem (Gordon 2014).

In this way, Freddy Sam is quite particular that many of his more recent works create a space of collaboration and reflection, not only on a personal level but also a community one (Gordon 2014).

Michael Elion stands on the other side of this continuum. By creating a three-dimensional work that did not have any direct significance to the people or the area where it was created, he had to forge those connections himself. By limiting the textual description of his artwork, loosely tying it to the legacy of Nelson Mandela and accepting corporate sponsorship the polysemic readings of his work became limitless and almost automatically resulted in outrage. The physical tangibility of his work is also a greater assault on public space, because it cannot just be painted over, destroyed or easily removed; it occupies the space. It has quickly become a solid work with fluid connections or motifs.

When applying McLuhan's hot and cold theories to each of the works, it becomes much more apparent why each practice elicits different forms of dialogue, and what that dialogue looks like.

Firstly, Michael Elion's *Perceiving Freedom* (2014) is a hot medium. This is because it is high in visual definition and engages with its audience primarily on the level of sight due to its highly visible and easily accessible location and its size. It is also, ironically a pair of sunglasses. Elion did not discuss the concept with the Art54 board or open dialogue up to the public. Therefore audience participation in the initial stages of the project is low. In terms of his other work for *City of Rainbows* and *The Secret Love Project*, these are also hot mediums, however, they are not as explosive as *Perceiving Freedom* (2014). This is perhaps because of the repetition of the crystal, rainbow and heart motif throughout the City of Cape Town. Or perhaps because they were smaller in scale, and not as visually obtrusive as they sought to work on subconscious level. Also, the hearts, crystals and rainbows required a level of audience participation in spreading and spotting them. It should also be noted that the city space is a hotter culture due to its fragmentary and cosmopolitan nature as a product of its economic function. The Sea Point Promenade on the other hand, is a

cooler culture as people meet here to relax, exercise and essentially retribalise, although this space is rapidly gentrifying (Brown 2014).

In terms of Freddy Sam's murals these are a cooler medium in comparison to Elion's sculpture. This relative coolness is due to the audience collaboration in terms of understanding his location, as well as the textual anchors he places into some of his murals such as *Our heart our home* (2011). However, once the murals have been completed, there is very little audience participation. This does not work in a cool culture like Woodstock, as the heated up hipsters from The Biscuit Mill then enter the cool residential areas to seek out these hot murals. Their engagement with Woodstock is primarily on a visual level, where the hot visual form is merely reproduced by taking pictures. If Freddy Sam's initial plan with Juma had worked out and there had been tour guides, they could have served as a cooling down medium to appropriate the hot murals to a cooler community context by explaining the cultural and historical context as well as the background of the artists.

The Tokolos Collective Stencil's work is the coolest medium of the three, as their stencils and tags are high in audience participation. This occurs on two levels, firstly, anyone can be a Tokolos, and secondly they make their invitation for the audience to participate explicit. Their provoking yet simple messages also contain very few symbols or pictorial forms, thus making them lower in definition than the previous two artists. They also noted that the cooler culture of the townships embraced their works and even named one of the local taverns Mambush in memory of the Marikana martyr (Tokolos-Stencils 2015). However, the hot culture in the City of Cape Town immediately removed their *Disown this Heritage* tag on the Hofmeyr statue and their numerous *Dehumanisation Zone* tags alongside highway barriers and sides of buildings.

In terms of the humour or practical joke to counteract the overheated medium, this is best understood through The Tokolos' introduction of their visual, tactile and olfactory assault on the senses with their First Thursdays Brundyn+ and Church Square installation, *Poor Only*. Here, they wanted people to engage with the unsightly and unsavoury aspects of poverty and did this in a tangible and omnipotent manner that disrupted the space. The hot medium of the putrid "porta-potty" overheated the

already hot gallery space and city square to the point of explosion where the offending object had to be removed.

Only the stencil tag 'poor only' cooled the medium down enough to make people stop and engage (in horror). Further cooling down then occurred when The City Press reported on the incident and Richard Young and Lloyd Gedye subsequently interviewed The Collective. It was only through this cooling down by the mediated medium of text could an audience once again understand and engage in The Tokolos' practices. This example follows a process called the reversal of the medium that occurs when "during the stages of their development all things appear under forms opposite to those that they finally present" (McLuhan 1964:34).

This is perhaps best articulated in McLuhan's (1964:34) observations about in-depth social reactions turning into conservative responses with the transformation of instant technology. An example of this is when Candice Breitz started the online debate about Elion's sculpture. By moving the debate out of its physical space and into the virtual realm, Breitz cooled down *Perceiving Freedom* (2014) its virtual form allowed boundaries of time and space to flatten. Thus it instantly engaged a large audience and kept the conversation going. By cooling down *Perceiving Freedom* (2104), Breitz also brought the debate closer to many people who were not necessarily aware of it beforehand.

By making the artwork synonymous with his personal brand, Elion indirectly ensured that any attack on the artwork would be an attack on him. This approach is different from that of The Tokolos Stencil Collective, who by being an anonymous collective speak for the people to the people. Their anonymity allows their message to function in a completely different way to Elion's hyper-extended branding. Freddy Sam uses both his artist name, and his real name (Ricky-Lee Gordon) when engaging in different aspects of his artistic career. When speaking to the press or interacting with the formal artworld he quotes himself as Ricky-Lee Gordon. When painting murals he signs them with his pseudonym Freddy Sam. However, he finds himself using Freddy Sam less and less, as he "doesn't [*sic*] need to hide anymore" (Gordon 2014). Naming practices therefore hold power in terms of what messages are disseminated and how

that can be linked back to a specific person so that they are held responsible for the repercussions of their work.

This is exactly what Michael Elion experienced. When the debate moved out of the physical confines (barriers) of Sea Point and onto an online as well as mediated space (even making news in the United Kingdom), any shortcomings of the public artwork were inverted to shortcomings in Michael Elion himself. This lack of physical barriers resulted in Elion confusing commentary against his public artwork with commentary against his personhood. This could serve as a possible explanation as to why Elion then laid charges of 'incitement to violence' against Breitz, Hobbs and Niebuhr after their Facebook comments about sending a 'street fighter' to show Elion how public art is done. Elion mistook their joke (as it was devoid of the practical elements and real world references) as an actual physical threat.

As more and more people joined in on the Facebook, Twitter and media debates around Elion's artwork, the medium cooled down to the extent that it became information itself. This pliability and adaptability was heralded by The Tokolos' attack (or improvement as they called it) on *Perceiving Freedom* (2014). Elion responded by saying that "[h]ealthy debate is welcome, but this is inexcusable" (Joseph 2014). However, Elion did not take well to the original Facebook debates. It then leads one to question where exactly these healthy debates should be taking place if not in the global village of social media or on the tangible artwork itself? Perhaps the debate was not so much about where it occurred, but the fact that there was a debate at all.

When audience participation increased, the underlying power dynamic of Elion's work was revealed to be a standoff between Michael Elion's artistic intent and the public's expectation of an artwork existing in in the public sphere. The object that represented this power dynamic then became the object of power. If McLuhan's (1964) ideas are applied to this power dynamic understanding, then neither The Tokolos Stencil Collective nor Candice Breitz took away Elion's power. It was never his to begin with. All they did was reveal the power structure by making the implicit, explicit. This was achieved by communicating directly to the form, which they understood to hold the power. Breitz cooled down the form by putting it into the

realm of the global village (a product of the electrical age) and by collapsing spatial and temporal boundaries she provided a participatory platform through which the public could communicate.

As Elion did not approve of or understand this debate, The Tokolos Stencil Collective then took this communication and reheated it by placing it directly onto the sculpture, in a hot language that the hot artist could perhaps understand more clearly. However, the heating up of this cool collective dialogue still proved too cool for Elion to fully comprehend, and as a result he understood the attack as a criminal defacement of his work. This is perhaps due to the fact that Elion saw his work primarily as an extension of himself and his brand and not as a public piece. Therefore his concern was not how or why this debate was sparked, or what it meant for his work and the work of others. Instead, his primary concern was how costly the damage would be to remove so that the sculpture would be restored to its former state. This provides an example of the hyper-extended closed system that McLuhan refers to. It is important to note that Elion was not alone in his anger, as the City of Cape Town also condemned the criminal defacement of *Perceiving Freedom* (2014).

- Freedom is only found in meeting points.

If McLuhan's (1964) argument is applied to the case of *Perceiving Freedom* (2014) then it becomes evident that a public artwork has the responsibility to be an open dialogue that encompasses all perspectives. If the original artwork does not provide this to the public, the public will re-appropriate the artwork by either changing its context or its form. The moment when two different mediums meet is when a truth or revelation occurs from which a new form is born (McLuhan 1964:55). This meeting moment becomes prolific because it is in this moment of new form, truth, revelation, visibility and recognition that man truly gains a sense of autonomy and snaps out of his Narcissus-narcosis state of numbness and trance (McLuhan 1964:55). In other words, it forces him to engage with the form itself.

Candice Breitz (representative of an artist operating in the formal artworld) responded by changing its context from Sea Point Promenade to an online forum but asked for the form to be moved with her Avaaz petition. On the other hand, The Tokolos Stencil Collective (representative of an anti-authoritarian collective), responded by taking the

debate to the form itself and changing it with that. This is perhaps where true collective representation and freedom is experienced, as Elion is granted his voice, but only alongside others.

If the artwork had been removed, then the destruction of the form would also destroy the site of debate. Therefore as long as *Perceiving Freedom* (2014) stands, the debate continues- and the importance of this is paramount due to the failure of proper public art policy, governmental funding and the dissolution of Art54 . It is necessary that the public and concerned arts and government officials have their say so that Cape Town can start constructively thinking about what visual communicative practices are placed in public spaces, and what this means for society as a whole. The Tokolos Stencil Collective (2015) succinctly articulated this point when they asked who the real vandals were: “[o]ur public spaces are being privatised and defaced by corporate interests – is that not vandalism of the highest order?”.

However, since Elion removed the polycarbon lenses and scrubbed the graffiti off his work, *Perceiving Freedom* (2014) is now just an empty shell that has transformed into a children’s play object and popular photography spot. By reversing the dialogue he has censored the debate. This debate could have become what The Chief Executive of The South African National Arts Festival, Ismail Mahomed, calls “a more powerful form of community and artist protest” (Schäfer 2014). Instead, by refusing to provide an external canvas and fragmenting his work, Elion has imploded through fission. Effectively, by fragmenting and thus silencing the dialogue, he has silenced himself as he created the artwork as an extension of his brand.

- Why this perspective of cultural temperatures is important

When man seeks to translate nature, man is essentially trying to translate experience. As experience is subjective, it is largely based on the society within which it occurs. It is also completely dependant on the language used to express it. When the Western man tries to express his experience of nature, he does this through art. McLuhan (1964:58) calls this the process of applied knowledge. On the other hand, the tribal<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Understood here in the context of a McLuhan (1964:24) understanding referring to his earlier mentioned ideas about fragmentary and retribalising technologies.

man understands experience not through applied knowledge but rather magic rituals where nature is invested with spiritual energy (McLuhan 1964:59).

