

# Visual transactions:

Image theory, new media art and cross-cultural exchange

Angela Vieira de Jesus

Dissertation towards partial completion for the degree of  
Magister Artium (Fine Arts)  
in the Faculty of Humanities,  
Departments of Fine Arts & History of Art and Visual Culture Studies,  
at the  
University of the Free State,  
Bloemfontein,  
Republic of South Africa

Date of Submission: January 2009

Supervisors:

Ms. J. Allen-Spies  
Prof. E.S. Human

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## Preface

“What makes a[n] [art] work open, legible to all, is the fact that it contains a slice, no matter how tiny, of ourselves”  
(Njami 2007: 18).

My Portuguese heritage within a family of shopkeepers<sup>1</sup> has proven to be a complex and multifaceted experience, which has provided me with a unique perspective to observe the cultural dynamic taking place in the peculiar setting of the shop. This perspective is a partial (perhaps biased) economically entrenched position that illuminates a number of imperative concerns allied with cultural interactions and visual perception.

The study materialised on one of the corners of a busy street in Bloemfontein’s CBD, where there is a small take away shop, a tavern at the back, and a not so obvious house next door.<sup>2</sup> This space serves as a microcosm of a particular community: a place with a constant routine, a unique etiquette, intercultural

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1. The Portuguese shopkeeper is a well-known stereotype in South Africa as many people of Portuguese decent living in South Africa own or work in small businesses such as take away cafés or supermarkets. In the 1960s and 70s a number of Portuguese living in other African countries, especially Mozambique and Angola, fled to South Africa as a result of violence occurring in African countries seeking independence. As many of them did not have citizenship and could not speak any of the languages, they supported themselves by starting or buying small businesses. As the immigrants adapted to the economic, social and political circumstances in the country many more Portuguese people from Portugal and Madeira applied for permanent residency and came to South Africa to join their families (this information has been sourced from several discussions held with Portuguese people who experienced it, among them are Mr Gabriel Jardim, and Mr Paulo Viveiros). In 1989 the Portuguese community made up a third of the people living in South Africa of European decent (Schutte 1989). Today the Portuguese community still occupies a large portion of this population group.

2. Saint Georges Street is a historically significant street and one of the oldest in Bloemfontein. It houses the First Raadsaal (today a satellite of the National Museum) which was used in 1854 as the official assembly hall by the Orange Free State Republic (*National Museum Bloemfontein 2006-2007*), while the dilapidated lower end of the street and its surroundings contain the city’s taxi rank and cooling towers, a scrapyard and many desolate buildings. This lower area is surrounded by small businesses, street trade, the buzzing noise of constant traffic and a stream of pedestrians or commuters passing by daily. The shop is situated on a corner of the street with the tavern at a back entrance. A continuous wall that runs from the shop entrance to the house, hides the house from outside view. The only clue to it is a door and two large windows that peek into the street. This house is thought to be the second oldest building in the street after the First Raadsaal but there is no proof of this except the building itself, which resembles many South African colonial houses. The shop sells commercial food and household products but mainly tobacco and alcohol. It targets a black working clientele, but also serves a diverse range of cultural groups and people – including a poor white community that reside in close-by flats, a variety of homeless people, many African emigrants who live and have set up hair salons or other businesses in the area and a young generation of students from Motheo FET college.

encounters and interchange. Yet another side exists: one of paranoia, misinterpretation, misrepresentation, guilt and suspicion. One moment it is benign and friendly, the next tempers are flaring and racial slurs are being hurled. The shop (and its surroundings)<sup>3</sup> provides a concentrated space, a point of view from which to investigate complex issues involved in cross-cultural exchange and image interpretation within our social environment. The collection and appropriation of surveillance footage from CCTV cameras installed in the shop, as well as the production of my own videos with hidden digital hand-held video camcorders around these spaces,<sup>4</sup> has given me the opportunity to identify and raise questions about cross-cultural exchange, as well as image exchanges, and allowed me to try to make sense of my position<sup>5</sup> within this microcosm.

Intercultural encounters do not occur in a vacuum, they are affected by perceptions, assumptions and ideas that have been modelled in a socio-historical context. These include among others, colonial and postcolonial notions, stereotypes, ideas about racial and cultural segregation, social and political conditions as well as illustrations and representations of each other. In the shop the exchange of goods occur concomitantly with an exchange of vision and cross-cultural perception. The video camera installed or placed in the shop surveys this exchange. When such footage is edited and placed in a gallery space it is read in the context of an image-making tradition, which in turn depends on various types of exchange.

Video 1 (Track 1 on the enclosed DVD), extracts from which are reproduced as stills in Figure 1,<sup>6</sup> shows typical transactions that occur in the environment of the

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3. In this text I will refer to the shop and the surrounding area as “the shop”.

4. In my previous research done on the immersive impact of inhabitants of the city, I did a series of etchings of people in the shop.

5. This position refers to my experiences in working in the shop and using this environment for artistic research.

6. For clarity in this text I will refer to my video works chronologically; this does not apply to the arrangement of videos in the video installation and exhibition. The video works discussed in this text are fragments of the exhibition installation, which is discussed in the exhibition catalogue. The rationale behind the video installation is discussed below. The video works discussed here are accessible on the enclosed DVD and appear in this text as video stills.

shop. In some of these transactions, when the goods shift from one hand to another, the individuals look at each other from across the counter. This short-lived moment is a multi-sensory exchange influenced by outside sources and shaped by interpretation. What occur are visual transactions, among others. It can be argued that in these transactions ideas and assumptions ('mind images') about what is being viewed are envisaged by each participant. These forms of interaction problematise our daily experiences as they revolve around power positions and ideologies. What forms can be argued to be a deliberate detachment, a purposeful distance by physical barriers, in this case the counter, as well as psychologically by a somewhat 'unconscious screen' between people. It seems as though the people in this microcosm live a superficial existence; a means perhaps of safeguarding themselves? With this come complexities such as social tension, violent behaviour, suspicion, anxiety and agoraphobia. These are social phenomena characteristic of a disjuncted, divided and disconnected society.

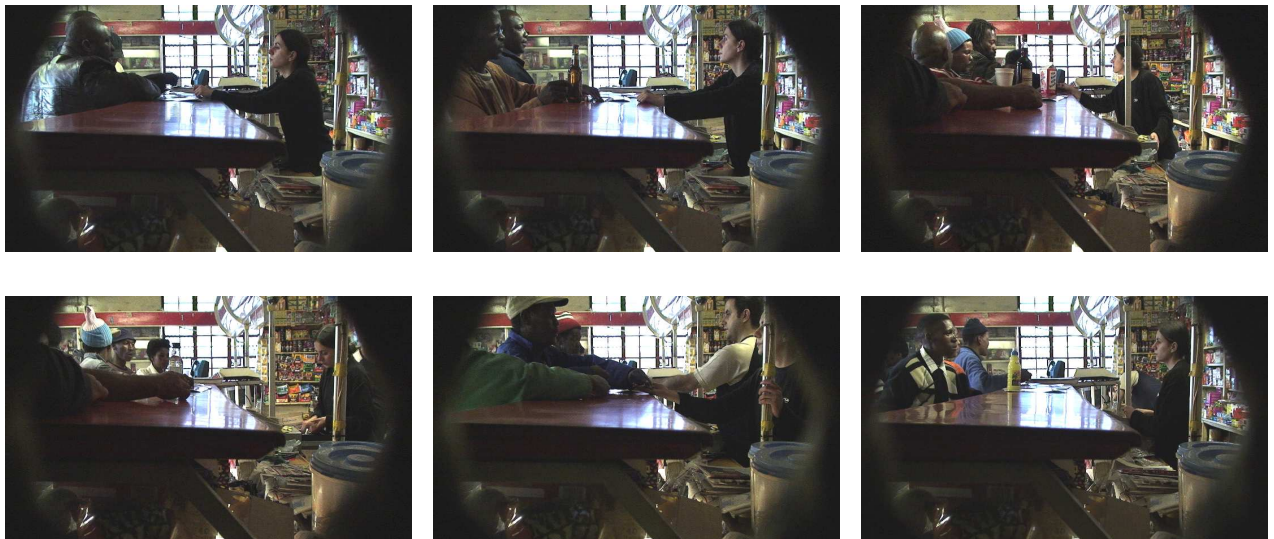


Figure 1: Angela de Jesus. Video stills from Video 1 (2006 – 2009). Detail from video installation, *In exchange* (2009).

When placed in the gallery space my video works become more than merely seemingly straightforward illustrations, observations or 'mirrors' of the shop. Meanings are energised by an image tradition in which the image is 'seen' or read as a means for understanding the contemporary world. Norman Bryson, Michael Ann Holly and Keith Moxey (1994: xv) argue that images are "inseparable from a larger cultural and ideological world". They not only duplicate a referent in the real world but also "exhibit cultural values" that are more complicated and have deeper significance (Bryson *et al.* 1994: xviii). Images do not mirror an external world; they represent essential structures of our thinking (Belting 2005, Mitchell 2005). People "behave as if pictures [are] alive, as if they have minds of their own, as if images [have] a power to influence human beings, demanding things from [them], persuading, seducing, and leading [them] astray" (Mitchell 2005: 7, Freedberg 1989). We interpret images as a form of interchange between the image and ourselves, as the image does not only refer to itself but to a range of 'mental representations' that can in some way be related to it (Belting 2005). The viewer, as Bruno Latour (2002) and Joan Ramon Resina (2003) believe, reads the image through the understanding of other images, while this image adds yet another representation to that collection; what Resina has coined "after-images". "Imagery is essentially rhetorical and nostalgic," and it yearns for a history, not of the subject but of images associated with the subject (Resina 2003: 4). The medium of video itself (and other new media, in that it has the infinite potential to replicate and transform) resembles some of these processes whereby we comprehend images. Video is a sequence of temporary moments on a screen that change from one image into another. At the same time it is in the nature of images to convert into and beget other images. Each consecutive image is read through a set of past images. There is no fixed 'freeze frame' in video, only a "cascade of images," a constant motion and transformation from one image to another, similar to the reception process that Latour (2002: 32) describes.

### i. Visual recording methods, editing processes and video installation

The videos of the shop are recorded on high and standard-definition hand-held video camcorders as well as retrieved from the permanently installed surveillance system that exists at several fixed camera angles inside the shop. The raw material for videos 2 and 3 (Track 2 and 3 on the enclosed DVD, Figure 2 and 3) is video surveillance footage retrieved from the CCTV system inside the shop. Each hand-held video camcorder is hidden inside a product box in which a peephole(s) has been cut out and often manipulated so that only certain motifs are visible, for the camera's 'eye'. The box is then placed in various positions inside the shop to capture footage. The video cameras are also used in shooting footage through windows, frames and from other vantage points. Usually the people captured on video are unaware of the hidden camera. However, one is not always certain whether or not they have noticed it and realise that they are being recorded.



Figure 2: Angela de Jesus. Video stills from Video 2 (2006 – 2009). Detail from video installation, *In exchange* (2009).



Figure 3: Angela de Jesus. Video stills from Video 3 (2006 – 2009). Detail from video installation, *In exchange* (2009).



Once the footage has been loaded onto a computer, a process of selection and editing begins. In this manipulation phase the footage has the potential to endlessly change and transform. A variety of techniques and strategies applied to the raw footage enables new meanings to surface, while in the video installation the utilisation of several additional methods and approaches, such as juxtaposition, provide alternative experiences for the viewer. The video installation comprises of several videos that have been grouped and arranged in different patterns and configurations. Within these arrangements and juxtapositions, the videos correspond and relate to each other in different time loops, generating a variety of meanings and conflicting interpretations.

Processes used in the installation of the videos and in the recording and editing of raw footage include: the peephole, barriers and layering, time alterations, luminescence, juxtapositioning, the grid, appearance and disappearance, repetition in loops, and sound manipulations.

*a) The peephole*

The peephole provides a frame for the footage and manipulates the recorded material to reveal only a section of the whole. In this way the viewer is distanced from what is being shown while simultaneously being offered glimpses of something, perhaps forbidden.<sup>7</sup> The experience is intriguing but the visible peephole frame also makes the viewer conscious of the process of looking and induces a self-reflective process of self-examination as voyeur.

*b) Barriers and layering*

Barrier motifs (the shop counter, protection bars, curtains, window frames, etc.) act as devices that both distance and filter what is looked across or through. The barriers either frame the subjects or obscure them, sometimes disrupting the viewer's indulgence in the scene. As in the process of interpretation where

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7. This response is associated with the position of the voyeur. The voyeur is someone who watches others without their knowledge, an obsessive observer who derives gratification from watching the unpleasant or sordid.

images are read through layers of mental representations, these barriers form filters or screens that we look through. Occasionally the manipulated video frames overlap, transcend or transform into one another.

*c) Time alterations*

The manipulation and alteration of real time allows the viewer to experience a vast period of time in a shortened phase or an extremely short phase in an extended period. An increase of speed allows the videos of the shop to compact several moments into a short loop while its decrease emphasises a specific moment.

*d) Luminescence*

The luminescence of the screen and the screen's light are mesmerising devices that captivate the viewer. This hypnotic light acts similarly to the modern cinema screen which has attracted audiences and created an immersive experience over many decades of filmmaking. In the videos of the shop there is often a contrast or play between light and dark; between what is exposed and obstructed, between what is revealed and concealed.

*e) Juxtapositioning*

In the video installation the videos are shown on computer, television or projection screens. The videos are placed or projected next to each other in various constellations to highlight relationships between them. They take part in a process of interaction and comparison, which is reminiscent of triptych and diptych configurations in painting. When exhibited or edited next to each other their meanings become more complex in relation to one another.

*f) The grid*

The grid is an organisational mechanism where juxtapositioning is multiplied. It suggests rational order, clarity, knowledge and control and is comparable to a surveillance system control room in which a surveyor examines a series of

screens (windows). In the video installation some videos are placed in grid-like arrangements that systematise them, but this mechanism of organising also complicates their collective readability. The grid has an overwhelming effect on its viewers as it creates several places to look at simultaneously. Their configurations are disrupted further with the disappearance and re-appearance of selected videos.

*g) Appearance and disappearance*

Videos that are juxtaposed often appear, disappear and re-appear or are replaced by other videos in varying time loops. This makes it possible to view the videos in various contexts and combinations and thus generates numerous meanings. This strategy is a way to interrupt the viewing process as well as to direct the viewer's attention to different image sequences at different times.

*h) Repetition in loops*

Repetition in loops creates an interminable, unchanging series of events. Not only does this cyclical repetition provide the viewer with the opportunity to re-view the videos, but it also becomes a metaphor for the recurring routines of everyday life; of being trapped in a condition where social constructs continuously and repeatedly reappear, are reinforced and underscored.

*i) Sound manipulation*

The sound track comprises an array of utterances taken from the environment of the shop layered over one another, making it rarely comprehensible or clear and more often than not resulting in 'noise'. The sound is uneven in volume and fluctuates over time producing a disruptive and unsettling surrounding tone during the process of viewing. While some softer sounds can only be discerned within close proximity others are more obtrusive and can be heard throughout the installation space.