In both scenarios, translation is essential for understanding and later, advancement. If this translation does not occur, then it is repressed and the user is rendered numb (McLuhan 1964:59).

McLuhan (1964:59) goes on to compare the transformation and transmission capabilities of media to that of a metaphor in language, as both occur in progressive steps of understanding and comparison. Therefore media can be understood to consist of a complex interplay of ratios between different parts, as one level cannot be understood in isolation, only in comparison to another. McLuhan (1964:60) notes that it is only “by seeing one set of relations through another set that we store and amplify experience... and all media as extensions of ourselves serve to provide new transforming vision and awareness”. This layered insight can only develop as each step of understanding translates into another.

The importance of sense is therefore paramount, as the unification of the senses creates human consciousness and consciousness serves as the primary translator for experience. If man continues to extend himself through media, then eventually his senses are extended to the point where their electric manifestations can be programmed to reach a level of consciousness. In other words, if the public debate is consciously denied a physical location, then the public will seek other methods of extending themselves through various media to make sure that their voices are heard.

McLuhan (1964:62) takes his observations further by commenting on the regressing linear structure of thought applied to the arts where the effect is first envisioned, and then the artistic product is created to fulfil that effect. However, new technologies do not embrace this suspended judgement and instead numb sensation to the point where the effect is not the driving force in a product’s creation, just the unfortunate by-product. This is perhaps nowhere more clear than in Michael Elion’s *Perceiving Freedom* (2014), as Elion had already imagined the effect before creating the artwork. When the effect did not go as planned, Elion responded by trying to restore the artwork to its former state.

McLuhan (1964:63) makes use of the metaphor of surgery to explain the insertion of new technologies into society without due consideration of the end effect. In this scenario, the effect is not immediately apparent due to the numbing narcosis created by new technology that privileges the fragmentary and specialist implications of the content and thus ignores the amplified effects of the medium (McLuhan 1964:64). In order to extend on McLuhan's metaphor, surgery is understood as a process that serves to enhance or sever in the most pain free way possible with the help of anaesthetics. In this way, new technologies can be likened to strong anaesthetics due to their numbing effects. This allows them to be introduced into societies, even though they have the capability of completely transforming life with potentially disastrous consequences. McLuhan (1964:64) explains this process:

[t]oday we have anaesthetics that enable us to perform the most frightful physical operations on one another. The new media and technologies by which we amplify and extend ourselves constitute huge collective surgery carried out on the social body with complete disregard for antiseptics. If the operations are needed, the inevitability of infecting the whole system during the operation has to be considered. For in operating in society with new technology, it is not the incised area that is most affected. The area of impact and incision is numb. It is the entire system that is changed.

The changed system is symptomatic of the introduction of a new medium that provokes a completely different and unanticipated sense. McLuhan (1964:64) points out that this in turn shifts the sense ratio of man and the society from which he heralds thus causing an undiagnosed effect. Immunity to this effect would entail encountering the disease without its symptoms (McLuhan 1964:64). To take this idea further, it would only be possible to develop immunity if the user was aware of his symptoms. McLuhan (1964:64) comments that “[n]o society has ever known enough about its actions to have developed immunity to its new extensions or technologies. Today we have begun to sense that art may be able to provide such immunity”.

Art provides immunity precisely because it inverts technological anaesthesiology and instead re-introduces the sense ratio that allows man to consciously feel the effect of his rapid advancement. The role of the artist would then be to warn man, as he “picks up the message of cultural and technological challenge decades before its transforming impact occurs. He, then, builds models or Noah's arks for facing the change that is at hand” (McLuhan 1964:65). In order for the artist to create work he

needs to be a part of the society that he is commenting on, not just sitting at the peripheries.

McLuhan (1964:65) echoes this idea when he refers to Wyndham Lewis' statement that "[t]he artist is always engaged in writing a detailed history of the future because he is the only person aware of the nature of the present". Within this mind set the importance of the artist should be recognised in terms of his work and in his ability to side-step the grasp of technological innovation. The genius of the artist should not overshadow his understanding of the medium. McLuhan (1964:65) describes this artist as "the man in any field, scientific or humanistic, who grasps the implications of his actions and of new knowledge in his own time. He is the man of integral awareness".

This authentic and inherent awareness that the artist possesses is seen as both an advancement of knowledge and the ability to anticipate and rectify effects of new technologies. McLuhan (1964:66) probes why artists have not been advanced to a status of power where their observations can be seen as social navigation charts. However if this was the case, then one would also have to muse if the gaze with which one studied artforms would also change? The gaze is important here because it is the lens through which the effect of social consciousness is felt. If art were seen as an everyday object, then there would be no lingering gaze, as previously discussed. McLuhan (1964:66) elaborates on this idea: "for those parts of ourselves that we thrust out in the form of new invention are attempts to counter or neutralize [*sic*] collective pressures and irritations. But the counter-irritant usually proves a greater plague than the initial irritant ". This is where the artist comes in, as he creates a form of entertainment that mimics reality in such a way that it simulates the real-world effect.

It may seem simple enough on paper, but in reality new technologies are so embedded in man's consciousness that an invisible dependency has been created. This effectively destroys any distinction between the private and the public due to the singular unified electric consciousness that the earlier section of this chapter spoke about. McLuhan (1964:68) points out that "[e]lectric technology is directly related to our central nervous systems ... leasing our eyes and ears and nerves to commercial interests is like handing over the common speech to private corporation ".

By extending his senses to the point of complete manipulation, man becomes a slave to them. McLuhan (1964:69) warns of this condition where “fragmentation or specialism as a technique of achieving security under tyranny and oppression of any kind has an attendant danger... [where the] entire stake of security and status is in a single form of acquired knowledge”.

Security in this situation is obtained by the installation of boundaries where two societies live side by side but do not interact. This frontier or wall creates tension. McLuhan (1964:69) describes this mounting tension: “[w]hen two societies exist side by side, the psychic challenge of the more complex one acts as an explosive release of energy in the simpler one”. This explosion is perhaps nowhere better witnessed than in the city centre, where the more ‘simple’ society is fragmented through interactions with a Westernised one. The explosion cannot be rectified through the use of a retrospective glance or a future-orientated glance. Instead, McLuhan (1964:70) notes that it is only the dedicated artist that has the insight with which to encounter present day actuality.

This goes back to earlier arguments about the capability of the artist to simulate aspects of reality through imitation so that the overall effect may be felt. It is perhaps best to understand this in terms of earlier mentioned ideas about the reversal of the overheated medium: “[w]hen the technology of a time is powerfully thrusting in one direction, wisdom may call for a countervailing thrust” (McLuhan 1964:70). This countervailing thrust is usually an implosive fragmentation that results in decentralisation and flexibility of the smaller centres. Thus the whole breaks up and reorganizes itself into smaller components. Therefore the importance of each visual communicative practice, whether alone or in conversation, is that they call public space and governmental policy into question. They force interaction, and allow man to feel his sense ratios by making these issues not only tangible, but most importantly visible. Art provides the immunisation to the capitalist consumption of public spaces by visually suggesting this scenario to the public. By (intentionally or non-intentionally) doing this, they also bring debate into the public mediated realm and out of the purely visual one. This forces Cape Town to consider what the corporate

consumption of space means and how disengaged it is from its surrounding cultural climate.

## CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION

### 5.1 Summary of chapters

This mini-dissertation has argued that visual communicative practices in the City of Cape Town should be placed on a spectrum instead of being considered individually. Within this spectrum it is important to understand that illegal and legal practices are continuously engaging in a visual and public dialogue that needs a space to manifest. This is highlighted through the background discussion of the international street art scene as well as the necessity of the term 'visual communicative practices' in Chapter One.

Chapter Two presented a specific and localized case study so that these ideas were illustrated. By considering the three different visual communicative practices of Michael Elion, The Tokolos Stencil Collective and Freddy Sam respectively, it became clear to see that there are a variety of ways to approach public space in Cape Town.

The debate and intersections of practices around Michael Elion's *Perceiving Freedom* (2014) illuminated ideas about the use of public space, artistic responsibility, what constitutes vandalism, community engagement and corporate sponsorship. The work of Freddy Sam is presented as an alternative to Michael Elion's practices whereas the work of The Tokolos Stencil Collective was considered for its social irritant capabilities towards both forms of visual communicative practices. Chapter Three therefore considered what the dialogue of intersection looked like.

Chapter Four presented an alternative methodology for understanding the different ways public visual communicative practices engage with the space, people and heritage around them. It did this by firstly examining the importance of content by referring to Michael Elion's aesthetic experiments and comparing that to its historical shortcomings. After that, Marshall McLuhan's (1964) total effects media theory was explained and then applied to illustrate the different levels that each visual communicative practice operated on. After that, it stressed the importance of the artist

in society and what it looks like when all voices are given a space to represent themselves in Cape Town.

## **5.2 Contribution of the study**

This study has contributed towards a better understanding of what was earlier referred to as a “convoluted problem” (Schäfer 2014). By considering the different ways that artists can occupy public space in the City of Cape Town, it allows necessary points of the debate to be made visible. These include but are not limited to the form of the artwork, the placement of the artwork, the artist, the artistic intent or concept, the sponsorship of artwork, the way the artwork engages the community (both before, during and after the artwork’s conception) as well as what types of art the City of Cape Town are privileging. This will hopefully lead to a more informed approach to public arts policy in the City of Cape Town.

## **5.3 Limitations of the study**

There have been very few South African academics that have engaged with graffiti, street art and mural practices. Therefore the academic literature is limited. Furthermore, visual communicative practices in the South African, specifically Cape Town public space encompass a multi-disciplinary range of approaches such as cultural studies, art historical approaches, anthropological discourse, urban geographies and media studies. The limited scope of this mini-dissertation does not allow for an investigation of this depth, as it would require an extensive amount of fieldwork and interdisciplinary studies that would have to take place over a number of years to form a more cohesive picture of this complex phenomenon.

## **5.4 Suggestions for further research**

This topic is an important one and is necessary in a democratic country such as South Africa. The interview with Freddy Sam alluded to some promising avenues that a participatory PhD study could undertake.

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## APPENDIX A

Consent form for Freddy Sam interview with attached email Correspondence.

### UNIVERSITY OF CAPE TOWN



Faculty of Humanities

### Consent Form

**Title of research project:** "Art, outrage, dialogue: A McLuhan reading of three visual communicative practices in Cape Town public space"

**Names of principal researcher(s):** Storm Jade Brown

**Department/research group address:** Centre for Film and Media Studies, University of Cape Town (UCT), Private Bag, Rondebosch, 7700.

**Telephone:** 0834584215

**Email:** stormjadebrown@gmail.com

**Name of Participant:** Ricky- Lee Gordon AKA Freddy Sam

**Nature of the Research:** Informal interview conducted on the nature of Freddy Sam's public murals in Woodstock, as part of his "We Art Woodstock" project. In-depth discussion of contextual socio-political and economic factors influencing the art, as well the street art/ mural and graffiti scene around Cape Town.