## ii. Reflections on the video installation process

The edited videos of the shop can, and have been, installed in several spaces, in various ways and in different configurations. I have investigated and experimented with arrangements, methods and display options. Figures 7 to 10 illustrate examples of the videos exhibited in other spaces and exhibitions.<sup>8</sup> Each of these exhibiting approaches add to or alter the meanings within the videos themselves and many of these choices have provided either technical difficulties in playing the video works, or recalled conceptual complications associated in exhibiting them. Conceptual complications are specifically difficult, as many critical associations accompany the exhibition of African objects and the presentation of ideas related to Africa.<sup>9</sup> This has influenced the decisions and processes by which the video works were edited and installed. During this project I have continually considered, deliberated and documented the processes of installation choices. This took place in the form of written text or drawings in journals (Figures 4 to 6 show selected pages in these journals), with practical display tests such as in Figure 7, and with installations in galleries and other spaces (Figures 8 to 10).

One of the initial ideas for presenting the video works was to exhibit them inside the space of the shop and to project them onto products (e.g. on cigarette packets) or other surfaces (e.g. the counter, display units and ceiling) within this environment, as in Figure 8, in an effort to take the videos of the shop back into the space in which it they where originally captured. However, it proved problematic because the shop did not provide many surfaces that accommodated the projections and because the surrounding environment tended to overpower the videos. At first most of the raw footage retrieved from the shop

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8. The videos have been exhibited at the Johannes Stegmann Art Gallery, in the reservoir of Oliewenhuis Art Museum and inside the shop environment.

9. An example is the Museum of Modern Art's *'Primitivism' in 20th Century Art* held in 1984 and the recent *Picasso and Africa* exhibition held in South Africa, where specific juxtapositioning of artifacts spurned heated debates. Refer to Chapter 1.

underwent a much more aggressive editing process, where often many of the videos were overlapped to create several impressions of the images (Figure 9). I considered presenting these videos over one another and installing them in immersive, cave-like, environments where the arrangements would be extreme and where the viewer would be engulfed by the overall digital environment (Figure 5 shows drawings of initial ideas). However, this reminded me of a spectacle<sup>10</sup> and instead of making excessive use of it I decided to incorporate some of these ideas with other exhibiting methods. Some of the other methods I explored included looking at ways in which viewers could engage more intimately with the videos, so that their relationships with the videos could replicate the interactions within the shop (Figure 7), presenting the videos on smaller scales and formats, and employing videos of various sizes to elucidate the shifting power positions within the shop. A problem which kept resurfacing in the video installation process was that of 'display'. The videos are at risk of being perceived similarly to artifacts in natural history museums and as curiosity products in a display case. At times I exploit these associations in order to subvert them, for example presenting videos on stands or other display-like units (Figures 6 & 10). I also try to find ways to get away from such stylized exhibition methods, by arranging works in configurations that are often in constant flux, and by deliberately displacing and detaching the videos, for example, from their usual positions and repeating them in other unexpected places.

Figure 11 provides suggestions for the layout of the installation, *In exchange*<sup>11</sup> (at the Johannes Stegmann Art Gallery, University of the Free State, from the 17<sup>th</sup> to 29<sup>th</sup> of April 2009), which consists of an environment of several video displays. These displays could be arranged and re-arranged in many constellations. The video displays could include: different size television and computer screens that have been grouped and mounted on a wall, a counter-like unit with embedded

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10. Visual devices and immersive environments, such as the panorama, have portrayed images of Africa as spectacles. Refer to Chapter 2.

11. The exhibition, *In exchange* is discussed further in the exhibition catalogue. The exhibition catalogue can be found in the addendum of this dissertation.

videos that occupies the floor space, a rear-projection with videos appearing and disappearing in a grid-like alignments, and video screens that have been intentionally detached from the arrangements on the walls and installed as repetitions on the floor. This space is a digital environment, where the visual component of the installation, as well as sound, plays an integral part. The viewers physically partake in the exhibition, in that they walk through the space and view the video installation as a whole. The exhibition provides an experiential space where at times the visual imagery and sound become over-stimulating. This experience directly relates to the confined space and excessive sound in the shop environment.

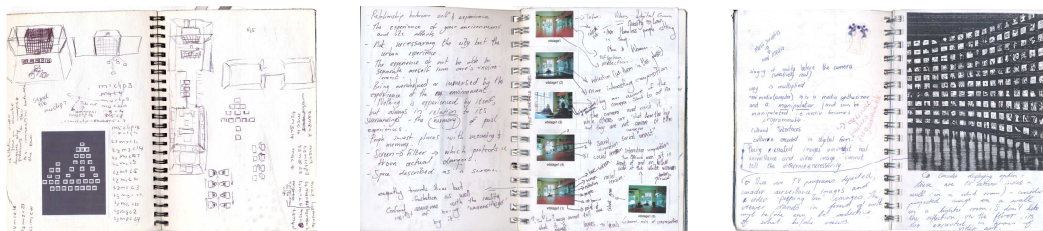
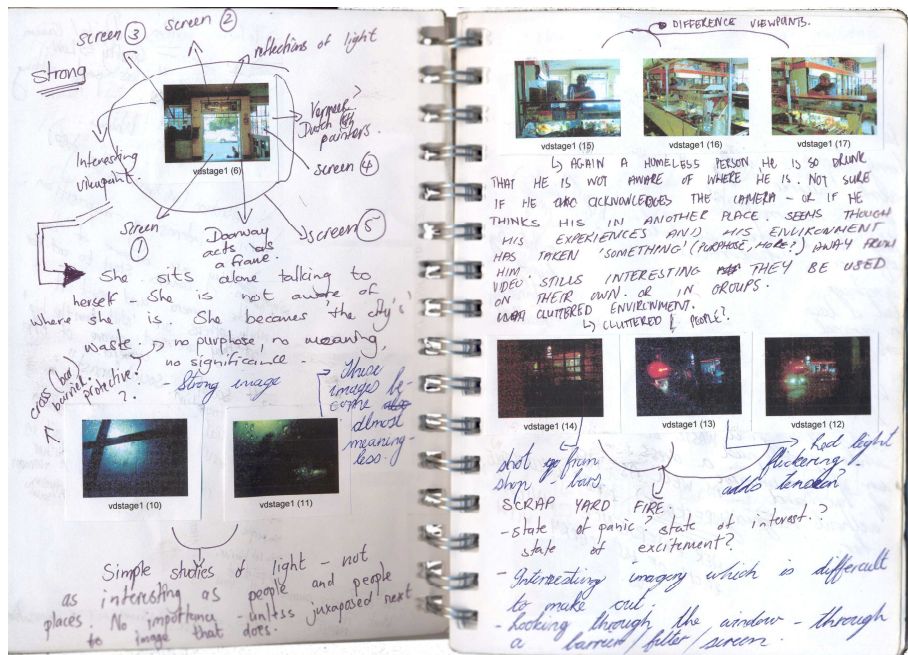


Figure 4: Angela de Jesus. Documenting and experimenting in journals (2005 – 2009).

Selective pages in journals.

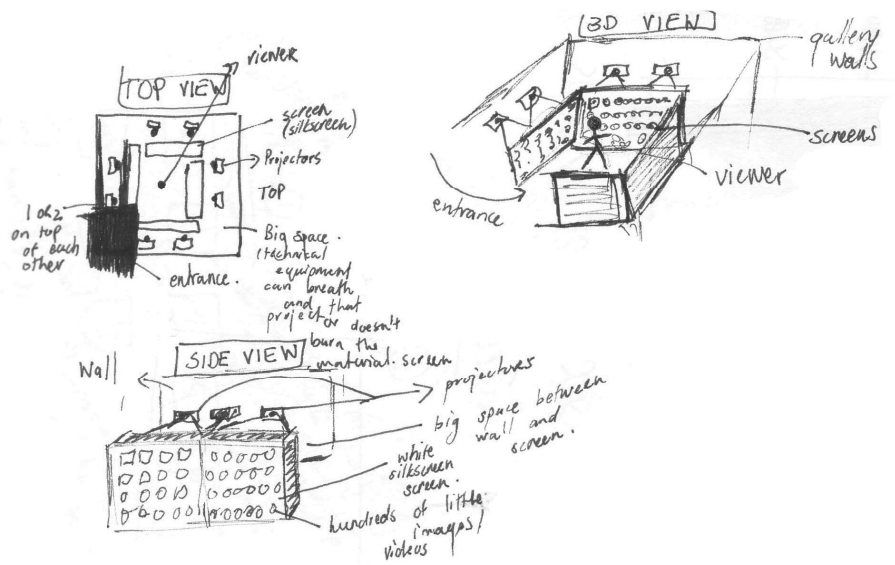


Figure 5: Angela de Jesus. Immersive installation environments. Video installation experimental layout drawings (2005 – 2009). Selective pages in journals.

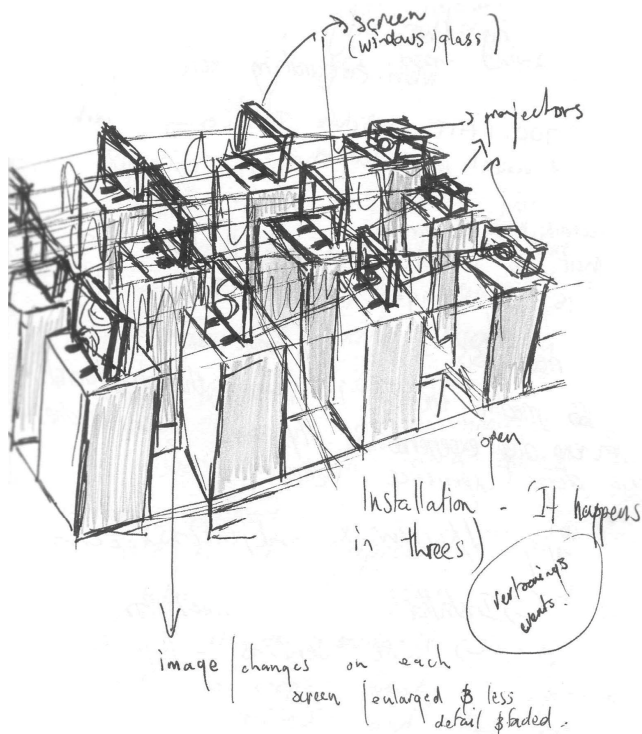
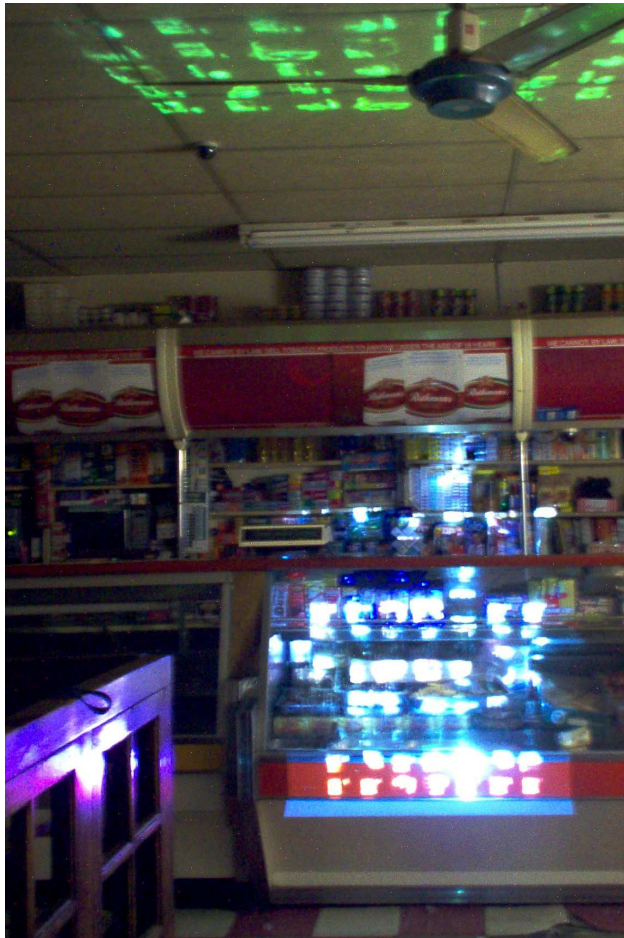


Figure 6: Angela de Jesus. Stands and 'display' units. Video installation experimental layout drawings (2005 – 2009). Selective pages in journals.



Figure 7: Angela de Jesus. Video rear-projection test (October 2006).  
Video projected through rear projection screen. Installation photograph.

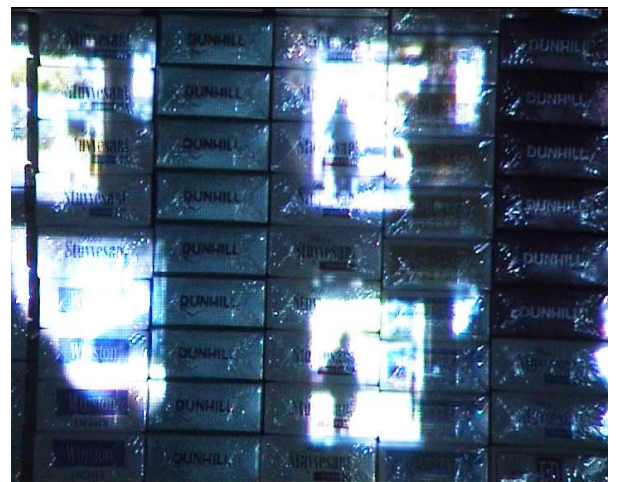




a) The shop counter



b) The ceiling



c) Cigarette products

Figure 8: Angela de Jesus. *Video installation in shop* (2 November 2006).  
Videos projected on various surfaces inside shop environment. Installation photographs.

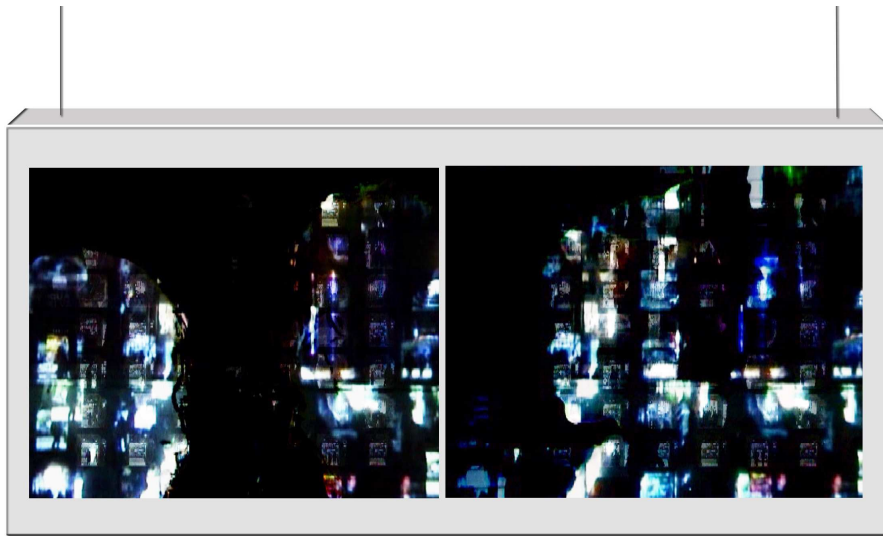


Figure 9: Angela de Jesus. *Exchange* (10 – 27 July 2007).  
Free State Contemporary Exhibition, Johannes Stegmann Art Gallery.  
Floating screen hang from ceiling with two rear-projections. Installation layout drawing.

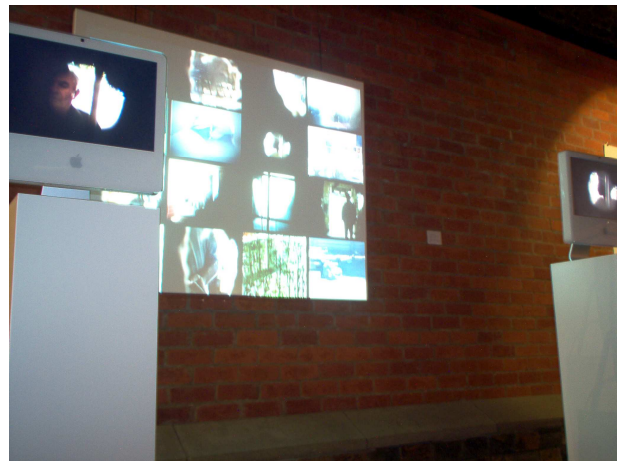


Figure 10: Angela de Jesus. *Looking out, looking in ...* (2 – 31 October 2008).  
Reservoir Exhibition, Oliewenhuis Art Museum (exhibition of artists affiliated with the Department of Fine Arts).  
Video projection and two computer screens. Installation photographs.



### iii. Chapter outline

The focus of this written research is to investigate transactions of vision, to explore the perceptions which form within visual and intercultural processes and to examine how, with the aid of visual technologies, representations have become central to the ways in which cultures are perceived. Trade situations within the shop become the basis for an analysis of modes in which cross-cultural image exchanges take place.

In the introductory chapter, *Interaction/Exchange/Interface*, the title page engraving on Peter Kolbe's book *Caput Bonae Spei Hodiernum das ist vollständige Beschreibung des africanischen Vorgeburgs der Guten Hofnung* (1719) is analysed to draw attention to various levels of intercultural trade and interactivity. The chapter examines depictions of intercultural contact and cross-cultural exchanges taking place between Europeans (people of European decent) and Africans (indigenous people of Africa), beginning with the fifteenth-century Portuguese explorers who bartered with locals in the Cape at southern tip of Africa. These interactions have played their part in developing cultural and racial constructs in our society today and have impressed themselves on ideas and images of what signifies 'Africa' as well as 'Europe' (Appiah 1999, Mudimbe 1999, Oguibe & Enwezor 1999). Michael Baxandall's (1972) market concept of the "troc", that refers to the relation of the painter to his (her) culture, is used to explain the visual exchanges that take place among images, their makers and their spectators. The exchanges and interactions between those in the shop have bearing on the exchanges that take place when producing and observing images.

Chapter 2, *Illusion/Suspicion/Perception*, focuses on illusionary spaces, visual devices and technologies such as: the magic lantern and peep-box, the panorama, the diorama, picturesque painting, cinema, tourist images, virtual reality and other forms of new media, like digital video. These visual mediums

have often assisted in transferring perceptions, such as a timeless and 'authentic Africa', to their audiences, for example the painting of *Bloemfontein* (1850) by Thomas Baines. The illusions were designed to fulfil their audiences' desires irrespective of their 'accuracy' and subsequently to commercialise their products and generate funds for their producers. The chapter considers Paul Ricoeur's (1970: 32 – 36) discussion on the "hermeneutics of suspicion" and the self-conscious way in which we interpret what we see, with a sense of doubt. We have become suspicious of devices, technologies and images because we know that they are manipulative but ironically we submit to them in order that our perceptions and desires may be met. In the intercultural exchanges in the shop, suspicious 'mental images' of one another are shaped. These are often products of preconceptions or misconceptions of one another. The edited videos of the shop evoke similar suspicions in the viewer because they record and frame these interactions on digital video. Digital media and the edited videos of the shop are easily manipulated and transformed, thus we question their 'authenticity'.

The notions and 'power plays' involved in looking, specifically from a surveillance point of view, are discussed in Chapter 3, *Surveillance/Power/Entrapment*. This mode of looking entails particular types of interpretation which are often caught up in paradoxical and ambiguous meanings – an effect of Joan Ramon Resina's (2003) "after-image". In this chapter selective contemporary works of art by South African artists like Pieter Hugo, Zwelethu Mthethwa, Santu Mofokeng and Mustafa Maluka, as well as the edited videos of the shop are scrutinised to reveal complex meanings and their associations with specific motifs and other images. Many of these works are associated with panoptic, voyeuristic or theatrical tendencies but constantly disclose conflicting implications. Image interpretation is argued to be complex because image associations evoke contradictory meanings which ensnare and trap their viewers.

In Chapter 4, *Conflict/Fear/Iconoclasm* the apprehension felt in the shop and in social encounters that leads to xenophobia, anxiety and agoraphobia are

reflected upon. It investigates the disruptive gestures and strategies visible in the edited videos of the shop as forms of iconoclasm and argues that these techniques are ambiguous. Iconoclastic gestures also become protective barriers that are the result of fear. In the chapter the satirical *Bitterkomix* anthology (1994) and Pauline Gutter's *Bullet Proof* (2006) are analysed, to highlight the alternating sides of iconoclastic practices. The chapter relates the violent assault and cross-cultural conflict experienced in the shop, to the destruction (or manipulation) of images, while associating fear-inspired mannerisms that have become so potent in our daily dealings, with the vulnerability of the image.

The initial documentation and straightforward visual capturing of interactions in the shop that initiated this project went through a process of unravelling and discovery, which allowed the seemingly everyday 'documentary' footage to adopt new meanings. As I became more aware of issues that depend on economic and visual exchange, the often-overlooked subtle moments and 'power plays' involved in these transactions became more evident. Intercultural exchanges and images are still affected by, as Milia Lorraine Khoury (2006: 65) states, the "colonising eye"; they have just become more complex and nuanced. As in economic exchange the power positions in these interactions, are continuously shifting. Thus, intercultural exchanges and images are ambiguous, inconsistent and conflicting. In this journey I inadvertently sought modes to counteract and disrupt preconceptions, and suggest more nuanced ways of looking at images and understanding them. What I found was that one can never completely be freed from after-images.

## Chapter 1

### Interaction/Exchange/Interface

In this land the men are swarthy.<sup>12</sup> They eat only sea-wolves [seals] and whales and the flesh of gazelles and the roots of plants. They go about covered in skins, and they wear some sheaths on their genitals. Their arms are staffs of wild olive trees tipped with fire-treated horns. They have many dogs like those of Portugal and they bark the same as they do. The birds of this land are also the same as those of Portugal: cormorants, gulls, turtle-doves, larks, and many other birds...

...On the following day 14 or 15 of them came to where we had the vessels. The Commander-in-Chief [Vasco da Gama] went ashore and showed them many trade-goods to learn if there were such goods in that land; and the goods were cinnamon and cloves, seed-pearls and gold, and other things as well. They did not know those trade-goods at all; it seemed they had never seen them. The Commander-in-Chief gave them little bells and rings of tin. This was on Friday, and the same on the following Saturday. On Saturday there came about 40 or 50 of them, and we, after dining, went ashore. With ceitis [copper coins] that we traded for shells which they wore in their ears, which looked as they had been silvered over, and fox-tails they carry fastened to sticks with which they fan the face. Here I traded a sheath, which one of them wore on his genitals for a ceitis (Axelson 1998: 23-24).<sup>13</sup>

It is generally acknowledged that Bartholomeu Dias of Portugal was the first European to come across the *Cabo da Boa Esperança* (Cape of Good Hope) (1487-8) and that Vasco da Gama was the first to discover a sea-route from Europe to India via the Cape of Good Hope (1497-8). These voyages revolutionised trade and relations between Europe and the East, as well as

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12. The original word used is *baço* meaning dark brown, copper-coloured.

13. A diary excerpt of a sailor aboard Vasco da Gama's vessels on the first voyage to India via the Cape of Good Hope. This excerpt refers to the descriptions and interactions occurring on their arrival at Santa Helena and Santiago (today Great Berg River, close to the fishing town of Laaiplek). Translated by EG Raventein and Freire de Andrade (Axelson 1998).

initiated interactions between Europeans and the people living on the southern tip of Africa. Fifteenth-century explorers often exchanged copper and tiny bells for fresh water, meat or other items that found their interest. What returned home, together with these items, however, were observations and descriptions of this land and its people. One such description occurs in an engraving that appears on the title page of Peter Kolbe's *Caput Bonae Spei Hodiernum das ist vollständige Beschreibung des africanischen Vorgeburges der Guten Hofnung* (1719) (Figure 12), designed by artist Jacob Schübler. Peter Kolbe,<sup>14</sup> a German astronomer and mathematician who lived at the Cape from 1705 to 1713 (and who was initially sponsored by a German baron to make astronomical observations), compiled the book from letters and notes he had written of his experiences during his time in the Cape. The book discusses topographical aspects of the Cape, the social life and customs of the Khoikhoi (then known as the Hottentots), and the political intrigues of the Dutch colony. These observations were an important source in early ethnographical research for understanding the interaction among various ethnic groups at the Cape during this period (Good 2006). Kolbe's writings attest to his direct, intimate interaction and communication with the inhabitants.<sup>15</sup> In spite of Kolbe's first hand experience and his awareness of the conflicting information promulgated by many Europeans, Kolbe's writings and the images in his book still chose to target European audiences and often played to their expectations. In probing Kolbe's decision to depict his encounters in this manner, we can begin to grasp his motivations as well as the assumptions that the image (and many others like it) have portrayed about Africa and its people, along with understanding the intercultural effects that occurred within these interactions.

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14. Peter Kolbe was said to be the "most accurate and detailed observer of the early Hottentots of the Cape of Good Hope" (Singer & Jopp 1967: 16).

15. An example of this is his discussion of intimate details in the birth ritual and the rearing of children within the Khoikhoi tribes (Kolbe 1719: 440 – 450, Good 2006).





Figure 12. Jacob Schübler. Title page of Peter Kolbe's *Caput Bonae Spei Hodiernum das ist vollständige Beschreibung des africanischen Vorgeburges der Guten Hofnung* (1719).  
Engraving.

This chapter considers several means of intercultural interaction and visual exchange concomitant with economic ones. The chapter suggests contact and communication, influence and conversion, and the role of visual interchanges taking place within cross-cultural encounters and in images; these are read from an analysis of the title page engraving appearing in Kolbe's book. This chapter argues that images are interfaces and that they follow a widely known 'prototype' that enables them to relate and be understood by their viewers. The daily interaction and exchange of goods in the shop are compared to the visual exchanges that occur between images and their viewers.

### **1.1 Intercultural contact, visual transactions and the “*troc*”**

Exchanges occur both tactually, in the form of cross-cultural trade, and visually (or multi-sensory) through bilateral visual transactions. Ideas and perceptions in the mind develop out of experience – visual perception ceases to be uniform from one person to the next, as Michael Baxandall (1972: 29) suggests – but visual exchange is also modelled by a diffusion of set interpretations induced via other channels. The products of this are mental-images, ideas and assumptions (within both parties) about what is being viewed, intermingled with an experience (direct or indirect) of the object (or individual). This is a pattern of barter, an exchange primarily of mental goods which has been formulated in the minds of both consumers resulting in a visual transaction. Hans Belting (2005: 302 – 319) explains that the German language ignores the difference between picture and image (referring to the word “*Bild*”), which connects mental images and physical artifacts to one another. Belting's approach compares internal and external representations, or mental and material images, as “two sides of the same coin.”<sup>16</sup> “We think of images as a family of immaterial symbolic forms, ranging from well defined geometrical shapes to shapeless masses and spaces, to recognizable figures and likeness, to repeatable characters such as pictograms

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16. Research by brain physiologists and psychologists at Harvard University has shown that imaging takes place in the same zones of the brain as visual perception, and that both is as equally 'real' (Pallasmaa 2001: 22).

and alphabetic letters. Images are also, in common parlance, mental things, residing in the psychological media of dreams, memory, and fantasy...They are, finally, 'likenesses' or 'analogies' that invite more or less systematic correlations of resemblance in a variety of media and sensory channels...The image seems to float without any visible means of support, a phantasmatic, virtual, or spectral appearance" (Mitchell 2005: 84). This *Bild*<sup>17</sup> (imagery, picture or mind-images) is sensitive to the kinds of interpretative skills – patterns, categories, inferences, analogies – the mind brings to it (Baxandall 1972: 34).

Images are not just descriptions of events and practices but also representations of them. Images speak on behalf of their subjects and are a way of gaining access to them, "not just world mirroring" (Mitchell 2005: xv). Mitchell (2005: 30) describes pictures as possessing "desire"; they are "animated beings", "living organisms" that have been marked with all the stigmata of personhood; they exhibit both physical and virtual bodies that speak to us and present "not just a surface but a *face* that faces their beholder". Images require reciprocity from us as they possess desires that cannot be conveyed without us; but we also use images to validate the desires we already have.

Michael Baxandall (1985) looks into economic theory borrowing the technical concept of a 'market' known as the *troc*, to describe the painter's relation to his or her culture.<sup>18</sup> He explains that a market<sup>19</sup> is a coming into contact of consumers and producers of goods (culture and painter) for the purpose of exchange; it is a model of relation in which two groups of people make choices, but the choice on any one side has consequences for the range of choice on both sides and will reflect on the market as a whole. Contact between the Europeans and the

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17. The meaning of *Bild* refers less to pictoriality and more to living essence – an object of power in which resided irrational, magical or spiritual power (Grau 2003: 16).

18. Baxandall (1985: 72 – 73) explains that the "painter's intention" of a picture speaks about cultural circumstances and follows a specific 'Brief' which relates critically to previous paintings. "On the one hand the painter evolves this 'Brief' for himself but, on the other hand, he does so as a social being in cultural circumstances. Culture acts on the painter and the painter acts reciprocally back on his culture. A sufficient model for this is that of exchange" (Baxandall 1985: 72 – 73).