**Participant's Involvement:**

1. **What's involved:** A once-off interview with researcher. Interview recorded and transcribed.

2. Risks: None foreseeable.

3. Benefits: To get street art and muralism and its creative potential into academic discourse in such a way that it benefits both communities through the creation of dialogue, recognition and discourse. To develop literature about the South African scene. A more contextual understanding is gained on both sides.

- I agree to participate in this research project.
- I have read this consent form and the information it contains and had the opportunity to ask questions about it.
- I agree to my responses being used for research on condition that my privacy is respected, subject to the following:

- o Will be used in aggregate form only (only as part of collected data), so that I will not be personally identifiable (identity anonymous in research project and archived transcriptions of data).
- I understand that I am under no obligation to take part in this project.
- I understand that I have the right to withdraw from this project at any stage.

Signature of participant: \_\_\_\_\_ *(on behalf of Ricky-Lee)*  
*(see attached proof.)*

Signature of Parent/Guardian (if participant is under 18 years of age): \_\_\_\_\_

Name of Parent/Guardian: N/A \_\_\_\_\_

Signature of person giving consent: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature of person(s) who sought consent: \_\_\_\_\_

Name of person(s) who sought consent: Storm Date: 13 February 2015

**Ricky Lee Gordon**  
 To: stormjadebrown@gmail.com  
 Re: Consent

13 February 2015 at 10:34 AM  
 Inbox - Google

RG

im happy for you to please just sign it for me please

thanks storm

See More from stormjadebrown@gmail.com

—  
 Ricky Lee Gordon ( Freddy Sam )

+27 (0) 83 300 9970  
[www.freddysam.com](http://www.freddysam.com)

**stormjadebrown@gmail.com** @  
 To: Ricky Lee Gordon  
 Consent

13 February 2015 at 10:27 AM  
 Sent - Google

Hi Ricky,

I hope that this email finds you well.

I am busy with the final stages for my dissertation at the moment and would like to use some of the information from our interview last year. You did give me recorded consent, but the department also requires written consent. Is it possible that you could fill out the following consent form and send it back to me? Otherwise I could easily come fetch it.

Thank you again for all your help! I would love to take this research even further :)



Consent Form

## **APPENDIX B**

Transcript of interview with Freddy Sam.

**11 November 2014 9:58 AM Town Hall**  
**(In verbatim)**

**FS- Freddy Sam**

**SJB- Storm Jade Brown**

**FS:** Students have already done research on mural, Marion's students. I'm pleased with the research that they did, but they did it, they got their marks and then that's it. I spoke to Marion about research on the impact of the community murals on that community. Some students have already done it on surface level. They did it on murals I did three years ago. I think that there's a website- I will go back to it. I don't know. Let me find it. I think that you can do as you wish, but its quite an in-depth subject and its quite an interesting time for what's happening now with the street art and if you choose to carry on with it, I think you could have something quite interesting and I could also give you- there's some very powerful research happening in Miami. There's an amazing anthropologist who is writing on this. He's at the forefront of this.

**SJB:** What is his name?

**FS:** There's a little documentary which I will forward to you.

**SJB:** Ok. Thanks.

**FS:** I have the password to watch it. And its.. its uh.. quite moving. It's basically. If I can just summarise - I don't support the street art and what's happening in Woodstock. I don't support Juma [Mkwela]. Giving tours. When we did the murals it was because we wanted to make murals, we wanted to do something for the community, but now its become a tour. It's become part of the gentrification. And the gentrification, art and public art has always gone together. And what this

documentary does is it looks at how closely connected it actually is. In fact- it's the first wave- first comes in graffiti- then comes in street art then comes in-uh- like a gallery- then comes in uh cultural bag maker, and then comes in music venue, then comes in bar then comes in restaurant then comes in residential. And that's exactly what's happening in Woodstock now. And I'm not uh really. People contact me for tours and I'm not giving them- I feel bad because I'm a bit short, but its like we've done it- with good intention. There's over thirty or forty murals there now. But there's other tour operators that give the tour. So originally it was meant to be a guy by the name of Mitchie, whose father gave us permission to make the very first wall, and a week after getting permission his father passed away. His father was a community activist, fighting against the gangs and the drugs in the area. His father passed away in a car accident and Mitchie, the son, I then went back to him and said "do you still want this?" and he was like "ja that's great, my father would have wanted this, the community needs this, let's fix it". And we thought that we were doing something good when I organised the project, I got funding from Adidas, which is another thing I could never do anymore as I used to get funding from corporations or brands. I don't do that...

**SJB:** So, did Adidas fund the whole ....

**FS:** Just the first like eight murals.

**SJB:** And then the rest?

**FS:** And then the rest I carried on going because I had a residency. So I had fifty-three artists visit me in the course of three years. Um, I had cheap rent, I used to pay R2500 for rent and that was like industrial side of the Woodstock Exchange. Um, but over the course of five years my rent went to R17500. Um. In the beginning I could afford to have a residency. Those residents I would then put into the streets and ask them to paint a mural. They would meet the community, they would have an amazing experience, a real experience in the community in which they were working. And then all of a sudden now you've got thirty murals and then the building gets sold. I decide to carry on doing the walks, uh, tours. But to partner Juma up with Mitchie because Juma was looking to work and do like tour operating. And he was working with A

*Word of Art* and he knew all the residents and he knew all the stories and who was involved. So Juma and Mitchie were partners, they would share the profit and the community gets something. Juma would then also run workshops with kids in that area. It was a whole mission statement. But that didn't necessarily work because I wasn't there driving it. And I don't know if Juma would, uh, work with Mitchie the whole time. Sometimes he would. I don't know if he would, uh if like the deal carried on. And then... Um. Also Mitchie was also very busy. And then um, other tour operators started giving the tours. And Juma stopped giving the tours. As far as I know but I'm sure he does if someone contacts him.

**SJB:** Ja, I'm new to Cape Town, so I don't understand the city space and the politics as well as I would like to, but from what I understand is...I saw *Makhulu*, Rowan Pybus put a post up on Instagram, and he sort of mentioned someone called Ishmail who does graffiti tours. So I phoned Ishmail and it turned out that Rashied did the street art, Ishmail did the graffiti. So that's how I got in touch with him. And then I found Juma's number in online research.

**FS:** Ja I mean that's the thing, is lots of people have done the tour and post some of these contact details. And the connection, Rashied. The thing with Rashied, is when we were painting these first murals, he just popped up and he was just very interested and he was just like... But Rashied is a drug dealer.

**SJB:** Ja, I know, Juma said that to me. He was like "Storm, Rashied, the reason why everyone knows him is because he's the biggest drug dealer here in Woodstock, and he's going to take you around and everyone is going to greet him because they are really scared of him".

**FS:** And that's, ja that's these things. And every time someone would pop up to do a mural, Rashied would be there, just to show the community he's involved in the murals. And then I went to Rashied and I said: "I don't trust you. You're a bad man. We're trying to give this to good people like Mitchie and his family. So please don't, like, uh, be here when artists are painting murals. Don't tell the community that you're the one behind this". He took ownership continuously, and he still does now.

**SJB:** Ja he told me he painted half the murals.

**FS:** Ja, so that's the unfortunate thing. It's slipped out of control. And it is now just there. And Woodstock has become a gentrified area, there's bars, and that's the next wave. As soon as bars, 'coz there's been retail, and now that there is bars, its going to be a night time thing, and then that's gonna... So I lived there for five years and I can see what's coming. The underlying thing is that its interesting how the street art has a strong connection to the development and that's because the area gets cleaned up, and people start walking in the street to see the street art. And then they're like "Oh look at the building. Look at how amazing this place is. And its not like, dangerous and um". That's not the reason, its just that street art was just the first wave. Which was never the intention. So after that and after Woodstock, and being there for five years I decided to focus my energy on painting for communities that actually really need it. Where its not, out of like, where its more, more focused. Like schools for example. And then that's what was *Colour Ikamva's* focus and since then I haven't really been painting in Woodstock.

**SJB:** But I saw on your webpage you said you painted that new wall.

**FS:** Ja the Kitchen? So that's an already gentrified area. It's not like I painted.. I painted on an already, Kitchens is a restaurant. And its next door to upmarket galleries, so I did that so that I can get exposure, whereas the area Juma would be giving tours, those are families that, um, which is quite interesting...

**SJB:** Juma didn't give me a tour of Woodstock, Juma gave me a tour of Khayelitsha.

**FS:** Oh. Ja, see that I support because that needs it, you know, people need to go there. It's not going to get gentrified anytime soon. Whereas you see the thing with Woodstock, is the Woodstock Industrial centre was bought by new developers, the guys that own The Biscuit Mill and its exclusive. You get screened coming in. No-one off the street can come in. It's not for everyone and it's expensive. So that exists over here... but just behind it are houses that um, ..

Okay wait let me just give you some backstory: So all those murals that I organised- they then passed a graffiti by-law which means that you need to get a permit for street art, or anything on the wall. So then I went to the City Of Cape Town and I said “look, I’m already organising these walls. Can you help me? Can we make them legal? Because..” and then they said “ok, if you get permission from all the home owners in writing, then we will get a blanket permit for all the walls in Woodstock. You just give us all the addresses and then we won’t clean them”. So I preserved all those walls. So I went door to door to all the homeowners, and I said to them, I need your permission. Do you want to keep your mural? Um, if so please sign here. And I did that and I got a permit. But whilst doing that, out of just curiosity I said to them- do you own your house? If not how long have you been renting? I was just very interested to see who owned their houses. Two out of twenty people owned their houses. And if they were renting they have been renting for two to three generations. Something like fifteen to thirty years. So what I instantly realised is that we’ve actually f\*cked up. We’ve actually gone and started painting and beautifying this area but the area doesn’t belong to the people. So what’s now gonna happen is now that this building here is old and developed, and the whole front of Albert Road has been developed. Property developers are going to start looking at what’s behind.

Because now that this area is getting developed, people are now going to want to move in. It becomes residential. So all the houses are going to be sold off and all the families are going to be evicted. Families who have been there for three or more generations.

**SJB:** That’s like that one you painted with that lady who has been there for 87 years.

**FS:** Ja, exactly. So its all very cool me painting a mural saying she’s been here for 87 years but she’s not going to be there for. Well no one is going to evict her now, there was a thing in the papers. She was going to get evicted and then she wasn’t. But I already heard that a young white guy that makes bags and sells them at the market has bought one of those houses. He knows me - he bragged to me like “ I got such a good cheap deal on one of these houses. In five years its going to be worth such a lot”. But you see he’s got good intentions. He’s not like... You know, like no one has the

realisation that in like five years, all those families are going to be gone and those houses will become houses for young white students.

**SJB:** But I also wonder sometimes, like, I'm approaching this from an academic perspective, but I've read up on the area and it's one of the few areas in Cape Town that actually has a solid history. Because the people that were there stayed there. They weren't evicted.

**FS:** Sure, but its got substitution. Its got no heritage. If you go speak to the City of Cape Town and ask them what's their strategy for Woodstock, they'll shrug. Private sector has control over Woodstock because its defunct, it's broken. Um, it was an industrial area, it was thriving, and the industry collapsed. So people got all these buildings that are worth nothing. And then it becomes a cultural area. Artists move in, make those buildings worth something. Then the bars, and then it becomes an entertainment area and then it becomes a cool area. It's divided up, but it also has a cool heritage. It's like what heritage was preserved? Bo-Kaap does have heritage and was preserved. So there are laws in place. You can't build up, you can't own certain houses. You can't renovate, you cant change building structure.

Woodstock is if you have money you can do as you please, because the city doesn't have a plan for it and they don't have money and they don't have infrastructure. As far as I'm concerned. What he means is that its juts going to be developed by white people and coloured communities who've been there for forty, fifty years and is just going to move out. There's no cultural preservation. So gentrification exists, and gentrification is actually ok, because its progress. For example Maboneng, kind of is needed- because the city kind of needs to rebirth itself, it needs to be... development... but Woodstock, the gentrification could have been done in another way. It could have been done with a more sensitive approach. The community could have been included in the development. Community could have been educated that their houses are worth something or um, or, there's a way to include the cultural history of, of the Muslim and coloured community into the cultural economy of the area.

For example making a true Woodstock Market, where people can sell their local goods and local products, instead of a Biscuit Mill Market which is R1000 for a

dress, you know? Which exclusive and unaffordable. So you can make it that it's culturally inclusive.

Another story, the landlords who bought the new, is it the Woodstock Exchange? There was a restaurant there called the Golden Plate - it was a local café for people to buy their Sunday night chicken or a samoosa. And it had been there for sixty years- it was like a pillar in the community. And yes, it was sort of cockroaches and sort of rundown. But it had history. And so the new landlord came in and gave them notice- they said- "you have to be out". So I found out and approached them and was like "guys, this is cultural history. Do them a favour, like give them a reduced rent, let's help them clean up and lets show them that they can sell Sterristumpi and Chappies and Samoosas and doughnuts and both the new white hipster can buy from them as well as the community whose buying from them. And they can also improve, with the building and with the gentrification they can also be included". "Yes Ricky, its all dream-like unrealistic but they owe so much money and, uh, their rent is just disgusting, it's a mess, and like it takes so much energy, and we're not gonna do it". So I was like, "I'll do it. I'll work with them- I'll do it for free". And they said ok we will think about it and a week later they didn't get back to me and the eviction notice was given and they were given a week to leave. Now, that space has been taken over by a craft beer bar and they have renamed the space 'The Golden'. Which, it was called the Golden Plate.

**SJB:** That's not okay.

**FS:** Not that's not okay. This is before they opened. Because they took notice on space about a year ago, this craft beer bar and they only opened last month. Soon as I found out they were going to open with this name I phoned up and found out who the owners were. I said "I'm Ricky, I've been here for five years, I've found out about this and its not okay, its not cool". It's like, its one thing to like take over the space, but another thing like, commoditise- its weird.

**SJB:** Ja, but its also throwing that heritage back in their faces.

**FS:** Ja it is. Totally. Check at this.. (shows image of poster on phone). It's a photo of a party they're having. And they were like, "Oh sorry we didn't know". And you

know, like they didn't leave, they were kicked out, you know. That's the other thing. It wasn't like they decided to close down their business; they were kicked out after sixty years. Um, and they were like "oh we didn't know that they were kicked out, okay no we wont change, we wont take the name". This is a party that they are throwing. So I want to like say something on Facebook , but I'm like, it's not going to change anything so I kept my mouth quiet. So I'll be open with you for your dissertation or like whatever, and if you choose to carry on with it that's cool, but its pointless, like um, its hopeless.

**SJB:** I get where you're coming from, but I don't think it is. That's also why I want to write about this, because you get a lot of people who are all like "Oh it's the new art history, blah blah blah, but besides those things, I think when you bring art into a space and you make the city space your gallery, um, its very powerful, because it makes people stand up and it makes people notice. And that will transcend any language, or any other barrier.

**FS:** Ja, but that's the artists point of view. I mean I used to believe that too, but then...

**SJB:** and now?

**FS:** Going to the families around those areas, ask them what they think, because that art now represents something else. It represents people coming on tours. Not to look at them, to look at art. So the art doesn't belong to them. It belongs to the white people that put it there, and the people that come to view it.

**SJB:** But I wanted to ask you about that, I noticed a lot of the subjects of the art, particularly in Woodstock but also a little bit in Khayelitsha is a little bit of things like 'Save the Rhino', which seem so far removed from what they're dealing with in their day-to-day concerns.

**FS:** Our policy for artists coming in from overseas was to ask the family what they would like to have painted. Most of the time it was nature.

**SJB:** Really?

**FS:** Ja, so that's where most of the nature was. And the 'Save the Rhino' thing was a guy who...that's what he does. He came from London. He always writes... he always does this thing. But that's the thing, artists do not live there. That's the thing you must research, actually let me write this down. He's written articles, and he's brilliant on this subject, a young guy from Philadelphia. He's like "street art isn't street art any more. Street art is Instagram".

**SJB:** Ja.

**FS:** So people aren't painting art to belong on the street and create... these sort of...people are painting art on the street so that they can take a photo of it. So this guys written an article about it...

**SJB:** That's quite interesting, because we actually had to submit an article and I was looking at how people sort of categorise street art and graffiti, particularly in Cape Town on Instagram...

**FS:** Sorry can I just interrupt you there. Cape Town doesn't know it...like Cape Town is quite unique because in someways we're like an island. Graffiti is so thriving here because we are not like in Europe or America where our neighbouring countries have educated us. We are still in the nineties. Graffiti is core. Its hardcore, its traditional, its "you have to do this, you have to do this" its vandalism and everything. And there's people like Mak1 and Falko who are the top... the elders, the wisemen who like tell the youth what the rules are but they're... They themselves don't even know what's happening overseas really. Faith47, she knows what's going on. She's travelling, um, but then she plays within this, kind of, you've gotta like um, South Africa is its own thing. So there's graffiti like this, but there's no street art. There's maybe a few people that are doing posters, there's one person doing knitting crochet, um that's it. But there's no street art...

**SJB:** What about those sticker bombs?

**FS:** Which ones?

**SJB:** The whale ones... There's a person drawing one... what would you categorise that as?

**FS:** Ja that's street art . Street art is any person doing stickers, any person doing anything in the street, anything in a creative way is street art. Anything that is graffiti is the letterform, so having a name, writing it and vandalism. So that's uh... graffiti. Everything else is street art. But street art has evolved is now more muralism, so anyone painting a mural is called muralism, not street art. People classify me as a street artist I'm not a street artist I'm a muralist. Because I only paint murals so I'm a muralist. Um...

**SJB:** And then, sorry to interrupt you, but its an important point. What do you think is the length between someone being commissioned to do something and vandalism? In terms of you being a muralist. I mean, would you just go and paint a wall?

**FS:** No. Because I have walls. So that was my thing, when I was younger I started doing graffiti, I would do vandalism. But then I asked for permission to paint a wall and I got permission so I was just like, Oh, so you can just ask. So actually, South Africa is quite an amazing place where you can ask. And so what's the point of... And actually, you can't just paint a wall illegally over two or three days because you're going to get caught. So you need permission to do it. And also once you ask permission, you get invited in for tea and you create a dialogue and become part of these communities that you're working in and it becomes quite a special experience. A graffiti artist is only thinking about themselves. They don't care about the other person they just want to write their name everywhere and keep on going. Its quite a uh, old fashioned mentality. Graffiti artists don't even know why they're really doing it. If you ask them why they will just quote you the same reasons that artists before them have said. It's just a club, it's a fraternity club. And its meant to be anti-establishment, but in fact actually they are just following the rules of the club that says "bomb your city, vandalise, take space back from your city". But its actually pretty silly because most of the graffiti art in South Africa is from white kids and they have money and then they go and destroy property that belongs to the third class

citizen- vandalising trains you know. Yes the government sucks but don't go then make it worse for somebody else you know. It doesn't affect you because you drive a car.

**SJB:** So the turning point for you from vandalist to muralist would have been asking permission?

**FS:** Sensibility! And permission. Because that's the thing, you can ask for permission and it just becomes easier. And also, artform. So vandalism is just a quick action and a quick result. So it's like not art its just like uh, quickly done vandalism whereas a mural is an artwork. Time has been put into it, consideration, form, conceptualism, colour. That doesn't mean graffiti isn't an artform you know, like it can be classified as an artform, the lifestyle. And the graffiti artist that is true to that club for twenty, thirty years and then been invited into the auction house with the gallery, and they have said we want to sell your name on a canvas because of what your graffiti does.

**SJB:** Do you think that your artform, as a muralist, should exist outside of the gallery space or do you not have a problem with the crossover?

**FS:** Ja, I want to make a living from art being an artist, so that's then the commission to the murals or the commission to the canvases. I'm having my first gallery exhibition next year in five years. And even though A Word of Art is a gallery, I've never been promoting my own work. Um, but the work that I do out on the street is similar, same context but the work that needs to be inside the gallery needs to be evolved, far more mature, needs to be better. So now I'm going to painting classes, going to drawing classes, I want to be a better artist I want people to see the craft.

**SJB:** So you weren't formally trained as an artist?

**FS:** No. That's what I like about graffiti, because it's also a love hate thing. Uh, it's the first artform ever that was cool. So I was one of these people who was like "ja, I'm going to do that". Whereas before it was always traditional and boring. You know, your teacher told you about Da Vinci and Van Gogh, it doesn't really excite many young kids. But graffiti is quite exciting and like a visual bubblegum, its

colourful and exciting and cartoon-like, you get a name, you have to do this and you have to do that, there are these rules and its quite exciting, it's a whole culture, and that gets you in to then practice your art and you have to then have discipline, you have to learn how to practice your name you have to bubbles you have to do arrows, you have to do all these things. And then all of a sudden, you're actually training, you're learning hard, you're self taught.

Um, and then, if... because art, the potential to be an artist is in everyone, that creative bit, your passion. And then, most likely, a lot of the time either the graffiti artist just gives up, because they have a kid, get a job or whatever, or they just do art, they learn about a whole new world of art, and their world evolves and matures, and they can be better as painters. So that's what's cool about graffiti, it's probably the biggest art movement ever, as far as I can see. I mean I haven't read up but there's so many young kids doing it. There's not thousands of young kids painting oil or portraits. It's always an exclusive thing with an apprentice, an art school. So that's what I do like about it. And most of the time kids get into graphic design or illustration or they get work as an art career from being a graffiti artist or a skateboarder. Those are the two.

**SJB:** Ok, And I wanted to ask you about your "I am because we are" I've noticed it at the bottom of a lot of your murals, and your name, where does that come from?