19. It is believed that the market is a human phenomenon which is familiar to every known society (Maus 1969: 2).

Africans for the purpose of exchange (both economically and visually) has led to choices that have ultimately reacted to each other, influencing one another's history and culture. What occurs as a product is a mutual exchange, intercultural reciprocation, where both groups are affected. Charles Taylor's (2004) model of a market economy that draws from the shift in the seventeenth-century from privileged institutions to a more 'liberal' principal of equality, depends on a set of interlocking activities and background practices that serve a moral order and is based on mutual social benefit.<sup>20</sup> His views show how we can imagine society primarily as an economy where the exchange of goods and services promotes mutual prosperity and how we can envision the public sphere as a place for deliberation and discussion of mutual concerns. This said, Taylor's views are based on Western notions (Crocker 2005) and no common language exists for exchange. All exchanges do not serve the same purposes in all communities. In theory exchanges are voluntary, disinterested and mutual, but are in fact based on obligation and self-interest (Maus 1969). It hardly seems true that exchange is really free; it is clear that Europe spread its influence for its own benefit and control. Nevertheless Europe's interest in Africa opened the door to a process of interchange whereby African influence could, and was adopted.

Knowledge of culture and histories<sup>21</sup> of pre-colonial Africa has been based on oral traditions of Africans themselves (which has often been misunderstood or misinterpreted), on archaeological discoveries (African works of art, religion, language and other evidence of material culture) and on, often, indirect sources (colonial manuscripts, pseudo-scientific theories, illustrations, European works of art, photography, film, images on mass media advertising, packaging, posters, magazines, travel books, comics, television, video, internet, etc.). It is, however, from these indirect sources that the most influential and memorable impact in shaping ideas and perceptions of Africa can be traced. Paul S. Landau (2002: 2)

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20. Taylor (2004: 69) mentions three central forms of a social imaginary that give rise to and are crucial to the modern social order: the economy, the public sphere and popular sovereignty.

21. Mudimbe (1999: 31) has pointed out that there is not only one history but rather that several histories of Africa exist.

explains that the “image(s) of Africa”, that still survive(s) today, really consist(s) of ideas associated with Africa which were constructed and originated by European travellers. These concepts have survived as products of the West, which were conceived and conveyed through conflicting structures and methods of knowledge.

Balthasar Springer, who was aboard a vessel of Francisco d’Almeida (the Portuguese Viceroy of India), wrote descriptions of the inhabitants of Mossel Bay in 1505, which led Hans Burgkmair to publish six woodcuts illustrating Springer’s journey, entitled *In Allago* (Figure 13).<sup>22</sup> Many of these sixteenth- to eighteenth-century illustrations of Africa’s indigenous people were, for the most part, done by anonymous artists and engravers who had no knowledge and experience of Africa and thus visualised their material from the writings of the European travellers as well as from European iconography (Singer & Jopp 1967: 15 – 19). As a result these presentations were considerably flawed, but have nevertheless found themselves passed from one book to another, elevating them to documentary status, as though they are true ‘mirrors’ and illustrations of the ‘real’. *A Hottentot native of the Cape of Good Hope, setting off to hunt* (Figure 14) and *A Hottentot woman with her baby* (Figure 15) in the Biblioteca Laurenziana in Florence, act as prototypes for the illustration *Hottentots at the Cape of Good Hope* (Figure 16) in Kolbe’s publication. These two images surface repeatedly for example in the Ethnographical Museum in Stockholm on two ostrich eggs (Figure 17), which are “most probably the work of a European or Sparrmann himself, who acquired it” (Bassani & Tedeschi 1990: 157 – 188).

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22. These woodcuts are believed to be the first published illustrations of the Khoikhoi.



Figure 13: Hans Burgkmair. *In Allago* (1508).  
Woodcut.



Figure 14. Anonymous. *A Hottentot native of the Cape of Good Hope, setting off to hunt.* Drawing. Biblioteca Laurenziana, Florence: Carta di Castello 81.



Figure 15. Anonymous. *A Hottentot woman with her baby.* Drawing. Biblioteca Laurenziana, Florence: Carta di Castello 80.



Figure 16. Anonymous. *Hottentots at the Cape of Good Hope.* In Peter Kolbe's *Caput Bonae Spei Hodiernum das ist vollständige Beschreibung des africanischen Vorgeburges der Guten Hofnung* (1719: 474).



Figure 17. Ostrich egg-shell with engraved portraits of (left) a Hottentot man and (right) a Hottentot woman. Sparmann collection. Ethnographical Museum, Stockholm.

The relations between Africans and Europeans grew steadily more corrupt because of the slave trade, colonial policies and subjective interests of the nations of Europe; images followed this proclivity, displaying Europe's assumed hierarchy and satisfying its curiosity with illustrations and generalisations. "These images were based on selective perception, expedience, second-hand information mingled with reconstructed biblical notions and medieval folklore, along with popular or 'scientific' ideas", or ideological interpretations (such as "primitivism" and "savagery") that were current at the time (Pieterse 1992: 10). The 'information' provided to Europe conveyed allegories of the relations between Europe and Africa viewed from a standpoint of Europeans, often one-sided and distorted, that of domination not dialogue (Pieterse 1992).

The development of visual technologies in the nineteenth century broadened the distribution of images of Africa, and, with the arrival of television and other electronic communication networks in the twentieth century, these images could be obtained in the comfort of one's home. With this information it was possible to access 'knowledge' about Africa without directly experiencing it. Pablo Picasso's 'Africa' remained one that he had imagined for himself; having never travelled to Africa his experience was limited to visits to the Musée d'Ethnographie du Tocabéro in Paris, masks and sculptures he collected and postcards he obtained, conversations with friends, traders, collectors and ethnologists (Madeline & Martin 2006: 15 – 17). Early twentieth-century Western artists, like Picasso, did, however recognise African sculptures as *objets d'art* and not curiosity objects, as was the case in European public opinion.<sup>23</sup> These artists were intrigued by the sculptures, collecting and appropriating them materially and intellectually into their work (Clifford 1988: 189 – 191).<sup>24</sup> Most of these African artworks originated from areas in the French colonies of Africa which had administrative ties and prominent trade with Paris, where most of these artists resided. In an interview,

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23. These items were often sold in antique shops or brought from dealers as decorative objects.

24. Picasso, Matisse, Derain, Vlaminck and others became fanatic in the collection of works they called "art nègre". Picasso alone had over 110 works from Africa, Oceania, Indonesia and South America in his collection (Stepan 2006).



Henri Matisse speaks about how he (and others) was captivated by the visual, intellectual and spiritual nature of these artworks, (Madeline & Martin 2006: 196):

"I often went to see Gertrude Stein in the rue de Fleurus, and on my way I used to walk past a small antique shop. One day, I noticed in the window a small black head, carved in wood, which reminded me of the enormous heads of red porphyry in the Egyptian collection in the Louvre. I had the impression that the two civilisations used identical approaches for rendering form, even though they differed so much from each other in other respects. So I brought that carved head for a few francs and took it with me to Gertrude Stein. I found Picasso there, and he was very impressed by it. We had a long discussion about it, and that was when our interest in African art began – an interest we have displayed to a greater or lesser degree in our paintings."

Pieces of African art that travelled to Europe acted as visual intercessors, expressing ideas about Africa but also exchanging ideas about African art-making. Although Western artists did not fully understand the significance of these artworks, their forms and ideas were made accessible to Western artists and their discipline.<sup>25</sup> The encounters that twentieth-century artists experienced with African artworks became a frame of reference that inspired them to move from perceptual traditions of representation to conceptual means of creativity, changing the face of twentieth-century Western art (Clifford 1988: 189 - 215, Belting 2002: 317 – 318, Martin 2006: 151 – 153).

On the opposite side of the colonial encounter, images of the explorers surfaced in the mid-twentieth century in African sculptures as products of intercultural

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25. The 2006 *Picasso and Africa* exhibition held at The Standard Bank Gallery and the Iziko National Gallery sparked varying dispute over whether Picasso's success lies in the appropriation of anonymous African artists' inspiration and whether this achievement is duly theirs (Nel, van der Walt, Klopper, Pissarra, Friedman, Okeke-Agulu, Raditlhalo, Zaayman, Schoeman, Carman & Collier 2006). The Picasso and Africa debate is not a new one as exhibitions like the Museum of Modern Art's *'Primitivism' in 20th Century Art* held in 1984, are repeatedly contested in contemporary art discourse (McEvilley 1984: 54 – 61, Clifford 1988: 189 – 215, Kisfir 1999: 88 – 91).

communications. Carved wooden figures (that are still made by artists today) that look like caricatures of Portuguese colonial officers (Figure 18) were (and are) used by chiefs and rulers in the Manjaco ethnic group, in Guinea-Bissau, to commemorate ancestors. These parodies of the Portuguese, that were primarily made to sell to Europeans and tourists, have been installed by Manjaco chiefs in their household ancestors' shines (Gable 2002: 294 – 319).

Several African images also 'borrowed' motifs from their European visitors, interpreting them and investing them with new meanings, and re-presenting them to serve their own aesthetic. One such case is the images of the nineteenth-century European snake charmer (Figure 19) that was added to the ancient pantheons of water deities by its followers in Africa, known as *Mama Wata*<sup>26</sup> (Figure 20). Her 'origin' is believed to also be associated with the first encounters of Africans and Europeans in the fifteenth-century, deriving her first representations from European images of mermaids and marine sculptures.<sup>27</sup> This representation is one that personifies unattainable material and monetary riches, which suggests an association with the international trade occurring at the time. Due to the establishment of colonial empires and the expansion of trade, these exchanges provided a setting for the rapid spread of images and ideas. This image of *Mama Wata* was later represented and transformed into an African Catholic saint in the Americas, known as *Santa Marta la negra*<sup>28</sup> (Figure 21), which allegedly originally reached the United States by transportation of plaster statues of saints containing contraband and money, only later becoming a popular religious icon of an exotic saint (Drewal 2002: 193 – 211).

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26. English translation 'Mother of Water'.

27. An African sculptor was commissioned to create a mermaid image for his Portuguese patrons as early as 1490 – 1530 (Drewal 2002: 198).

28. English translation 'Black Saint Martha'.



Figure 18. Soga Mendes. Manjaco ancestor posts (twentieth century). Photo by Eric Gable.



Figure 19. Arnold Schleisinger. *Der Schlangenbändiger*. (ca 1920). Lithographic print.



Figure 20. Mama Wata headdress (Nigeria, 1901) Photographer unknown.

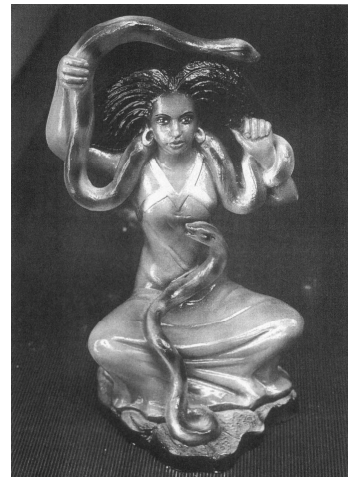


Figure 21. Contemporary "Saint Martha." Manufactured object. Photo by Henry Drewal.

Simon Njami (2007: 14) explains that today's Africa is inevitably an image of "cultural syncretism", a continent in "constant mutation". He points out that cultural aspects such as everyday speech are hybrid, that the idioms inherited from the colonial powers have developed shifts, acquired accents, intonations and meaning they did not originally contain. Similarly, African works of art have often responded and adapted to changes in socio-historical milieu and context. Afro-European contact, long distance trade, migrations, the formulation and dissolution of states and the social and political upheavals that have taken place has resulted in transformations of artworks and trends and the adoption of new forms. Undeniably in most cases this implementation and flexibility of foreign forms have been forced, unbalanced and biased. Africa's adaptability to these shapes has been frequently criticised as 'Eurocentric', 'neo-traditional', or in the case of contemporary works of art, as 'merely second-hand Western facsimiles'.<sup>29</sup> The styles, motifs and themes of tourist art (works produced for and consumed by the West)<sup>30</sup> that have functioned as 'export goods' for the international market, for example, endorsed many neo-traditional perceptions. Nonetheless African works have tried to break free from the exogenous and often Western gaze, exchanging and integrating their forms with others into an entire re-composition in their own way, with their own sensibility. Achille Mbembe (2007: 27) states that "the pre-colonial history of African societies [is] a history of people in perpetual movement throughout the continent" and that "it is a history of colliding cultures, caught in the maelstrom of war, invasion, migration, intermarriage"; a history of various adopted religions, techniques and traded goods. It is significant that this cohesion, cultural mixing and superimposition of

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29. "African discourses have been silenced radically or, in most cases, converted by conquering Western discourses. The popular local knowledges have been subsumed critically by 'scientific' disciplines. This process meant not only a transcending of the original locality, but also, through translation (which is, in reality, a transmutation), what I call the 'invention' of Africa took place" (Mudimbe 1994: xiv – xv).

30. "African bourgeois consumers of neo-traditional art are educated in the Western style, and, if they want African art, they would often rather have a 'genuinely' traditional piece – by which I mean a piece that they believe to be made precolonially, or at least in a style and by methods that were already established precolonially...Most of this art is 'traditional' because it uses actually or supposedly precolonial techniques, but is 'neo'...because it has elements that are recognisably from the colonial or postcolonial in reference, has been made for Western tourists and other collectors" (Appiah 1999: 61).

trends occurred pre-colonially and that it did not exclusively result from imposed colonisation, Western conversion and/or European art schools.

Yinka Shonibare's work explores the relationship between Western colonialism and African aesthetics and the conflicting weight involved in this encounter, along with the complex interactions and dependencies between these two cultures. His sculptural works (for example Figure 22) entail printed cloth that was originally imported from Europe (as well as India and Indonesia) and became very popular in West Africa through "active assimilation that transformed these foreign materials into articles of local use" (Leibhammer 2006: 207 – 208). Ironically, some of these print textiles are still manufactured in Europe today to be exported to Africa. These factories are dependent on African patronage to keep the factory working but the designs and sales are driven by African agencies (Leibhammer 2006: 207 – 208). Contemporary works of art have displayed this type of itinerancy and mobility, they have interacted extensively with globalised networks, exchanging and accessing information or points of view (Kellner 2007: 22 – 23, Mbembe 2007: 26 – 29). Many contemporary artists (such as Samuel Fosso and Romuald Hazoumé) have participated in numerous international exhibitions and/or residencies as well as utilised the Internet or other technological media, bringing about transitional tendencies, directions and "Afropolitanism".<sup>31</sup>

It is evident that the interactions occurring between the explorers and the people in Africa were not simple transactions, but were a form of intricate intercultural communication and the beginning of many complex levels of exchange.

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31. Achille Mbembe (2007: 26 – 29) explains "Afropolitanism" as the "awareness of the interweaving of the here and there ... the relativisation of primary roots and memberships and the way of embracing, with full knowledge of the facts, strangeness, foreignness and remoteness ... to domesticate the unfamiliar, to work with what seem to be opposites ...".



Figure 22. Yinka Shonibare. *The wanderer* (detail) (2006).  
Wooden model with wax printed cotton.