**FS:** I am because we are- is Nelson Mandela...

**SJB:** I know that, but why is it in your murals?

**FS:** It's only in two murals. The Springbok one is Joburg in Maboneng, that's because I painted Nelson Mandela on the other side of the wall. And then the other one. I was invited to paint the other side of the wall and I had the freedom to do what I wanted. So I decide to paint the Springbok. I paint Springboks a lot in South Africa. The Springboks are drinking from water and it's a reflection of a Springbok and it represents South Africa past present and future. And reflecting on what is the idea of Ubuntu, have we changed or have things gotten worse. Does it mean anything? Does it mean something? Because everybody speaks of this philosophy but it doesn't really or truly exist unless you go to a rural place. Because it's a selfish society. Because we

are all trying to sell profit and we are not trying to work for a community or an ecosystem. I am because we are means that you cannot be human alone. We're part of nature we're part of an ecosystem. My actions affect man one thousand kilometres away. If I continue to be in pursuit of wealth meaning keeping other people poor, that's not gonna benefit me actually. We know this in a philosophical way, but we don't practice it. So it was just posing a question. And then I painted in Atlanta with a herd of Springbok and I wrote "I am because we are" and that's just if you look at, patterns in nature, or herds, you can actually see how it looks like one unit. It looks like a pattern. That's kind of evident, is that we are connected. So that's why I painted a crowd of men and a crowd of springbok. So that's why you can actually see, if you close one eye, it just looks like black and white. And its abstract and its just black and white lines and they're marching, and that's actually a time when we do become one unit, when we are all moving together. Marching for one ideology, and that's when we all start marching to the same beat and become truly democratic. Like a Springbok is all the time, its like how we should be, but we are not.

**FS:** So that's the main subject in my work lately. Looking at nature and man and the relationship, and the fact that we don't have a connection to each other anymore. But we do, but we don't. We don't act on it.

**SJB:** Ja, we sort of shut that down. And your name, Freddy Sam, where does that come from?

**FS:** It's my two grandpa's names put together. So I used to write graffiti name for nine years, and I realised that was quite silly. My name was Trix. It's a very graffiti name, and I just asked why am I doing this, its quite immature. And then I wanted to paint a new name... and Freddy and Sam was my two grandpas names and they were very different people. So it's a name I wanted to use as an artist and I wanted to keep it idealistic and represent both of those people. They were very idealistic, very strict, you know, um, like um, it's a new platform to explore ideas, but I think that in a short time I will kind of drop that name as well. Go by my real name, because its not necessarily needed, anymore. As I mature, my ideas mature.

**SJB:** But also you have your name next to Freddy Sam as well...A lot of street artists just use a pseudonym.

**FS:** I only sign my work Freddy Sam, but whenever I do press and media I will always quote myself Ricky-Lee Gordon as Freddy Sam so people know who Freddy Sam is. You know, I'm not trying to hide.

**SJB:** I wanted to ask you, I went to a seminar a while ago, and it really inspired me for what I want to do. And this guy, an Indian Professor, was speaking about how academics should never just contribute towards an ivory tower of knowledge that filters back into the university. And I want to try create that participatory or that engaged element in my research. What do you think this field or this genre, or even what you're doing specifically, needs?

**FS:** I mean, it needs the writers. For example, RJ, he's 22 years old and he's got a blog – his opinion counts. He's not an artist, but he doesn't say he is an artist. His opinion counts though, more than everyone else, because he speaks from both points of view. Because he loves graffiti, he loves street art, and he loves murals, but he will challenge anyone as a critic, as a writer and its important. That's the thing. Just because Falko and Mak1 are like gods doesn't mean its right, like someone whose doing knitting, I mean if you ask Falko what he thinks of street art, he will say its gay but then he goes and takes on street art-style projects himself. You know? And then, you ask him what he thinks of corporations, and he says 'f\*ck them' and then he gets hired by Red Bull and Coco-Cola, and Ja, its bullsh\*t. It needs writers to like dig and actually document, documentation, and lay it out, but not say this is it, like continuously update it. I would really recommend you trying to get into the circle of writers if you're really interested in writing and research. Because there's other people like RJ like kind of ...

**SJB:** Is RJ South African?

**FS:** No he's from Philadelphia. Maybe make contact with him? He'll be more than happy to speak to you. If you're gonna write a thesis about street art, you've got a lot of...

**SJB:** Ja, I know. That's a PhD.

**FS:** First you've got to learn everything about everywhere else and then look at South Africa and figure out what makes us who we are, and write about that, because no-one has written about that. There's a book on graffiti in South Africa and its just written by those guys, you know. And its not necessarily true, you know. And you need to necessarily speak to them.. Well I mean if you need to talk to Falko try find another angle.

**SJB:** Do you think it's important?

**FS:** Well I think as an anthropologist researching whatever, you have do everything... Because you can't just write your view, you have to take everyone's view into account. It's also, their view, whether I agree or disagree with it, still counts, still exists. Um, so you, know. Government policy, when they passed a by-law, me and Faith stood up and actually started to consult, well not consult, but be very vocal with the city, so they didn't pass a draconian law. And we tried to like consult them about as much as possible with what's happening overseas so that they were more fair so that people could also get permits. I mean you can get a permit now, I'm self-permitted. After five permits that become successful an artist becomes self-permitting, and you can get a wall and you can get permission and send permission to the city and the city wont paint over it.

**SJB:** Wow, ok.

**FS:** And if you're not self-permitting you have to get the wall, get the permission, get the neighbours permission, apply for a permit, wait, get the permit and then paint the wall. So I can go get permission and then paint the wall and only send the permit after. Which is ...you know like a lot of artists are like f\*ck this, f\*ck the city, but there is no city in the world that is as liberal with their law as Cape Town. And people don't know that.

**SJB:** I didn't know that.

**FS:** Try paint a mural in London or whatever, you have to go through permit processes as well, as with everywhere. Or you do it illegally and stand the chance of getting it removed. And that's just part of the... If you paint it with the permission of someone its still technically illegal because the city hasn't given permission. Um, so if its something you're interested in and want to do it for five years reach out to RJ and ask him for all the readings... There's other authors, like McCormick.

**SJB:** Ja, I've read Tresspass and The Wooster Collective

**FS:** Ja but the Wooster Collective, they're advertise it and they have a successful website. You know, and they're famous. RJ really knows his sh\*t. And he's got respect from a lot of people because of it. He continuously writes. Ask him for literature. And you met the guy who wrote the graffiti book? Ja?

**SJB:** I haven't met him yet. I read the book. Matthew Olckers?

**FS:** He's sweet and all. But you know he's like...here's these high school kids and these kids in matric and they're like you know, he's not a good artist but he wanted to write this book and he wrote this book, but he's just praising all this graffiti you know? It's meant to have like history, it kinda does but like, it does a good job of just being a graffiti book. It's not inclusive of street art and murals.

**SJB:** Do you know what I struggled with? You need people like that, you need Juma and you need Rashied. Where's your access point otherwise?

**FS:** Exactly. I mean I don't want to be the guy who organises the tours, but there should be like, otherwise you're going to go on a tour and take photos and like, have no clue that the murals are done by international artists. No clue that the families asked for nature, not clue that those families don't own those houses and that, you, know... that was the point of the tour, to like go on a graffiti, street art tour, and actually find out about the history, find out about the current situation. And who knows, maybe there's a guy who is interested in buying a house and he's like, oh well I don't think I'm going to buy a house but, I would like to form a partnership with a local person. So street art has the power to bring people closer to street level and find

out more information. But it only has that if the people that create the street art are more than involved in just the making of it and are actually explaining the story. If it's people who are just making a commercial viability off of other...if they are just selling a tour or making a postcard, they have nothing to do with the art, they weren't there, so they are giving broken telephone information. If you're interested in making a proper tour, I grew up with Mitchie, f\*ck that would be awesome. Like making a proper system like I tried to do, that would be f\*cking awesome. Like putting Rashied out of business, that would be awesome.

**SJB:** I don't know if I would want to take on Rashied.

**FS:** No he wouldn't do anything, he would step back. Because Mitchie's family has more... If you talk to Mitchie, that's a whole family. Like Aunty, Uncle, Brother, they all live in the same road. It's quite fascinating- there's good and evil that exists in Woodstock and the good, the way it exists, like the way they look out for each other. You wouldn't take them out of business, but you would just have a better, project. That's not why Juma stopped. Juma stopped because there's all these other tour operators that are there, and when he bought people in a group, the community was looking at him like why are you doing this, you're just exploiting us. But its because Juma didn't do it the way we set out. Like he never followed up... Juma doesn't have the capacity or the intelligence or the knowledge to create that system and follow up on it. Like kind of a sustainable model. If he would have worked with Mitchie, if he would have done it the right way, if he would have advertised his mission statement and put it on a website- this is how this thing works. Ten percent of your R150 goes towards an art class with the local kids, 50% of this money goes towards a local family. You will find out about the history of the community through the local family, you will also find out about the history of the artists, you know? Everyone would rather go on that tour. You know? Because it's so rich... But I'm getting emails from people they want to go on this tour. Because I kept my website up and there's lots of information up about this tour, and I just continuously reply to people. It's not available. And I don't write why, I mean I don't have time to.

**SJB:** Quickly, do think that that maybe should be part and parcel of the World Design Capital?

FS: Ja, but I mean. They... World Design Capital doesn't do anything except try create a platform for people that want to do things. So it's your job to do it. And another thing if you're interested, Google has started a street art project. Its called Google Street Art and they're contacting non-profit organisations around the world that organise murals and they're asking them to upload their murals to the specific website in high definition, and then they also have the street view camera go to those murals. So you can go on and look at all the murals in Woodstock and find out about all those murals and find out proper cultural heritage preservation project, uh, street art preservation project. Um and they are begging me to do it but I'm not interested because I don't have the time. I mean I've got all the photos but I don't have the time to upload them and write an explanation about each one and also, I want to promote myself, I don't want to promote other artists right now. I've spent the last ten years promoting other artists. And also I don't. I'm just focused on my own work right now. So if that's something you're interested in, that's something you can do, basically. And also its not juts uh, um, its not just murals that *A Word of Art* has organised, it can be anything. So I will send you that link, you can check it out. It's also just an interesting thing to know about, how street art is now going on to the internet, and you can go online and now explore street art in the world, in a very different way.

So I basically said to them no. So for example what Maboneng is doing, I've organised most of the murals in Maboneng. If you spoke to Grind. So I organised an Adidas project that brought six murals there and Maboneng has paid for some of those residents and the deal was that some of those residents need to go work in Maboneng first, paint a mural and then they could come to Cape Town, so they paid for their flights. But now there's like twenty murals so I said to Maboneng, you actually have to pay me if I do it more in the future. And they created a New Doornfontein Improvement District so they appealed to other building owners so they could paint more mural so if there were more murals the artists could get paid and I'll get paid as a curator, where as before an artist wouldn't actually get paid. So its like landlord exploiting, there's a landlord involved, and he's like I see how when you paint a mural it makes the whole...

**SJB:** it's Lieben....?

**FS:** Jonathan Liebmann. Um, n that side. I must link you to this Miami project, and how a property developer hired artists, to paint loads of artists and completely fixed an area with street art. And its quite clear, but not cool, because they didn't talk to the community, they didn't get involved with the community, and the street artists are like "ah f\*ck I didn't mean to do that". Because street artists are cool, street artists are nice people they didn't mean to put people out of their homes, but you know the property developer, see the, the guy with the money always sees what he can use as the cheapest way to clean up an area. So Jonathan is part of that. Jonathan is at least still doing local housing, um student housing, and trying to create a full ecosystem. He's not trying to create a rich neighbourhood. He's just trying to make it rich with culture, with low income housing, and a mixed-use space, which I support because I think Joburg needs it. I just don't think one developer should be behind it, there should be lots of...