## 1.2 Visual exchanges on the title page of Peter Kolbe's publication

The engraving on the title page of Peter Kolbe's publication<sup>32</sup> (Figure 12) represents a meeting of two cultures; the Europeans pompously display their items while the inhabitants investigate them. One of the Europeans presents a string of pearls to the "native" who gestures to examine it, affirming their interaction. This engraving probes the many levels of exchange (including economic, cultural and social) and entails definite visual exchanges that can be detected among the individuals in the groups depicted. The two central figures on each side, although positioned to face the viewer, engage each other. With an attentive look the European offers a goblet (possibly containing alcohol)<sup>33</sup> to the African, while the African looks back displaying a tusk in his left hand, perhaps for barter. There is also an exchange between the kneeling figure on the left and the pointing figure on the right. Other figures in the back of the groups also engage with one another, while the gesture of the figure on the extreme left is unclear. Does he find amusement in what he sees, is he watchful and suspicious (like the figure who smokes on the extreme right) or is it just that he is attentively listening to his European colleague next to him? It is probable that in the process of these transactions, perceptions and assumptions about one another were being formed on the basis of existing 'knowledge' of their own particular group or culture (ethnocentric knowledge).<sup>34</sup>

The Kolbe image depicts Europeans on the left and inhabitants of the Cape on the right, with particular trade goods positioned beside each group. On the left are instruments of Western progress, civilization and beauty (agricultural

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32. For the remainder of this chapter, I will refer to the engraving on the title page of Kolbe's book as "the Kolbe image".

33. It has been thought that alcohol was offered to indigenous communities as a means of manipulation during the colonial era.

34. In Vasco da Gama's diary excerpt (p 1) the writer distinguishes and notes points of similarity between what he is familiar with and what he encounters, for example he refers to the dogs and birds in the foreign land to be like those in Portugal.



utensils,<sup>35</sup> an hourglass,<sup>36</sup> a string of pearls/beads<sup>37</sup>); on the right, indigenous hunting gear with bartering animals, including sheep and cattle, which were significant in African economy and rituals. As Svetlana Alpers (1983) and Simon Schama (1988) have shown, this technique of positioning and the putting together of significant objects or descriptive elements was common in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century art and culture, and was an expected pictorial language for European audiences of this time. Motifs in these paintings and engravings held symbolism that was decipherable by the public and fashioned an image that they (the Dutch) wished to project of themselves and their land. Alpers (1983: 72 – 95) explains that the recording of the multitude of things (objects) that make up the visible world was celebrated as giving basic access to knowledge and understanding of the world; that each object is displayed not for use, but for the “attentive eye”. In order to make sense of the way in which the Kolbe image was read by seventeenth-century audiences it is significant to understand how art such as this was depicted and presented.

Alpers (1983: 106) uses David Bailly’s still life (Figure 23) to describe the subtle, yet powerful, instrumental manner in which art (images) can lead to knowledge of the world (in this case about the artist himself). Bailly’s painting is a celebration of his craft and a personal memorial. He introduces himself in the form of a portrait, in the middle of the painting held by the youth, while his life and work are assembled in the objects on and around the table. “The status of the youth and the format of the still life with human actor recalls his family’s roots; the copy of a Venetian statue of Saint Sebastian recalls his Italian journey; the central rose, rolled paper, female portrait, the copy after Hals’s *Lute-player*, the hourglass and skull were all objects previously crafted by Bailly for earlier works” (Alpers 1983: 106). The arrangement of momentous objects and the way in which the youth

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35. Europeans bought many agricultural products into Africa, among them the coconut tree, now ubiquitous, which was originally a European importation from the Indian Ocean. Ironically it has been traditionally associated with Africa and many illustrations have depicted ‘the African with the palm tree’ (Pieterse 1992: 36), as visible in Figure 12 and Figure 24.

36. This is an indication of the importation of the Western world’s conception of time.

37. An indication of beauty, adornment and wealth which was significant in Dutch culture (Schama 1988).

displays the portrait of Bailly, reminds us of the Kolbe image. In the Kolbe image the subjects display their items as Bailly's youth does. The Kolbe image also depicts similar vanitas<sup>38</sup> objects to Bailly (the string of pearls, the hourglass, a pipe(s) and a goblet); clearly Bailly's and the Kolbe images have not selected these items for the same purpose,<sup>39</sup> but both selections portray objects that transfer value and meaning to the image and their particular endeavours. In the Kolbe image, knowledge regarding each cultural group is accessed from the depiction of various barter objects.



Figure 23. David Bailly. *Vanitas still life with portrait of a young painter* (1651). Oil paint on panel.

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38. Dutch vanitas still-lives of the seventeenth century were designed to make the observer contemplate the brevity of life, the frailty of man and the vanity of all worldly things.

39. Bailly's painting reveals vanitas ethic, while the Kolbe image emphasises wealth and trade.

The detailed execution of the subjects and their surroundings in the Kolbe image, and the idealistic and subjective nature of the engraving excludes the possibility of the drawing being done on site and in real time, suggesting a depiction that has been constructed away from actual dealings and based instead on other sources.<sup>40</sup> The engraving is divided into three sections: a foreground where the two groups interact, a middleground with houses and homesteads, and a background showing Table Mountain and colonial ships in the bay. This division of the landscape as well as the framing of trees on the right and the elevated viewpoint, which establishes a commanding perspective for the viewer, is an obvious recollection of Claude Lorrain (Bunn 1994: 127 - 129). The artist has departed from depicting actual motifs in favour of an imaginative process of selection and construction which is characteristically picturesque. The Kolbe image has meticulously positioned and selectively imagined a landscape to fit and so attain understanding from European viewers.

Mark Roskill (1997: 105) argues that the images of Tahiti, based on Captain Cook's biography, were attempts "to impose on the presentation of the landscape a purified and implicitly magnified version of all those components that, in their purported reality, [corresponded] to the most basic abstractions of a European viewpoint. What remained was a source of scenic convincingness". Roskill (1997: 108) further suggests that formulas in the picturesque landscape are modified in colonial images "to suggest an association of unspoiled nature with an unsophisticated culture: as if the natives themselves were unequipped to recognise the rich luxuriance of their land in the way that European colonial presence – looking out as if from an overseeing command post – was equipped to do". David Bunn (1994: 129) has also argued that this form of staging or theatricality apparent in these colonial illustrations serve a dual purpose: "the landscape becomes a place of enactment, able to receive various foreign

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40. The figure on the right, who investigates a string of pearls, resembles the figure depicted in *A Hottentot native of the Cape of Good Hope, setting off to hunt* (Figure 14) which is evidence that this image was not made on site. Although the Kolbe image has been enriched with more characters and is more complex with detail, it is no more credible than earlier illustrations of this subject.

presences, and the terrain is displayed as though already ordered to European conventions of taste”.<sup>41</sup> In the case of the Kolbe image the richness and potential profitability of the land is definable by the landscape that is used, a landscape still unspoiled but erupting with European development.<sup>42</sup>

Along with the landscape, the figures in the Kolbe image have been carefully positioned and arranged according to European tastes. The poses of the figures, which are rhetorical, belong to Western art and content. The gestures and stances are formulaic; such stiffness in illustrations is often the sign of intertextual borrowing (Bunn 1994: 131). The youth in Bailly’s painting is positioned to face forwards, addresses the viewers and visually converses with them while the faintly slanted heads of Bailly’s other subjects and motifs also appear to be communicating with the spectators. Similarly, the theatricality in the subjects of the Kolbe image, who face to the front as though in dialogue with a viewer, is a means of interacting and communicating with a European audience of the time.

The Kolbe image partakes in a cultural exchange (*troc*); it has reacted to a particular “brief” that speaks about cultural circumstances and relates to previous images done in this period. The viewer’s mind is enriched with the embellishments of the artist, while the artist adapts his image to cater for the imaginative needs of a wide variety of viewers. This interchange (or form of exchange) leads to the formulation of ideas about the subject. Ideas are based largely on existing images and we can acknowledge that the characteristics of seventeenth-century art made this inevitable.

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41. For further discussion on this subject refer to Chapter 2.

42. In the Kolbe image European development is visible in various trade objects as well as in buildings and constructions on the landscape.

### 1.3 Persistent images: Product labels and intercultural interfaces

The Kolbe image (Figure 12) invited speculation and fantasy into the minds of its European viewers. The ape-like creature in the tree suggests a comparison between the inhabitants and the creature. It is positioned on the right hand side of the image where it looks at the Europeans in the same way as the inhabitants do (Figure 24 is an example of representations of Africans in trees).<sup>43</sup> This comparison demonstrates the European thought on the primitive state of Africans and resembles the pseudo-scientific theories, in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, of the existence and significance of racial categories and the classifications of humans into distinct biological races (Figure 25).<sup>44</sup> These theories of scientific racism placed the indigenous people of Africa between the great apes and human beings of European descent (Bindman 2002). As a result people from Africa were taken to Europe and presented in public colonial exhibits (or in images) as ethnological expositions that emphasised the descriptive and cultural differences between European and non-European peoples (Gordon, Rassol & Witz 1996: 257 – 269). Among them was a family from the Orange River who were persuaded by W.A. Healey, with sugar and coffee, to travel to London for exhibition (known as Farini's "African Earthmen" – Figure 26) (Skotnes 1996: 40). These exhibitions and images provided 'characters' with African props, similar to those trade items which were brought back to Europe by travellers, in an attempt to create (and construct in a studio) an African image. The counterfeit nature of these stages and studio photographs can be compared with the Kolbe image whose surroundings resemble an interior or staged set.<sup>45</sup>

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43. Representations of Africans in trees feature in European iconography of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

44. Josiah Nott's and George Robins Gliddon's *Indigenous Races of the Earth* (1857) used misleading imagery to suggest Africans had been created to rank between the classical Greeks and chimpanzees (Wallis 1995: 55).

45. For further discussion on this subject refer to Chapter 3.

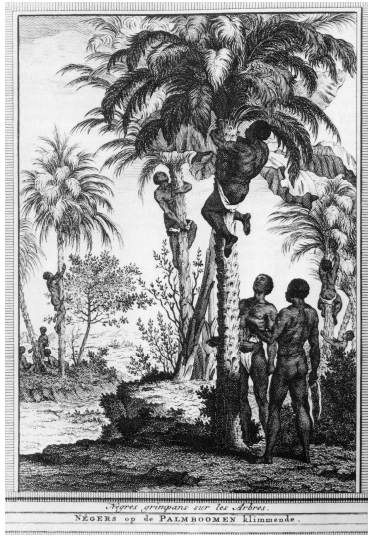


Figure 24. 'Savages' in Romantic style (ca eighteenth century).

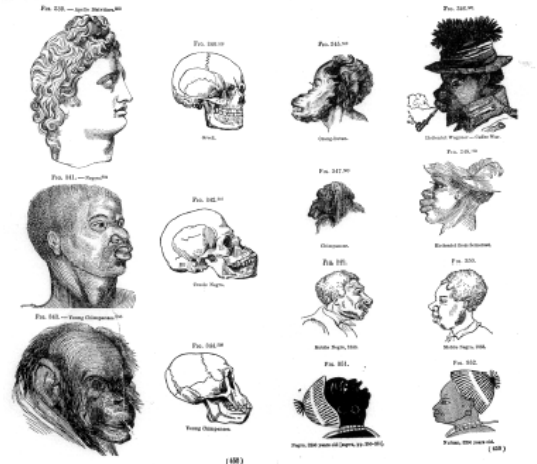


Figure 25. Pages from Josiah Nott's and George Robins Gliddon's *Indigenous Races of the Earth* (1857).



Figure 26. Farini's "African Earthmen". PRM Moseley Collection B11 4b.



Figure 27. Barack Obama sock puppet. (2008). Produced by TheSockObama Co.

By choosing to include the ape-like creature, the Kolbe image feeds a popular European appetite for the exotic as well as verifies the 'dark, primitive and savage' image of Africa that has been conveyed since. Many of these assumptions were already established during early European contact with Africa. Thus the Kolbe image was conditioned by internal European concerns that affirmed conventional European perceptions. Evidently these perceptions still persist. In early 2008, a United States Internet company (TheSockObama co.) released a monkey sock puppet of, the then, American presidential candidate Barack Obama (Figure 27). When questioned about their objectives they replied that they were "saddened that some individuals [had] chosen to misinterpret the plush toy" and that they had "simply made a casual and affectionate observation one night, and a charming association between a candidate and a toy" (Amira 2008). What this represents is the influential and long-lasting effect that images like the Kolbe image have created.

Commercialism conveys presumptions and sells products with these assumptions, providing avenues for the distribution and persistence of images. In *Dobbelman's buttermilk soap* advertisement (Figure 28), a popular motif of washing black people white is illustrated. The early twentieth-century advertisement depicts a white child displaying an image of white beauty to a dumbfounded black child while the poster reads: "If only you too had washed with *Dobbelman's buttermilk soap*". This caption conveys the assumed binary nature of white and black relating it to the opposing ideas of clean and dirty or good and evil. In the advertisement there is an interaction of two cultures, like the Kolbe image, this time the African is on the left<sup>46</sup> and the European on the right, but exchanges occur nonetheless between the two subjects as well as with the viewer. The advert makes an appeal (or insists) to its audience, a kind of pictorial seductiveness, to buy in to the product. Ethnic features have often been incorporated into 'product image elements' to use as a language for trade. In early forms of advertising European hegemony was reflected along with race,

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46. In Latin the word for left means sinister which is related to evil and malevolence.

class and gender hierarchies, thus “in consuming colonial products Westerners were also consuming the subjection of the colonized” (Pieterse 1992: 188). Images of black Africans appeared on the packaging of tobacco, sugar, alcohol, coffee and cocoa; these were all delicacies and products of slave labour, which are still available as luxury items and ironically sold back to Africans in shops today. Although many of these products have changed their motifs the associations still cling to the items. For example, *Sedgwick’s the original old brown sherry* is sold daily in the shop and depicts an image of colonial ships with a view of Table Mountain (Figure 29 & 30). This motif, coincidentally resembling the background in the Kolbe image, is a setting that recalls earlier images. The motif supports and authenticates the product, and implies that the product should be good because it is based on the “old” and “original”.<sup>47</sup>



Figure 28. *Dobbelman's buttermilk soap* advertisement. Netherlands (1910).

47. Other products that still carry associations with “ethnicity” and are sold in shops today include: *Original rum and maple*, *Original Cape Hope*, *Copperband original rhumba*, *Carling black label beer*, *Hansa pilsener* and *King korn malt*.





Figure 29. *Sedgwick's the original old brown sherry*.  
South Africa (2008).



Figure 30. *Sedgwick's the original old brown sherry* (detail).  
South Africa (2008).

Cultural and social exchange of information has become more complex in the digital era, with the proliferation of images. The internet, a paramount 'interactive' channel, is much more than a method for exchanging data; it is a system, an overarching network of connected computers, which provides a rich but chaotic source of information and opinion (Greene 2004: 7 – 14). It is a stimulating environment for learning but also one that has been exceedingly commodified by commercial and state powers, which have used intelligent computer software to gather information about their users, through their online behaviour, in favour of their economic agendas (Lessing 2005: 214 – 220). *NetMonster*, designed by the London-based artistic group Mongrel, generates, edits and continuously updates a composite image made out of the results of internet searches guided by various keywords. It allows people to collaboratively build up a composite 'networked image' out of the images, texts and addresses returned. The *NetMonster* (three different ones have been developed, an example being *Trade* – Figure 31) continuously rebuilds itself based on users' edits and changing search parameters, offering up new content and configurations (Mongrel 2006).