**SJB:** It should be a collaboration.

**FS:** Ja, but at the end of the day he'll start and in a few more years there will be more developers around him. That will start to happen. So that's the thing, street art isn't just street art, unfortunately.

**SJB:** No, I know that. But I can't learn that from books. I need to actually speak to people.

**FS;** The other thing is like, what right do you have to make what you want in public space, just because you can afford to make it? And its just happened with these sunglasses that have been put on Seapoint Promenade, these Ray-Ban giant public art piece, and Ray-Ban has sponsored it, and the artist owns a fabrication company. So he can afford to make this thing, and it's a tribute to Nelson Mandela, but I mean f\*ck, its not necessarily, um, truant. I mean he had an idea, get Ray-Ban to sponsor it, connect it to Nelson Mandela, and its this amazing thing, but its not cool that they have done that. So it's like, what do you make and what should you make? Is the question, you know? So that's also an interesting discussion. And um, RJ will have

also essays on that... and sometimes its okay to make what you want. And I have the right to put whatever I want in public space, sometimes its okay. But my personal view is just create a dialogue with people that see the work, because even if I want to put a pair of sunglasses there, who knows if I can just talk to people first, kind of get their feedback, and then the sunglasses become blue sunglasses because the whole community loves blue and then you've created a compromise and a sense of ownership, because then you walk away from it and um, it doesn't belong to you anymore, it belongs to the people who are exposed to it on a daily basis. So you should at least give them a voice before the artwork is created. And most artists are scared to do that because they think the community is going to come back and say "no, I don't like your work, I don't want you to paint sunflowers". But usually they will just say, no art is good, what about this, what about that? And then it gets you thinking, it gets you working, and as an artist you go back to the drawing board and you create something that you love and you hope that they will love and it turns out that they do love it, and then everyone is happy and its quite a cool experience. Takes a little bit longer, but its more valuable to more people. So there's kind of a sense of responsibility I think.

**SJB:** Do you think if I sort of just I email Faith again, but try raise some of these points she will be interested in talking to me?

**FS:** Uh, I think you need to know what you're talking about more, before, and be like, hey I've read this article. She doesn't have the time, and also just so you know like, I get emails from students a lot of the time. And you can see, I mean, I said yes to you because you're doing a masters and I won't... Do you know how many students I've seen who choose to do a project and they choose to do street art and they ask a few questions and they publish it, and they move on. I don't care to assist those students, they can find that information online. But there is someone who is doing it for journalistic, like true like documentation and substance, then you will get the respect of the artist but it will take time. Um, so like if RJ wanted to interview faith she would jump at it, for the exposure. She's also just busy so chose your timing right, and write her the right kind of email. Maybe speak to RJ first, ask him what kind of literature to read. Find a new angle, pose a question that really hits the nail for her, that's like

understanding her work. Don't try get a sit down, because she's so busy. Maybe just say answer these two questions for now.

**SJB:** But I don't know if I can write on the South African scene without mentioning her.

**FS:** Ja, but most of the questions you want to ask her already exist online.

**SJB:** But she also has a book...

**FS:** Ja, just dig deep online. Everything I have just said now is all online. There's loads of articles that are just there saying the saying things, so get there and then say I've got this, but there's something that I don't know and that's the question I want to ask you. Let me send you that stuff now.

**SJB:** Thank you.

<END>

## APPENDIX C

Screenshots of text messages exchanged with Michael Elion.



## APPENDIX D

Excerpts from Candice Breitz's Facebook debate on Michael Elion's *Perceiving Freedom* (2014). (The Journalist 2014).



**Candice Breitz**

November 15 at 6:25pm · New York, NY, United States · Edited · 🌐

**SOUTH AFRICANS!!**

**WOULD YOU SIGN A PETITION?**

What is puzzling to me, extremely puzzling, is that despite the broad disapproval of Michael Elion's 'Perceiving Freedom' — [which many, myself included, view as an aggressive instance of corporate branding in public space (the sponsor is Ray-Ban), a gesture made all the more heinous inasmuch as it is dressed up as a tribute to Mandela, whose legacy it appropriates] — I've asked the community of folks following this debate, on more than one occasion, whether a petition expressing disapproval of the way that public space is being used, a petition calling for the withdrawal of the work from public space, would be an interesting option, and the response has thus far been very loud silence. Though I view social media as an interesting context for debate, there is a limit to what can be done here. People tire easily and move onto other debates, other kittens, other buzzfeeds. This discussion can not have a direct impact on city policy (either in relation to Elion's work or future public works of art) if it stays virtual. I don't know how to interpret the lack of interest in a possible real life petition, and it really makes me feel like withdrawing my voice from this conversation. I've said what I have to say on this platform, but meaningful action can not remain virtual. By the way, in my opinion, we should boycott Ray-Ban, for what that gesture is worth, as a matter of principle (even knowing that the gesture would probably have very little impact on the company), but maybe that is too real world for most. Personally, I wouldn't be seen dead in Cape Town wearing a pair.



**The Bullshit Files: The "Mandela" Ray Ban "Sculpture" in Cape Town**

## **THIS IS NOT THE WAY TO COMMEMORATE OUR PAST!**

I'm reposting this article in favour of the opinions it expresses:

[http://www.dailymaverick.co.za/.../2014-11-11-junkyard-prom.../...](http://www.dailymaverick.co.za/.../2014-11-11-junkyard-prom.../)

It is a travesty and a disgrace to see the city of Cape Town allowing the legacy of Madiba to be trivialised and branded in this fashion. Located in private space, one could dismiss the gesture as simply irrelevant. In public space, it is heinous. The South African art community should express its disapproval loudly - this is nowhere near the 'public art' that we should be aspiring to as South Africans, particularly in the case of public art that reaches to commemorate our complex and dense history. A pair of Ray-Bans sponsored by Ray-Ban (how "fantastic" of them, says the artist on his FB page, which is worth a visit) just doesn't do the trick, regardless of the artist's protestations. Let's hear as many strong South African voices as possible insisting that this is not what public art should be or can be in our delicate public sphere.

With Sue Williamson, Mikhael Subotzky, Moshekwa Aron Langa, Jonathan Garnham, Zanele Muholi, Santu Mofokeng, Penny Siopis, Roger Young, Leonard Shapiro, Mary Corrigan, John Nankin, Stephen Hobbs, Marcus Neustetter, Lisa Brice, Adam Broomberg, Oliver Chanarin, Hasan Essop, Athi-Patra Ruga, Haroon Gunn-Salie, Gerald Machona, Tracey Rose, Nelisiwe Xaba, James Sey, Steven Cohen, Robyn Sassen, Simon Gush, Nicholas Hlobo, and many others who I am not listing. Oh, and for the sake of transparency, Michael Elion too.



Like · Comment · Share



**Candice Breitz** BREAKING NEWS: Roger Young interviews Michael Elion in the City Press. Decide for yourself whether you find Elion's explanation convincing. I don't know where to begin dismantling this one. The artist is his own best critic... feel the white privilege oozing and globbing off the page, without the slightest, without the most miniscule fragment of acknowledgement of the same: <http://www.citypress.co.za/lifestyle/ray-ban-mandela/>



### Ray-Ban Mandela - City Press

Michael Elion responds to the criticism levelled at his installation.

CITYPRESS.CO.ZA

November 17 at 12:35am · Like · 5



**Eva Scharrer** Well, I'm not going to throw my Ray-Ban glasses away now. But even without the brandname, this "sculpture" is just the worst example of bad, stupid and distasteful "art in public space" I've seen in a long time. "Oh look, there's Robben Island!" WTF.

November 17 at 12:40am · Like · 3



**Andre Laubscher** Spike Milligram ain't dud. Everything's hilarious.

November 17 at 1:16am · Like · 1



**Floor Van de Velde** Yes yes yes!

November 17 at 2:48am · Like · 1



**Anja De Klerk** If anyone participating in the conversation is interested in commenting on the current WDC public sculpture competition finalists (to be installed on the corner of Long and Dorp Streets next year) check it out here or have a chat on my wall: <http://www.westerncape.gov.za/.../world-design-capital-2014>



### World Design Capital 2014

?

WESTERNSCAPE.GOV.ZA

November 17 at 7:24pm · Edited · Like



**Storm Janse Van Rensburg** I will support the petition. And whilst the petition is being drafted, I suggest those living in Cape Town to include in said petition the carbuncle that is being erected on Signal Hill, as I am typing this.

November 17 at 10:27pm · Edited · Like · 4



**Rosie Mudge** Malcome Payne, I want to sign your petition about holding accountable that crew who made this mess. Candice, although I think the sculpture is a terrible terrible work there are many artists out there who make terrible, questionable art. I would love the work to be removed in whatever way necessary, but at the same time I think that we should take care of the root cause before the symptoms (or both at the same time). Michael Elion's work would never have been passed by a committee who knew what they were doing.

November 17 at 10:28pm · Like · 3

Continue Heading



**Cape Town City Mayor Patricia de Lille, Western Cape Premier Helen Zille: REMOVE THE WORK...**

Art54's pilot project in Sea Point has dramatically exposed Cape Town's lack of a Public Art policy, by falling for an "artwork" which is a clearly identifiable Ray-Ban...

AVAAZ.ORG

Like · Comment · Share

👍 23 people like this.

↪ 2 shares



**Candice Breitz** For those who are joining the debacle late, here's a summary of why so many of us are angry about the new 'public art' that has been installed in Cape Town this week: <http://africasacountry.com/the-bullshit-files-the.../>



**The Bullshit Files: The "Mandela" Ray Ban "Sculpture" in Cape Town**

"Real art makes those with privilege feel..."

AFRICASACOUNTRY.COM

November 23 at 7:21pm · Edited · Like · 👍 1



**Candice Breitz** An excerpt from the above article - you can read it in whole using the link in the last post above: "Not merely a puerile gesture at public art, "Perceiving Freedom" [the title of Elion's giant Ray-Ban tribute to Mandela] is a pathetic appropriation of commemoration as cover for a commercial promotion. Really, it's a stunning emetic trigger that suggests that Nelson Mandela is beckoning us from the afterlife to buy Ray-Ban sunglasses, to do our duty for reconciliation and nation-building by consuming this luxury product. What an incredible opportunistic whitewashing of an iconic legacy. No wonder the unveiling is on the cusp of summer, and not a year before Mandela's passing. And is it not ironic that the marketing spin does not mention that Madiba's eyes were damaged while he was incarcerated on Robben Island, the result of dust and blinding light of years of working the lime-quarry. Luckily "Perceiving Freedom" has clear and not

👍 17 people like this.

➦ 14 shares



**Emma Druyan** Signed but Avaaz only seemed to ask for my email so I am not sure my initials/name is on it. But done. Thanks for setting it up!