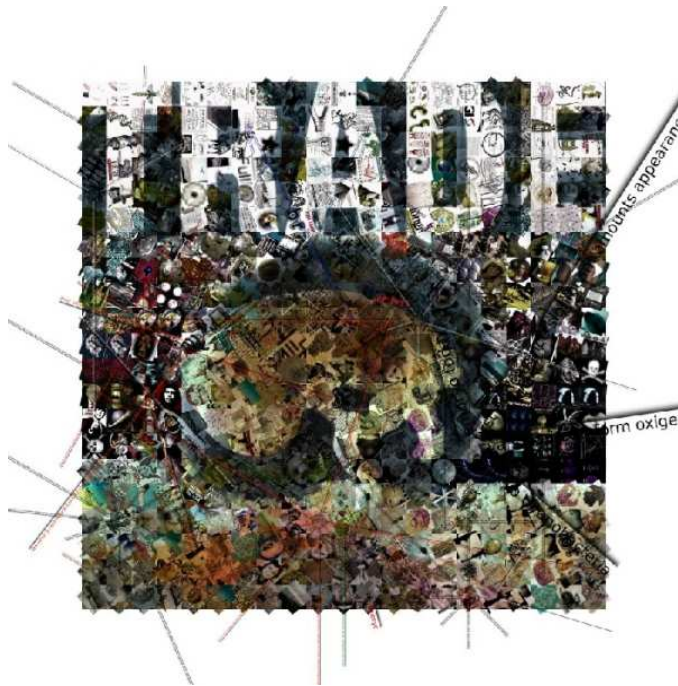


Figure 31. Mongrel. Images from the *Trade* series, a *NetMonster* project (2005).

Images have fitted quite comfortably into the respectable commercial package and have become increasingly accessible, in theory, to anyone who has access to a networked computer<sup>48</sup> (or other sources of mass media). The information posted is often open to facts, gossip, propaganda, conspiracy and lies, which deceives the user but at the same time relies on the user to converse and participate in the system. This form of interactivity has become vital to many new media artists, specifically net artists and interactive works of art, and has allegedly distinguished itself from most other forms of art production as it involves interacting with a set sequence of events, established by the artist(s) and/or programmer(s), permitting users to create a work of art themselves (Greene 2004). Julian Stallabrass (2003: 61 – 64) explains that “in principal [,] interaction holds out great cultural and social benefits”. That “it should empower users, encourage cultural activity, rather than mere spectating, and make art more responsive to its audience”, but that “the fundamental problem with interactivity is that a degree of autonomous action is needed for this type of exchange to occur and that requires complex and sophisticated programming that many artists lack the skills and resources to produce”. People act as the feedback mechanism in a system that has its own autonomy; one that does not serve their needs but exploits the dataset that is the sum of their inputs, choosing between limited and discrete options. Interactivity is a new form of experience that extends beyond the visual to the tactile. In this experience viewers are essential, active participants, no longer only viewers but users. However, they are still users able only to access what is provided by the system.

There are parallels between the spectatorship in the Kolbe image and participation occurring in interactive works of art. The Kolbe image engages with and relies on the involvement of his audience; the motifs that he has used (including his subjects and their positions, the objects, the landscape) have

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48. “Two persistent and pervasive myths about the Internet run as follows: there are vast numbers of people online, and they are to be found in every corner of the globe. In fact, there are few people online, and they are geographically concentrated; with only 2.5 million (out of 374 million – in the year 2001) being in Africa” (Stallabrass 2003: 48, Mosco 2004: 17 - 53).

created premises within the image that the spectator responds to or interacts with. Lev Manovich (2001) uses the term “cultural interface” to describe a human-computer-culture interface, in which computers present themselves and allow us to interact with cultural data. The Kolbe image (as are all images) is a cultural interface, an area of exchange which allows the spectator to interact with it. It is susceptible to presumptions while at the same time intends to provoke new allusions. It is vulnerable to ideas and assumptions, but transmits them as well. The spectator essentially becomes an active participant when perceiving the Kolbe image.

The basic exchanges and interactions occurring in the everyday proceedings of the shop are comparable to the many forms and levels of exchange emphasised in the discussion above. Economic trade occurs on a daily basis by the selling and purchasing of goods, like *Sedgwick’s original old brown sherry*; this process is a multidimensional exchange entailing several underlying concerns involved with cultural interaction. What occurs is the persistence of intercultural visual exchanges, which brings with it perceptions and ideas about one another. These encounters are subject to social and individual ideologies or belief systems. Most often the perceptions are not sustained, but are, rather, partial, fragmentary and mixed with other concerns, though they are still rooted in social, racial and cultural constructs. These constructs become readable in the videos of the shop because, borrowing Mitchell’s (2005: xv) phrase, they are “not just world mirroring”, illustrations or reports but are interpretable images. Even the most apparently straightforward scenes of everyday life can convey nuanced messages.

Some exchanges are momentary while others extend over longer periods of time. The videos of the shop capture both the fleeting and perpetual moments. Like exchange, some images seem less vital to interpretation than others however each image is essential. In Video 1 (Track 1 on the enclosed DVD, Figure 32) it can be assumed that cultural constructs are limited as often there is no

acknowledgement of the other from one, or both sides, merely an exchange of goods. This reaction, however, is conditioned by constructs and is actually another form of visual exchange. By not recognising each other, the assumptions about one another have already been established without an attempt for visual clarification. Whether there is a direct visual confrontation or a denial of this confrontation, participants are still as vulnerable to visual exchanges as they are susceptible to perceptions in images.

Like the Kolbe image, Video 1 is a cultural interface. Exchanges occur continually between two subjects depicted in the image, but also among the viewer and the images on the screen. The viewers interact and are involved in this process, they too add their perceptions to the exchange, while the video requires exploration and inquiry from its viewers. The video is susceptible to the viewer's presumptions, to image traditions and conventions but at the same time the video utilises strategies that intend to or unintentionally draw attention to them.



Figure 32: Angela de Jesus. Video still from Video 1 (2006 – 2009).  
Detail from video installation, *In exchange* (2009).

## Chapter 2

### Illusion/Suspicion/Perception

Plato's shadow images<sup>49</sup> deceived its prisoners into believing that the images cast on the wall of the cave were real. These illusions in the cave have become metaphors for the world, our sense of perception and image interpretation. It is not possible for any image to reproduce reality in its entirety or objectively but it seems that we are moving ever deeper into the cave, giving in to the seductiveness of these illusions and interpreting reality through the 'reports' given to us by images (Sontag 1973: 3 – 23). At the same time we are aware of these illusions, especially in the digital age with its new visual media technologies, where images are susceptible to untraceable visual alteration and manipulation. We are suspicious of the credibility of images, yet we still continue to submit to their illusions. The videos of the shop appear as 'reports' or 'records' of the environment but are merely images displayed or projected on a screen. The seemingly real videos are imitations as the reality of the shop is unattainable through the image. What viewers see are illusions of the place and not the reality they perceive.

Western encounters with images of Africa have shaped numerous perceptions and illusions of what Africa is. For many years the West has attained a desire to see Africa as an open space of tranquillity, serenity and naturalism, a space of primordial timelessness and perpetual primitiveness, with an unchanging facade

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49. The allegory of the cave is used by Greek philosopher Plato in his work *The Republic* (written approximately in 360 BC). Plato describes a scene where prisoners have been chained up, immovable, deep inside a cave. Behind them is a well-used walkway, where people walk and talk, and behind that a fire. All that the prisoners are able to see are the shadows cast on the wall and they believe these shadows to be real objects and that the noises that they hear from outside come from them. If one of these prisoners could break free he would be compelled to explore and walk outside the cave into the sun where he would, at first, be blinded but with time would learn to see the truth. Once enlightened he would be obligated to return to free his fellow prisoners in order to share this truth but they would be suspicious of it and wouldn't believe him. Plato's allegory suggests that only by ascending 'into the light' can we access knowledge and understanding of the world; while the products of vision and imagination can only present false imitations and illusions.

and authenticity (Kasfir 1999: 88 – 98). Many of these perceptions have been promoted and endorsed by imagery, technological devices and illusionary spaces in mass media entertainment and tourism, promising their audiences and clients ‘all that they are looking for’ while generating funds for their makers. Very few of these images reveal anything at all of their actual locations. Instead what we mainly see are attractively designed images of a particular place to transport the idea of its beauty. Africa has been primarily portrayed as picturesque, but in recent popular entertainment there has been a shift in this viewpoint. A considerable amount of descriptions that represent Africa depict bloodshed and poverty, but often in these scenes the ‘old’ idea of beauty still lingers. Images live up to their producers’ doctrines and their audiences’ expectations, and demonstrate the skill with which visual strategies achieve perfect congruency between clichés, manipulation and customers’ dreams.

This chapter examines how visual technologies and mediums have promoted and supported ideas and assumptions about Africa and Africans and how these ideas can determined the way cultures are perceived. The chapter is an investigation into the mediums and methods that have been used (or are used) to transfer ideas of Africa to its audiences – specifically commercialised and profitable illusions of naturalism, primitivism and the landscape genre of the picturesque. It traces particular visual devices, technologies and mediums that have captured and enchanted its audience, and follows the motifs that these spectacles promulgated. It explores the seeming neutrality of mediums and suggests that, despite varying beliefs, images often reflect a propagandist way of thinking and that they encourage the ideologies of their consumers. We regard images with suspicion for we know that what we see is only an interpretation of the real, yet we still ‘buy’ in to their perceptions and illusions. In this chapter this suspicion is affiliated with mental images arising within intercultural interactions in the environment of the shop. Within these exchanges the individuals suspiciously look at each other, while in the gallery space the viewer can interpret the edited videos of the shop sceptically. The edited video footage

becomes part of a network of existing images and illusions that are suspiciously interpreted.

## **2.1 Illusionary spaces, deceptive devices and audience allure.**

Illusive image devices have opened up a new world of experience, offering its viewers a rich outlook of changing tableaux without leaving home. They offer a world known through the image yet unfamiliar in actuality. The space of the gallery creates an illusionary setting where the videos of the shop can be interpreted by its viewers. Viewers are captivated by the surrounding sounds and mesmerising luminescent screens that immerse them into the space. They are able to observe the shop through the videos but their experience is limited to the changing images on the screen.

### 2.1.1 The magic lantern and the peep-box

Spaces of illusion have enjoyed tremendous popularity in a variety of forms for many centuries. The age of exploration happened to be the age of illusionistic devices as well. Victorian audiences travelled vicariously in the footsteps of the explorers through the extravagant illusions revealed by optical devices. The 'magic' of the lantern slide<sup>50</sup> (Figure 33) beamed natural wonders: waterfalls in Africa, volcanoes in South America and kangaroos in Australia. Many different kinds of shows revealed worlds near and far through colossal and spectacular illusion (Warner 2004: 20). Due to travelling showpeople, illusive optical devices, such as the magic lantern and peep-boxes,<sup>51</sup> (Figure 34) spread quickly

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50. The lantern slide (the magic lantern or the lantern of fear) is a box with a light source inside. A concave mirror is fixed to the back of the box to intensify the light by reflecting the beams forward and parallel to each other. At the front, opposite the mirror, is a tube with two vertical convex lenses inside it. Beyond the common focus point of the two lenses a transparent picture is inserted into the box, reversed and upside down. The lantern projects a corrected version of this image onto a screen or wall (Mannoni *et al.* 2004: 215).

51. The peep-box is a 'perspective theatre' replicating a miniature theatrical stage. Interchangeable sets and cut-out figures are placed behind each other in a box with a peep-hole where the viewer looks onto the scene (Mannoni *et al.* 2004: 220).



across vast areas and by the end of the seventeenth century wandering lanternists were putting on small-scale shows in inns and castles, using a lantern lit with a candle. The peep-box offered viewers, through the peep-hole, a glimpse into another space, while the magic lantern's mesmerising light captivated its audiences.

These early shows manipulated their audiences' beliefs and played with their superstitions as they often featured goblins and devils,<sup>52</sup> but these shows also depicted 'new' lands and Europe's hegemony, as in Figure 35, toying with audiences viewpoints. At annual fairs and folk gatherings people would pay to see the wonders of the peep-box, the drama further heightened by the showman's commentary. In more affluent circles, the peep-show became a popular device for discovering other worlds and the strange mixture of magic and reality ensured its long-lasting popularity (Mannoni 2004: 44). Live showmen or musicians provided the sound for larger shows, known as phantasmagoria, with multiple magic lanterns hidden behind screens and effects such as smoke. The animated projected images of these elaborate shows provided an emotional and enthralling ride for its audiences (Stafford & Terpak 2002: 297 – 306). By the nineteenth century illusive optical devices were extremely common and appeared in homes, schools, churches, lodges, large-scale halls and theatres, as a regular part of public entertainment gratifying the desires of their consumers and imposing perceptions of Europe's superiority and control.

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52. Hence the name "magic lantern" or in German "lantern of fear".

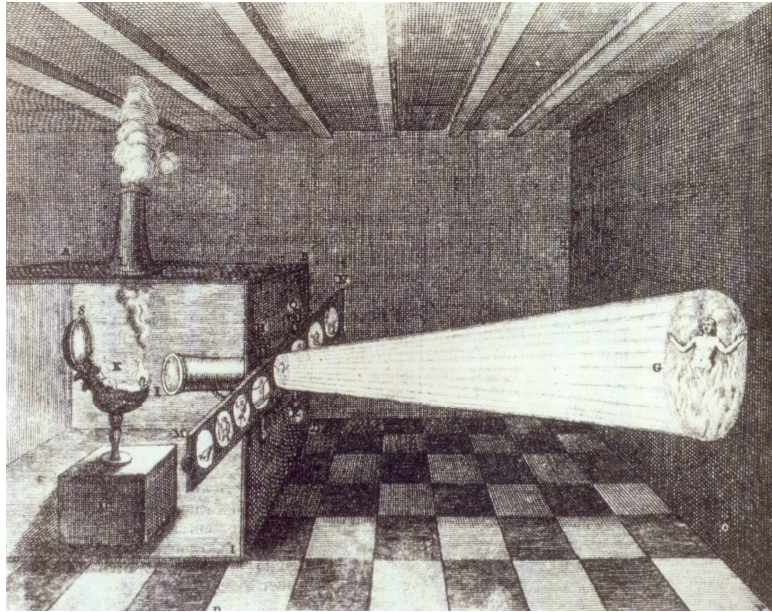


Figure 33. First printed illustration of a magic lantern projection.  
In: Athanasius Kircher. *Ars Magna Lucis et Umbrae* (1671). Amsterdam.