November 20 at 5:14pm · Like · 👍 1



**Susanna Coleman** Colin Besaans - have a squizz at the debate on Candice Breitz's time line, I also posted about it. I'm sure that you and Gina van der Ploeg will get it...

November 20 at 5:30pm · Like · 👍 1



**Candice Breitz** This is just one of the reasons why I signed (an excerpt from a longer statement I wrote explaining my reasons for signing - inbox me if you want a copy of the longer text): "Without a doubt, there are many grave issues facing the South African public ... See More

November 20 at 5:37pm · Like · 👍 5



**Candice Breitz** More reasons to sign the petition: ✕



November 23 at 5:27pm · Like · 👍 4



**Jeannette Ginslov** Done

November 23 at 7:26pm · Like · 👍 1



**Dawie Van Vuuren** I think that nasty thing perfectly represents Cape Town.

Yesterday at 6:12am · Like



Write a comment...



**Tlou Masello Motanapitsi** ▶ **Candice Breitz**

November 19 at 12:41pm · 📌

Dear Michael Elion,

How do i perceive a freedom i have never had? How do i perceive a freedom i don't have? How do i perceive a freedom when "we wuz robbed?" Nelson Mandela was not the first or the last prisoner at Robben Island. Makhanda kaNxele, Robert Sobukwe and Japhta Masemola who actually spent more time than your beloved Tata are amongst many, many prisoners who we

## APPENDIX E

*Its not about the art its about the street-* a photoessay created as a requirement for FAM5015W 2014 Master's coursework. It chronicles some of the Woodstock and Khayelitsha murals and street art.



It's not about the art, it's about the street.

A Photoessay

Storm Jade Brown

**Storm Jade Brown**

**FAM 5015W**

**Final Photoessay**

**Supervisor: Mr Paul Weinberg**

**Centre for Film & Media Studies**

**Humanities Faculty**

**University of Cape Town**

**Printed in October 2014**

**[stormjadebrown@gmail.com](mailto:stormjadebrown@gmail.com)**



"The viewer knows that the  
city is alive and that the artist  
cannot live without making  
his art. Ultimately, it is a  
shared view of the world and  
the belief that small acts can  
make a difference..."

Alan Sondheim & Sue Robinson at the  
Kew-Forest Exhibition (2001)

## INTRODUCTION

When I first started thinking about what I wanted to do with this book, I was inspired by the work of Martha Cooper. Martha Cooper is a notorious New York photographer, who made her name photographing graffiti, hip-hop culture and the grim of everyday life in 1970's and 1980's New York. What made Cooper's work unique was the way in which she captured the graffiti in the context of its immediate surroundings and displayed it as an art form. Never before had graffiti, or urban grime been considered as an art form, or even something worth photographing. The brilliant way that Cooper captured her work changed all that. It made people reconsider their ideas surrounding beauty, art, and the city space.

The paradigm shift that Cooper brought about through her photographs really inspired me. I wanted to take this simple concept and apply it to Cape Town, South Africa. I wanted to present South Africans with art and beauty, found in the most unlikely places. So I went in search of places fragmented by the horrors of apartheid that today still exist in a state of critical economical, social and spatial inequality. Finding these spaces was easy enough, as I just had to look towards the places that most people from the Southern Suburban lifestyle avoided.

The difficult part came in when I tried to figure out how to create this paradigm shift. Our society constantly reminds us that if we are in a privileged position, it becomes our duty to do more to change the state of our social inequalities. I would feel hopeless and think that there was nothing I could do to heal the keloid scars that our land bore witness to. But in all this hopeless meandering, I was losing sight. How can you problematise over something that you have never bore witness to? How can you speak of another's life, another's community, culture and traditions when you have never set sight on them? Sometimes you need to go to these places and see the art that exists in them. Not despite of the circumstances, but precisely because of them.

This was when I realised that I needed some sight. Some foresight, some hindsight, even some insight. I really needed to just see. And instantly, I knew that I could not change anybody else's mind before I changed my own, and that only came with departing from my much-loved comfort zones.

So I ventured out of my comfort zone and crossed the great divide.

## **OH, THE PLACES YOU WILL GO.**

At first, I did not know how to start my adventure. Here I was; a privileged white girl, living in the Southern Suburbs, studying at Africa's most prestigious university, completing a Masters degree and driving around in my own car. I was walking into these places with a camera that cost more than most people's houses. When I put things into perspective like that, I shuddered with shame and embarrassment.

But here is perhaps where I learnt my biggest lesson. None of those things mattered. What mattered most is the mind-set I approached these situations with. Instead of focusing on difference, I focused on our shared humanity, love of art, and an eagerness to learn more about these communities.

So I started asking around and one thing lead to another, before I was visiting Ocean View, Khayelitsha and Woodstock with respective representatives from each community. Looking for art and artistry in these places was not hard at all. It seems that when people are less precious about their walls and boundaries and more invested in their communities, amazing things start to happen. This shift from immanence to transcendence creates a space where all sorts of creativity blossoms, usually with no formal training.

As the street art created in these spaces is appreciated, it is usually left up long enough for other artists to create pieces that work in conversation with the space. This collaboration of local artists to create an artistic hub of creativity and dialogue has been so successful that international street artists have flocked to Cape Town to join in on these dialogues.

Over the past few months I have seen some amazing pieces of street art, that speak to animals rights issues, historical narratives, human rights, political satire or simply just reimagine a space. These hidden galleries should be considered a national treasure because they give the invisible visibility, and create phenomenologically situated art.

In my four years of art history and visual studies education, I have yet to come across a less mediated art form. Not only is this art free, accessible to everyone, devoid of capitalist intentions and a rebellion against the exclusivity of the art world, it is also speaks to the space that it is in.

## ART SPEAKS WHERE WORDS END

The beauty of making an art piece public is that it draws on the power of art to simultaneously access emotion, intellect and affect, and puts it out into the street. Perhaps the power of the arts is nowhere better articulated than this statement made by Steven Dubin (2010:7), when he comments on the cultural warfare that the arts have the power to provoke:

*They are speaking here of an unsettled, and unsettling communal history. These feelings must alight upon terrain that is subject to being contested because it is highly visible and a symbolic site for collective meaning and representation ... works of art (paintings, photographs, songs, films, plays), school curricula and place names are some of the most familiar examples... Collective memory, cultural capital, and multiple forms of social value are generated at nodes such as these; they are both signifying and significant...*

Street art works with the discourse that public art creates, and adds a different dimension by taking away the idea of exclusive art with permission. This creates an art that no longer requires an undergraduate degree in art history and philosophy to understand. Art is now something that is encountered in everyday life, going through our daily routines.

However to define street art as simply art on the street misses a great deal of its rich history. Over the years many academics such as Waclawek (2011), Chalfant and Prigoff (1987), Lewishon (2008) and Schiller and Schiller (2010) have all spent a great deal of time and energy defining street art mostly through a process of eliminating what it is not. Although street art originates from graffiti, they are not the same thing.

A good distinction between the two is made by Lewisohn (2008:21) who points out street art's break with the tradition of the graffiti tag. The break with the tag signifies street art as the graffiti revolution. This is because it takes the secret language of graffiti, used only to connect with different crews, and turns it into an international language that everyone can understand (Lewishon 2008:15).

*Once a viewer takes an interest in the subject, it becomes clear very quickly what is street art and what is graffiti. Graffiti writing has a very specific aesthetic: its about the tag, its about the graphic form, its about the letters, styles and spray paint applications, and its about reaching difficult locations. If we think of street art as all art on the street that is not graffiti, the definition is extremely broad, and this broadness reflects the genre's freedom.*

Many would argue that street art, in its essence, is an anti-art as it seems to rebel against everything that the art world cherishes. However, in the years that have passed since Martha Cooper first began her avant-garde work with graffiti in Subway Art (1984), street art has skyrocketed in fame.

This is at least partially due to the notorious London-based street artist, Banksy and his documentary, Exit Through the Giftshop (2009). Which in turn has resulted in a proliferation of decontextualized images on social media platforms such as Instagram where street art has acclaimed a hip connotation associated with urban cool. Here, various images pop up under the #streetart and #graffiti tags, but often have little to do with the genre itself. Whilst it is wonderful that so many people are taking an interest in street art and getting works out onto the internet, the problem with this mode of engagement is that the information gets misconstrued and the communities in which this art occurs are circumvented.

This community-based understanding is essential, because only then can one understand how graffiti and street art function within the same space. When I was taking these pictures I came across a few street art pieces with graffiti tags on them.

This also speaks to the broadness of street art as a genre and its existence somewhere between the representational markings of graffiti and the artistic aesthetic of public art.

Street art flattens linguistic, educational, class, racial and spatial barriers and creates a visual dialogue in a language that everyone can understand.

This is particularly important in a South African context, as we live in a country with eleven official languages. Street art therefore allows the viewer to create their own meaning, as everyone has different perceptions of and associations to place. This creates a powerful form of visual revolution where the status quo can be challenged.

Street art opens our eyes to the spaces around us. It forces us to sit up, notice, engage and question. Once our eyes have been opened we can never look at any marking on our city walls the same.

## LET ME SHOW YOU MY WALLS

*On 27 April 1950, the apartheid government passed the Group Areas Act. This Act enforced the segregation of the different races to specific areas within the urban locale. It also restricted ownership and the occupation of land to a specific statutory group. This meant that Blacks could not own or occupy land in White areas. While the law was supposed to apply in converse, it was essentially land under Black ownership that was appropriated by the Government for use by Whites only. :*

## Ocean View

I first visited Ocean View with a friend named Jean America who was a previous inhabitant of the community. He invited me to come take pictures whilst he and two European girls painted a mural outside one of the blocks of flats. Jean is now living in Kommetjie, a short drive away from Ocean View, where he is involved in The Youth Leadership Training Programme that equips youths from disadvantaged areas to make a difference in their communities by teaching them sustainable skills.

At the end of the programme, a French girl, Mari, wanted to give something back to the community she had spent the past two weeks working in and so she decided to paint the Madiba mural for them. Driving into Ocean View on a Friday afternoon was quite a shock for me.

I understood that this was where the people from Simons Town had been relocated to under the 1950 Group Areas Act of apartheid, and that today it was rife with gangs, violence and alcohol abuse. Yet Jean's passion for his community inspired me and created a curiosity to experience Ocean View from his perspective, and not through the eyes of the subjective media reports that I had read.

Driving into Ocean View, I am immediately struck by the amount of people just sitting about. I notice the uniform concrete buildings that on closer inspection house several families in one small room. The community is predominantly coloured and a colloquial Afrikaans is spoken. A few heads turn as I drive in with Jean and the two European girls. Immediately I become scared and my defences rise. Jean tells me to calm down, and just relax. If I am hostile then the people will be hostile back.

When we arrive, we walk through a section of the back of Ocean View. It seems strange that such poverty and so many social ills occur in a place that is surrounded with rolling green hills, white beach sand and as the name suggests, a view of the ocean. Jean introduces me to some of his friends, and we start chatting about art, music and poetry as a language that supersedes any other method of effective communication.

Suddenly, everyone is getting involved and the mural process starts. Excited children run out into the street, curious onlookers wander over and groups of teenage boys and girls excitedly chatter about Madiba's face on their wall. I had forgotten myself there for awhile, as I watched astonished in the way that the entire community came together and shared in the experience of creating art.

I am only reminded that we have to leave as Jean urgently tells the girls to finish up and that we need to be out of Ocean View by nightfall, as this is when things start to get a bit rowdy and he is worried about our safety.

Instead of shocking me, a comment like this only reaffirms that community activists like Jean want people to experience their communities, not once but several times. He does not paint an unrealistic picture, instead he puts all that Ocean View has to offer on the table and I cannot help but start to love it.

## **Woodstock**

The next day, I visited Woodstock and met a man who introduced himself only as Rashid. Rashid is a local who has lived in Woodstock for over fifty years, and makes an income from giving street art tours around the neighbourhood. Woodstock was one of the few places that were not struck down by the Group Areas act during apartheid, and as a result many of its inhabitants have been there a long time. Today, Woodstock is falling victim to extreme gentrification. Suddenly, local homes and businesses are being demolished in favour of hip, new creative spaces that cater for people who want to live and work in a more edgy environment.

The main road running through Woodstock, Albert road is a prime example of this extreme juxtaposition. The one side borders on the city centre, and here an array of convenience shops, factory stores and autobody repair garages can be found. Rashid informs me that this is where Cape Town's biggest drug den is, and the Hard Livings Gang as well as Pollsmoor ex-convicts frequent this area on a regular basis.

Following Rashid's lead, I climb into a small opening in a metal gate lined with barbed-wire. He tells me that this is home to several gangs as well as a few homeless people and drug users, but as long as we are with him, we will be okay. As I crawl around the floor lined with sewage, broken fibreglass, mud, used condoms and strange pieces of metal, I am immediately struck by the beautiful pieces of street art and graffiti. Here in this decrepit space that very few would dare enter into, lies the most extraordinary art. The stench, the beauty, the artistry and the danger overwhelm my senses.

We venture further up into the adjacent streets, away from the hub of The Biscuit Mill, home to an array of exclusive restaurants, studio spaces and gourmet food markets. Suddenly I am no longer surrounded by "day visitors" from the suburbs, and I find myself in a very different space where the tumultuous history is literally written on the walls.

Rashid has worked with and knows many of the artists who decorate Woodstock on a frequent basis. He talks me through all the beautiful pieces we pass and gives insight into the context in which they were created.

The walk with Rashid was not just about the art, it was also very much about the original Woodstock community that was slowly getting pushed out of the area. He took me to the furniture factory that trains up ex-Pollsmoor inmates and showed me a few of the finished pieces. Another stop was at the house of a woman who had lived in Woodstock for eighty-seven years. The municipality wanted to demolish her house, and one of the local artists, Freddy Sam had painted a piece chronicling this history in protest of this.

Rashid also took me to a hidden square behind the houses, where he proudly informed me that we were in the midst of the Hard Livings, Fuck Shit Up and the 28's. These are some of the most notorious and violent gangs in Cape Town, and here I was standing in the middle of their territory. My legs started to quiver a little as three men approached Rashid and asked him in Afrikaans why he brought two "whities" into their territory. Rashid calmly told them that I was there to take pictures of the art and I was genuinely interested in the community.

They seemed to understand and suddenly the environment changed. I looked round and saw young children playing in human excrement, discarded refuse and dirt. In 2011, Woodstock played host to The Toffie Festival, A WORD OF ART and Addidas collaboration. Here, Freddy Sam, a local artist, organised for street artists from all over the world to come beautify the community of Woodstock. This is where many of the original works come from, and is perhaps what started this creative space. Since then, many artists have contributed to this space and it continues to grow and improve. Despite this beauty, it was still quite a scary place, and I wondered what it would be like without Rashid showing me around.

### **Khayelitsha**

I sat with the pictures of Ocean View and Woodstock for a while. I knew that I was onto something, and yet there was a crucial piece of the puzzle that was missing.

My answer came to me a few weeks later when a friend sent me a picture of a piece of street art depicting Former President Nelson Mandela in conversation with our Current President Jacob Zuma. This picture had been taken in Khayelitsha at The Hub, and I instinctively knew this would be where I have to go next.

After some research, I got in touch with Juma Mkwela. Juma is a practicing street artist and resident of Khayelitsha and makes his living from giving township tours to tourists. His passion for his community runs parallel with his love for his art.

The township tour that I experienced with Juma was the biggest break from my comfort zone. We drove into Khayelitsha in a minibus taxi. The streets were chaos; alive with the cackling of half-dead chickens, taxi hooters, people shouting at each other in Xhosa, Kwaito music booming from shebeens, and emaciated dogs running across the street. This community was not eerie like Woodstock and its shadows of the past, Khayelitsha was buzzing.

Khayelitsha is the second oldest township in Cape Town, but this history is still a new one as there are few actual cement structures. Most of the people live in shacks or in makeshift homes and are still waiting for the government to build them their own houses. Yet each shack we walked past was presented with the utmost pride and respect. I was flabbergasted at the quality of art that appeared on the side of the shacks and could not believe that once again, international artists had come here to make their visual voice heard. Here inhabitants were proud to offer up their tin walls as canvases.

The pieces of wildlife, African faces and social commentary were carried out in the most contextually co-ordinated manner so that it appeared that the art had always been there.

Although there is much contention over the ethics of township tours in South Africa, I found the experience to be a good access point to start visualising the narrative of a place and people I knew little about, yet shared so much of my life with. This context helped me to understand the art so much better than if I had just bravely ventured into Khayelitsha by myself and tried to contextualise pieces in places I had only imagined.

I spent that afternoon eating pap and sadza in somebody elses shack, drinking a quart of beer in the shebeen, watching a traditional dancing competition (with a bound sheep as first prize) and experiencing chicken being strangled, plucked and then sold on the side of the road. I was amazed at the goods one could find at the local markets and astounded by the amount of ailments the witchdoctor could fix.

In a place like this it seemed that everything existed alongside everything else. There were no juxtapositions, just life in continuous, vibrant, alarming and overwhelming motion. You could either choose to embrace it or be swallowed whole as the rhythm continued.

## CONTINUOUS RHYTHM

Perhaps this was the theme and binding narrative that I was searching for all along. I wanted to present art in unlikely places to the world. But I could not do that until I put myself in those unlikely places and embraced their rhythm, not my own. This was not a dystopia frozen in time. It was a living, breathing companion to the communities and therefore subject to the same shaping and defacing forces.

*At its most apolitical, work done without permission in places that make others bear witness to the affront still embodies an intuitive rebellion against the assumption that the rules of property take precedence over the inherent rights of free use and self-expression. From the cave paintings left by primitive man through to the proto-poster art of Martin Luther nailing his proclamations up in the early 16<sup>th</sup> Century, there are valuable precedents for the appropriation of public walls by individual ideologues that cannot be forsaken by the mere existence of mortar, brick, steel and glass, nor whatever subsequent laws are constructed.:*

If these artists wanted people to marvel at their artistry or see the collection of their works in one place, they would have entered into the formal art world. Instead, what they are doing is creating a culture of curiosity where art becomes the tool for engaging with the space and the people in it. People outside of the communities can only learn about the art if they go into these communities and embrace them by engaging with the people and the spaces.

Therefore I present a collection of carefully cultivated images to show not just the art, but to tell a story of the communities. This narrative walks to the same beat as the rhythm of these communities that I have experienced. Prepare to be enticed, alarmed, puzzled, made uncomfortable and left with a curious taste in your mouth.

Here's to leaving comfort zones behind and embracing the art that brings us together.

## References

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Wake up to the Sun (2011)

Freddy Sam

Woodstock

© Storm Jade Brown

Diamond Inside (2011)

Boamistura (Madrid)

Woodstock

Storm Jade Brown



Untitled (2012)

Nard\_Star

Woodstock

Storm Jade Brown





Remember to forget

Author unknown

Woodstock abandoned boat yard

© Storm Jade Brown



Untitled

Artist unknown

Woodstock abandoned boat yard

© Storm Jade Brown



Freddy Sam tag (Woodstock our home)

**Freddy Sam**

Woodstock

◀ Storm Jade Brown



Freddy Sam

My Home

This woman has lived in her house for 87 years. Developers wanted to tear it down so in protest and as part of his 'Art Woodstock' project, Freddy Sam painted this piece. It also includes the name of a local child.

© Storm Jade Brown



Wall with all the artists' names on it

### Joint Collaboration

Made in Woodstock to remind the youths that there is a choice and that they do not have to resort to social evils such as drugs, alcohol and gangsterism. Instead, they can enrich their communities.

© Storm Jade Brown



Untitled (2011)

Dathini Mzanyiya  
Woodstock

© Storm Jade Brown



Full Moon (2011)

**DAI est**

Woodstock

Storm Jade Brown



FREE PALESTINE

MILAR

STATION

Free Palestine

Author unknown

Woodstock

© Storm Jade Brown



Untitled (2012)

Pens & Elicser (Toronto)

Woodstock

© Storm Jade Brown



Untitled (2012)

Cerr (New York)

Woodstock

© Storm Jade Brown



Untitled (2011)

35-ten-73

Woodstock

© Storm Jade Brown

Untitled (2012)

**Juma Mkwela**

Khayelitsha

Storm Jade Brown



Detail of wall chronicling the history of Woodstock (2012)

**Elicser (Toronto) & Urbanski**

Woodstock

Storm Jade Brown



Faith47 tag

Faith47

Woodstock

Storm Jade Brown



Parkin D 2011

DALest

Woodstock

Storm Jade Brown





Gympie Street elephant (2012)

**Makatron (United Kingdom)**

Woodstock

Storm Jade Brown



ROTHSCHILD  
GIRAFFE  
UNDEF

Rothschild Giraffe

Masal TV

Woodstock mural to raise awareness about the Rothschild giraffe.

© Storm Jade Eilown



Detail

Masai (UK)

Woodstock

© Storm Jade Brown



Save our Rhino part II (2012)

Masai (UK)

Woodstock

Storm Jade Brown



"Save Our Rhino"

Binho (Brazil)

Woodstock

© Storm Jade Brown





Detail 2012

**Binho (Brazil) & Cern (New York)**

Woodstock

Storm Jade Brown



Long Live Mandela

Juma Mkwela

Khayelisha

© Storm Jade Brown



"The People Shall Share in the Country's Wealth" part of the Freedom Charter Series (2011)

Faith47

Khayelitsha

© Storm Jade Brown



The Fresh Prince of Bel Air

Artist unknown

Woodstock

© Storm Jade Brown

Storm is currently a Master's student in Media Theory and Practice at the University of Cape Town, South Africa. She is writing her dissertation on street art in the Cape Town city space.

This book is by no means an archive- it only begins to touch the surface of an ever growing body of work around the Cape Town space.

Special thanks go out to Jean America, Juma Mkwela and Rashid for their time, patience and inspiring passion. I have learnt so much about art, life and the power of community from all of you.

sous les pavés, la plage.