Figure 34. George Moutard Woodward. *Peep-box* (1802).  
Woodcut. In: Francis Grose, *Principes de Caricatures*. Paris.

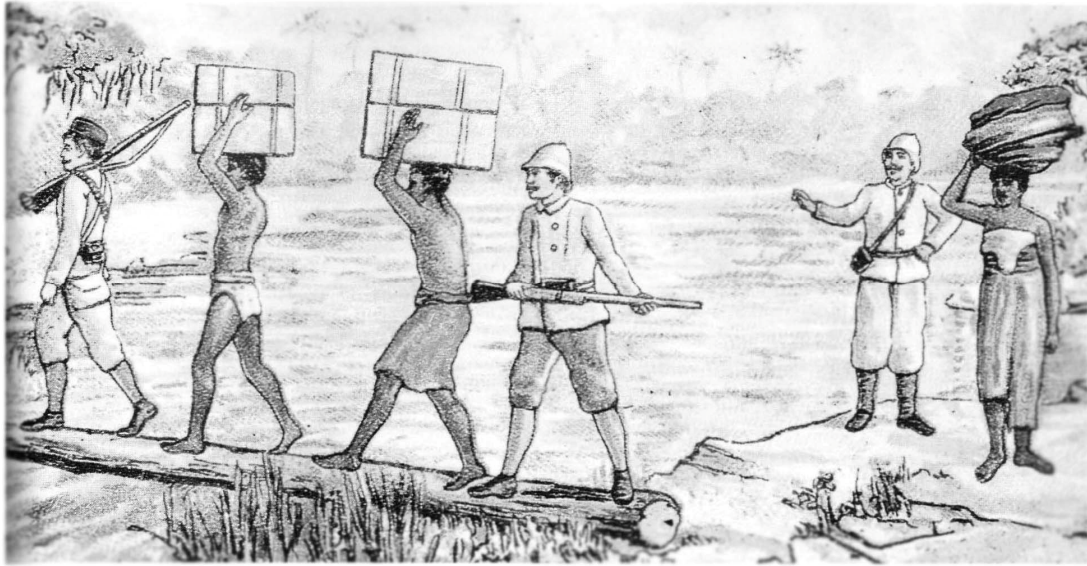


Figure 35. Magic lantern slide (Early twentieth century).

### 2.1.2 The panorama

The panorama<sup>53</sup> (Figure 36), an agent of popular taste and a representation in service of an illusion, attracted the attention of broad sections of a sensation-seeking civil society in the late eighteenth century, and became an increasingly fashionable medium in the nineteenth century (Oettermann 1997, Oleksijczuk 2001). The panorama's intention was to create an overall immersive effect, an illusion of being inside the image space and events, blurring the distinctions between real space and image space. It arose during a period of "panoramic consciousness" when the view from hot-air balloons, the endless landscape vistas seen from windows and the sweeping visions possible from the top of high-rise buildings became somewhat of a public obsession (Rice 1993).

Subjects for panoramas were selected for their popular appeal and were often shaped by the market, reflecting the interests of its audiences. Along with landscapes, cityscapes and battle scenes, the panoramas depicted images of the rise of imperialism, offering spectacular events and scenes of the colonial histories. Surrounded by the image, spectators could immerse themselves in a vast, detailed view of some distant place or event. These images were often suggestive and a strategy of political propaganda, serving the interests of their administrators. An example is the colonial panorama, *German Cameroons* (Figure 37) in Berlin in 1885 that showcased a military expedition to the country's newly acquired African colony, Cameroon. This project, intensively publicised and well funded, was "aggressively pro-imperial" and compared to other

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53. 'Panorama' is derived from Greek and means to 'see all'. The panorama is a 360 degree circular surface, in a rotunda-shaped building, with an artificial image space (usually a painted scene) which fills the observer's field of vision, addresses the observer from all sides and gives the impression of standing in the painted environment. The visitor enters the panorama through a dark passage that leads to the viewing platform in the middle of a cylindrical picture that offered a complete circular view of an environment. To increase the illusion, the upper edge of the canvas panels were usually hidden from sight, and the space between the viewing platform and the painted imagery was often filled with real objects, such as shrubbery. From this point of view the panorama creates an illusion of being immersed in the picture, inside an image space and its illusionary events (Sternberger & Neugroschel 1977, Stafford & Terpak 2002: 315 – 324).

panoramas of its time, “openly chauvinistic and appeared to have been designed to propagate the idea of a German colonial empire” (Oettermann 1997: 27).

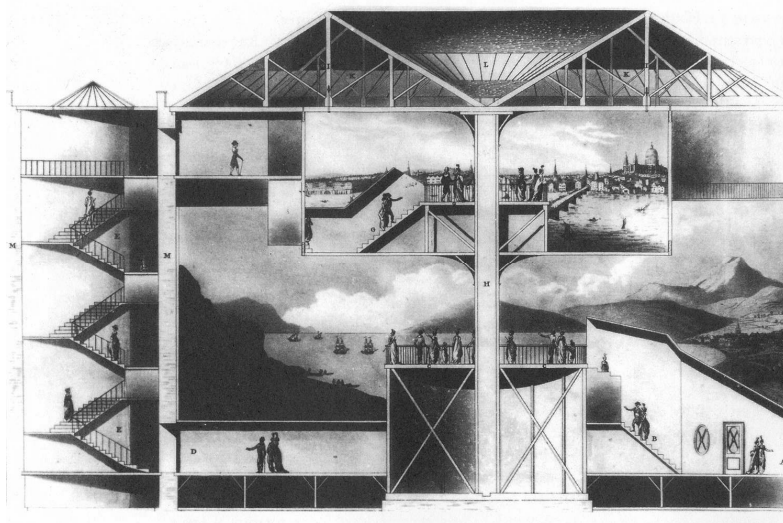


Figure 36. Robert Mitchell. Section of the rotunda, Leicester square. (ca. 1798). Illustration in Robert Mitchell *Plans and View in Perspective of Buildings Erected in England and Scotland*.

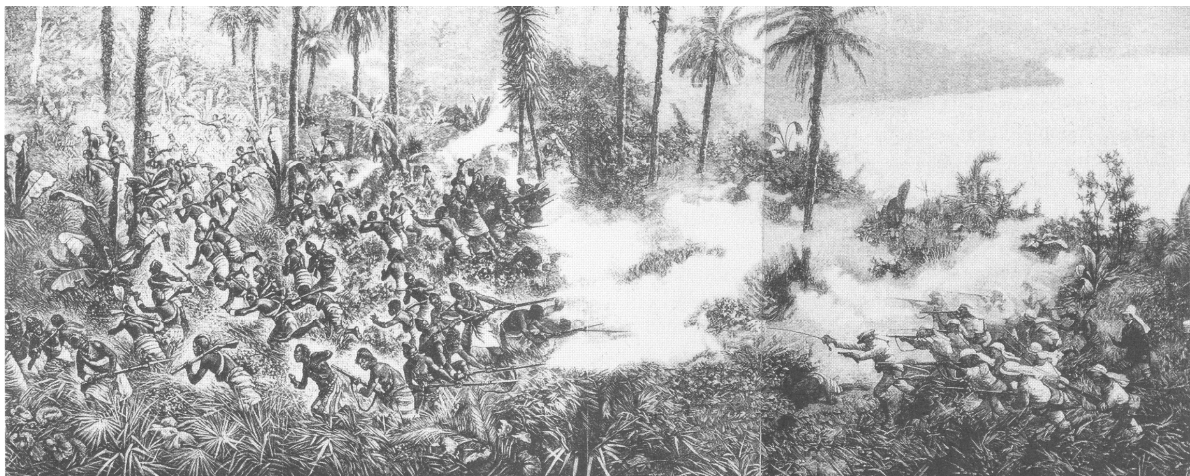


Figure 37. Carl Planer. Detail of the Colonial Panorama, *German Cameroons* (1885 – 1887).

Oliver Grau (2003: 69) explains that the panorama brought the world to the cities of Europe and North America. It became an “economic surrogate for travel” that compared (and preferred) “travels with the eye” to real travels.<sup>54</sup> The panorama was a vehicle for personal and social fantasy, a means of escape to places or activities more exotic and exciting than the limitations of everyday life. The scenes of the panorama addressed its observers directly, employing visual strategies that removed the boundaries and psychological distance between the observer and the image space. The viewer, while aware that they were looking at an image, was encouraged to embrace the illusion, to participate mentally and emotionally in the image (Oleksijczuk 2001: 149 – 151). In order to imaginatively project themselves into the scene, the viewer went through a process of mentally absorbing the situation, of changing from one mental state to another. This type of imaginative projection enabled spectators to use the panorama to break away from the spatial, temporal and social limitations of their lives.

Nineteenth-century audiences experienced illusionary spectacles as both magical and technological. They were intrigued by them, but realised that they were only technological illusions and that what they were seeing was impossible. Nonetheless, they paid to be convincingly transported into a fully fleshed experience, produced through as many sensory channels as possible (Slater 1995: 219). Illusions constituted a huge commercial market that took advantage of their audiences’ desires and drew profit from astounding them. The realism of the effect was all-important for an illusion only works if it is convincing. Illusive spaces, such as the panorama, celebrated their mesmerizing detail and meticulous construction, and made great use of perspective to give a more realistic illusion of scenes. But they remained misleading. At times, the makers of these devices added stereotypical features into scenes with precise observation and detail that acted as interchangeable ‘props’. These features

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54. As one German commentator wrote in 1827, “To sit in a room and thus travel is all the more pleasant since one is troubled neither by dust nor customs agents” (Rice 1993).

created a 'deceptive authenticity', intensifying the enchantment and fantasies of its visitors and moving them ever further away from the reality of a place.

### 2.1.3 The diorama

Many natural history museums have directed their efforts towards the creation of large mammal and ethnological dioramas.<sup>55</sup> In 1930, the Buffalo Museum of Science in the United States, presented a diorama of a Zulu encampment (Figure 38) as part of their *Hall of primitive races* (Gramly 1989: 36). The diorama consisted of a village scene with several figures that were made out of plaster and painted with realistic details. The figures were presented as though engaged in some kind of domestic activity and were enclosed by a number of sets and props. The scene was framed by a painted panoramic landscape. In this diorama viewers' observed the scene from a bird's eye view, so instantaneously they were placed in a dominant position.

Due to their life-like quality dioramas still generate enthusiasm and interest from visitors (Levin 1989: 204 – 205). The "Bushman" diorama (Figure 39) previously exhibited in the Iziko South African Museum in Cape Town was "a site where teachers and tour guides stop to lecture to their audiences, enthusiastically recreating the life and manners of 'the Bushmen'...Many of the ideas expressed...[were] decades-old, colonial stereotypes from the nineteenth-century, available only in texts long out of print" (Skotnes 2002: 254 - 255). The people cast for the exhibits were chosen as 'specimens' that comprised of features that, at the time, were understood to be most characteristic of "the Bushmen". Pippa Skotnes (2002: 256) explains that this was ironic since the people chosen were survivors of war, living in poverty on a land stripped of its natural bounty and most had lost all memory of the oral traditions of their parents.

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55. The diorama is a three-dimensional representation of a scene in which objects and/or models are arranged in an artificial naturalistic setting, against a realistic background.

The way in which dioramic installations have been constructed and presented has followed age old perceptions of its subjects. Objects have been included and transformed into warped meanings by the methods of display, and the information presented (or absent) has clouded what is seen by its audiences. Yet these images still exist because the diorama's power resides in the compelling visual drama that "encourages voyeurism" (Skotnes 2002: 256). Sidney Kasfir wrote that the diorama is "utterly ahistorical and fictionalised" but that it is "the kind of image everyone frankly loves" (Kasfir in Skotnes 2002: 256). Dioramas intend to provide their audiences with factual 'documents' of their subjects but often contain motifs that are based on perceptions and that are deceiving.



Figure 38. Diorama of Zulu encampment, former *Hall of primitive races* (1930).  
Buffalo Museum of Science, United States of America.



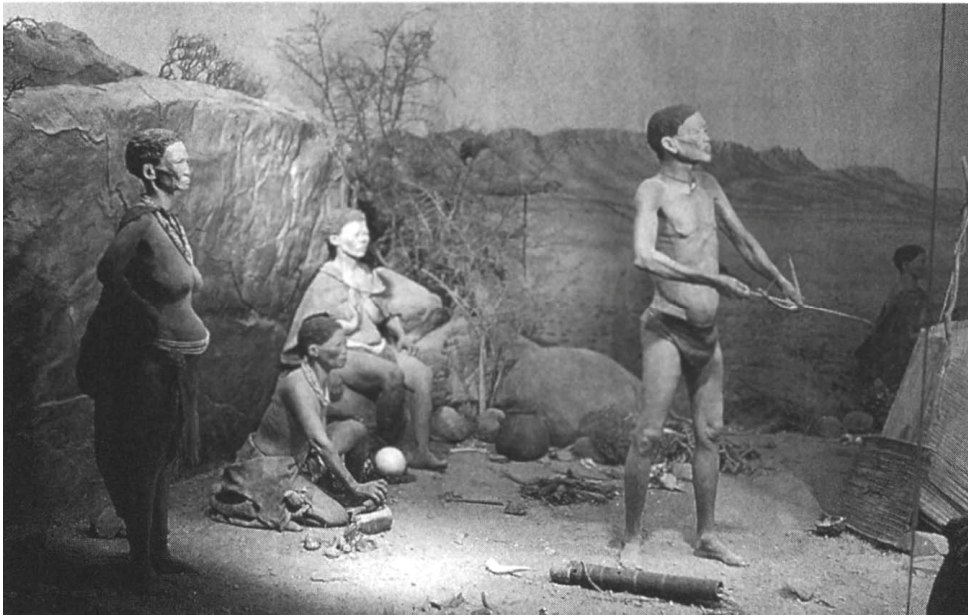


Figure 39. Detail of diorama depicting hunter-gatherer camp (ca. 1800).  
South African Museum, Cape Town.

#### 2.1.4 Picturesque painting and photography

Thomas Baines's<sup>56</sup> huge output of journals, sketches and paintings, which detailed the experiences of his journeys in Africa, have contributed 'knowledge' to many disciplines since the nineteenth century. As Jane Carruthers and Marion Arnold (1995) reveal, his works follow a significant Victorian trend and contain evidence of British social-economic progress and imperial values. Yet Baines's paintings have been perceived as social documents (Stevenson 1999)<sup>57</sup> "cooped into history to illustrate written records or to confirm particular interpretations of history, and used to authenticate 'reality'" (Carruthers & Arnold 1995: 14). Ironically Baines's painting *Outspan under mocheerie tree between Koobie and Lake Ngami* (Figure 40) discloses a deceptive nature in his paintings, photography and image-making in general. Carruthers and Arnold (1995: 11) elaborate by saying:

The painting encapsulates the many subjects that characterise Baines's career: nature, represented by the spacious landscape and central, dominant tree; exploration as signified by the wagons; ethnography in the form of black people (Damaras and Bushmen), and science and technology exemplified by Chapman's<sup>58</sup> camera. The camera is the key to the scene since it draws attention to the contrived nature of all image-making. The figures posing for Chapman, to be recorded as a reality, are merely two actors on a wide stage and Baines's painted version of the scene is another composed version of life conventionalised as art and orchestrated with regard for colour, tone and the distribution of form in space.

Baines's painting captures the context of the spatial narrative around Chapman's photographic lens. What the painting shows is the subjectivity that all images are

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56. Thomas Baines was an English artist-explorer in the nineteenth century, who travelled extensively with other explorers through the interior of South Africa, Namibia and Australia (Stevenson 1999).

57. The Bloemfontein diorama that exists in the National Museum in Bloemfontein is an example of how Baines's paintings are used as "social documents". The diorama was constructed between 1977 and 1978 with the establishment of the First Raadsaal as a museum and was based on Baines's 1850s paintings of Bloemfontein (see Figure 33). This information was supplied by Mr H.J. du Bruyn (Senior Museum Scientist) and Mrs S. Havenga (Senior Collections Manager) of Bloemfontein's National Museum on the 27 October 2008.

58. Baines accompanied the explorer James Chapman to the Victoria Falls in 1861 (Bester 1999: 137 – 142).

prone to and how images and visual technologies often depict staged realities. The ability of Chapman's camera to capture the whole scene is limited by the static, atemporal frame of the camera and used within this space to deflect as much as to capture certain subjects (Bester 1999: 143). Baines painting, as Chapman's camera, offers a selective view of the scene.



Figure 40. Thomas Baines. *Outspan under mocheerie tree between Koobie and Lake Ngami* (1861).  
Oil on canvas.

Despite the painting's deceptive nature, it is composed to demonstrate aesthetic conventions and the profitability of a distant land. The picturesque format and the neo-classical poses of the African people reveal Western conventions, while Baines displays Africa's wealth by the adornment of the 'authentic' people and the embellishment of the landscape. The painting attempts to pass itself off as an image of the actual place but the typical organisation of the landscape and the indication of Western traditions verify its artificial character (Barrell 1980: 2 – 5). Baines accompanied Chapman on his expedition to extend Europe's knowledge of Africa and portray the geographical, agricultural and mineral resources that were available for collection, exportation and exploitation. He witnessed the commercial trade and barter between natives and his companion, moreover he partook, through his painting in a visual exchange that assisted in the establishment of colonial power relations.

W.J.T. Mitchell (1994: 14), in his innovative essay *Imperial landscapes*, argues that landscape is "best understood as a medium of cultural expression" and is "not simply raw material but is always already a symbolic form in its own right". Landscape is in "itself a physical and multisensory medium" in which "cultural meanings and values are encoded...As a medium for expressing value, it has a semiotic structure rather like that of money, functioning as a special sort of commodity that plays a unique symbolic role in the system of exchange value." Baines and colonial trader, Joseph McCabe, journeyed to the interior of southern Africa between 1850 and 1854 where Baines produced a number of oil paintings of Bloemfontein (for example Figure 41) (Carruthers & Arnold 1995: 46).<sup>59</sup> The paintings, that are all similar in nature and depict the town from the vantage point of Naval Hill, show a planned composition and constructed pictorial reality. The landscape vistas, enriched with detailed information, are not topographical in intention; they reveal spacious terrain readily available for British occupation. In Baines's paintings the 'floating viewpoint' communicates a European position of

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59. It is not known whether these paintings were made during this period or after, since Baines often painted his oils days, months or even years later.

power in Africa. The open terrain points out the land's availability and the movement, transition and man-made changes indicate its fertility. The vast Free State landscape invited its audiences to "fill in" the spaces with colonial ideology and material. Baines's paintings follow the theme of *terra nullius*, that is, "vacant land essentially uninhabited or at least uncultivated, and therefore rightfully available to colonisation" (Pieterse 1992: 35, Barrell 1980).

Baines's paintings "exists as a form of intertextuality" which is "distinguished as a special form of aesthetic ordering within a tradition" (Bunn 1994: 143 – 144). He utilises picturesque conventions to communicate these ideas and creates a product that embodies a Western aesthetic attitude of wealth, beauty and nature. While the scenic painting of Bloemfontein (Figure 41) depicts known sites,<sup>60</sup> it employs romantic principals that transforms the scene into a spectacle. In his painting Baines incorporates picturesque trends such as: the Claudian bands dividing the landscape in three sections, the dramatic and dominating skyline, the rhetorical framing motifs on the left, the lilliputian figures in the foreground, and the placement of animals and birds overlooking the sensational scene to emphasise its deserted vastness. Baines selected information that conveyed an 'authentic experience' and played on audience perceptions. The entire landscape is a setting, a miniature panorama, enhancing the scene with an 'ideal aura' which creates an emotional experience for viewers, inviting them to enter and travel through this pictorial space, making them instantaneously part of it. For the European audience images of the remote colonial countries has a two-fold effect. Not only did the images arouse the attention and spirit of adventure within its audience, they also acted as a vehicle for disseminating illusions about the lands and its cultures.

*The greatest hunt in Africa near Bloemfontein* (Figure 42), painted by Baines to commemorate the vast hunt organised in celebration of Prince Alfred's visit to

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60. An example is the First Raadsaal (neighbouring the shop today) which is depicted centrally, in the background of the painting.

southern Africa and the Free State (then an independent Boer republic), became a symbolic show of power (Carruthers & Arnold 1995: 43).<sup>61</sup> The painting while purporting to record an event instead represents the marketability of a product, in this case southern Africa, and the potential for profiteering. The spoils (from hundreds of carcasses left to disintegrate) and the assessment of land in Baines's painting (which was painted in monochromatic tones to facilitate reproduction) signify Britain's potential to take possession of the territory and its rich range of natural resources. Baines turns the brutal incident of the hunt into an inspiring scene with a pristine landscape and magnificent performers.

In comparison, Pieter Hugo's contemporary photograph *Discarded tomatoes and chillies in the veld* (Figure 43) presents an unofficial dumpsite as an attractive and mesmerising sight. In the photograph the ruined tomatoes, chillies and other decaying products encroach on the landscape. The red decay of waste over the land is a reminder of a bloody scene. Baines portrays the production, consumption and excess of wealth in Africa, while Hugo shows the waste that, in present day Africa, is associated with want and poverty. Hugo's photograph implies decay and waste; a lack of management and resources. He portrays this dumpsite as picturesque but in a manner that counteracts its idealised view. He chooses to portray a scene reminiscent of the 'colonial format of beauty' but at the same time exploits this to show brutality. The beautiful setting is in stark contrast the ugliness of the landscape; it provides a comfortable viewpoint but the brutality of the scene prevents the viewer from accessing it.

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61. "A thousand Rolong, members of the Sotho tribe, were recruited to drive herds of animals inwards while three hundred pack oxen stood by to bear the carcasses from the slaughter. Between 20 000 and 30 000 animals were caught within the cordon and hundreds were either slaughtered by assegais or gunfire" (Carruthers & Arnold 1995: 43).



Figure 41. Thomas Baines. *Bloemfontein* (1850).  
Oil on canvas.



Figure 42: Thomas Baines. *The greatest hunt in Africa near Bloemfontein* (1860). Oil on canvas.



Figure 43: Pieter Hugo. *Discarded tomatoes and chillies in the veld. Messina/Musina.* (2006 – 2007). Photograph.

### 2.1.5 Cinematography

Illusive devices and visual technologies provide a meeting place for science and fantasy, disenchantment and enchantment (Slater 1995), if only because, as Johannes Fabian has pointed out, “the Western empirical tradition assumes that visualising a society is synonymous for understanding it” (Gordon 2002: 214). Illusions became even more convincing with the invention of cinema. Cinema could depict an intensely exhilarating experience of a place and could represent the world of dreams, fantasies and thoughts more effectively and convincingly than any other media before it. Cinema provided complex representations of events and places. It took its audiences into an emotional labyrinth and visual experience, above and beyond the threats of a place, affording them the security of a panoramic vision. Cinematography provided the possibility of a complex montage of juxtapositioned images one after another, moving through time, pulling its viewers away from where they were into a scene visibly present. In the late nineteenth century “ethnographic exhibitions” were a popular form of “educational” entertainment, but cinema proved to be a more cost-effective way of circulating “primitive bodies” in industrial society. Robert J. Gordon (2002: 212 – 213) explains that tourists often believe that authentic Bushmen are “those who dance exactly as they do in the countless (real and pseudo-) documentary films made about them”, naïve to the truth that these films were facilitated and staged by Westerners themselves.

Films have been modified by filmmakers and producers to fit the requirements of ‘cultural authenticity’ and the attention span of their audiences (and their producers’ pockets). Cinema has played a central role in developing, emphasising and disseminating assumptions about Africa. Often films about ‘Africa’ depict “‘pure’ cultures, untainted by contact with outsiders” and are more concerned with “clear camera angles than contextuality” (Kasfir 1999: 98). Films, such as *The gods must be crazy* (1980) (Figure 44), have achieved huge



audience success<sup>62</sup> by blending comedy with a pseudo-documentary narrative style, and have continued to encourage Western perceptions.<sup>63</sup> The stereotyping of Africa has persisted in recent films, such as Fernando Meirelles's *The constant gardener* (2005) (Figure 45).<sup>64</sup> These genres of film have captured the West's changing attitudes towards Africa and based their scripts on Western guilt. Hollywood's view of Africa continues to reflect the West's history of imagining itself. Hollywood portrays Western ventures against a backdrop of African suffering, violence and poverty. Recent films have fit neatly into a cinematic legacy of self-serving misrepresentation that best suits Western economic, political and ideological preoccupations (Strauss 2008).

Cinematographic images are "very effective for cultural communication because they share many qualities with natural perception and are easily processed by the brain. Their similarity to 'the real thing' allows designers [or filmmakers] to provoke emotions in viewers, as well as effectively visualis[ing] nonexistent objects and scenes" (Manovich 2001: 180 –181). Films, like *The gods must be crazy*, treat the Western world to beautiful cinematography of Africa's landscapes, skies and animals as well as encouraging ideas of cultural primitivism, while films like *The constant gardener* continue the presentation of the picturesque by showcasing violent and sordid scenes within beautiful landscapes. Similar to Hugo's photograph of *Discarded tomatoes and chillies in the veld*, recent films such as *The constant gardener* provides a 'comfortable

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62. The largest grossing foreign film in the United States that broke records in a number of European countries and Japan and spawned not only a sequel but a minor industry of similar films (Gordon 2002: 226). The film's plot follows the journey of Xi, the head of a Bushman family living in the Kalahari Desert, whose quiet life has been disrupted by a glass Coke bottle dropped from an airplane. Xi decides that the bottle is an evil thing and must be thrown off the edge of the world. He sets out on a quest and encounters Western civilisation for the first time.

63. A comment posted on YouTube ([www.youtube.com](http://www.youtube.com)), where sections of the film appear, reads: "One of the best natural comedy, fact movie!" (by "Jwalantsoneji" on 13 May 2008).

64. The film is based on a novel by John le Carre. English diplomat, Justin Quayle, tries to uncover the mysterious murder of his activist wife, Tessa, who is killed on a trip to the north of Kenya. He discovers that a powerful British pharmaceutical firm is testing fatal medication in Africa in an attempt to create a drug that is marketable. Through his journey Quayle finds redemption in the African terrain and makes the decision to be killed in the same place where they murdered his wife.

picturesque viewpoint' that invite audiences into the scene. These films reveal more about conceptions of 'Africanness' than Africa or Africans themselves.



Figure 44. Jamie Uys. Movie still of *The gods must be crazy* (1980).



Figure 45. Fernando Meirelles (1955 – ). Movie still from *The constant gardener* (2005).

### 2.1.6 Tourist images

Visual images have projected events and things that need not have historical or logical connections with its subjects. They offer fragmented and irrelevant information in an attempt to please its audiences. Images of tourism - brochures, postcards, posters, advertisements, websites, etc. - manipulate facts and allow for generalisation and stereotyping that target their clients' desires for something 'authentic'. They live up to the colonial fantasies of their viewers and present a "marketable commodity". W.J.T. Mitchell (1994: 15) explains that "landscape is a marketable commodity to be presented and re-presented in 'packaged tours,' an object to be purchased, consumed, and even brought home in the form of souvenirs such as postcards and photo albums. In its double role as commodity and potent cultural symbol, landscape is the object of fetishistic practices involving the limitless repetition of identical photographs taken on identical spots by tourists with interchangeable emotions". These images, with their impressive vistas and idealised subjects, are obsessively repetitive, romanticised and nostalgic. In the 1970s and 80s the government-sponsored glossy magazine, *South African Panorama*, chose to ignore the vast areas of township matchbox houses and the bloodshed of apartheid by "presenting a country of golden beaches, glowing sunsets, and plump shining natives with perfect smiles" (Metelkamp no date: 11). Okwui Enwezor (1999: 387) points out that "we easily deceive ourselves, believing that the dividing line of racial discourse is not as baited as it once was", that "today the spectacles of yesterday have returned" and that "the most resourceful and formidable examples of this kind of representation have made their appearance in the booming South African tourist industry". He also states that:

In what are described as 'Cultural Villages' throughout South Africa, so-called old African customs are being staged for mostly white audiences, in exclusive holiday resorts. In Lesedi Cultural Village in Gauteng Province, tourists have their choice of which African fantasy they may sample. Depending on your taste, you might choose Zulu dancing, in which pot-bellied, ferocious-looking men in leopard skins

prance and stamp around a bright burning fire, in a performative, ethnographic Surrealism. Or you can partake in an authentic Xhosa, Pedi or Sotho domestic scene, replete with the visible iconographical marks of those cultures. In this retrieval of African customs from a besmirched ethnographic cupboard, only those aspects of African culture that entertain are presented. Such are the images of Africans that are beginning to enter the archival bank of the new South African nation.

Increased emphasis is being placed on the role of “township tourism” as a catalyst for social change and perception, regarding it also as an important economic activity with the potential to enhance the local economy. Tourists are given a glimpse of local residents, their daily lives and living conditions (and insights into post-apartheid progress and development) in an attempt to partake in the ‘feel’ of the township. The *Ubuntu Tours* pamphlet, striving to showcase the experiences of the majority of South Africans, promises its clients a “first-hand experience of the township”. By visiting Guguletu, tourists can “interact with people” and “imbibe traditional beer at a shebeen, an African social place” (Gordon, Rassol & Witz 1996: 267). Tourists are interested in townships that reflect human experience and they believe that what they see are ‘real’ people and what they witness is daily life. However, these tours visits carefully selected people in carefully selected places and walk along specific routes (normally passing by a memorabilia craft centre). In turn, making these ‘experiences’ just as orchestrated as the ‘cultural villages’.

Imagery of the ‘good life’ remains essentially unchanged, and what tourists view is not the authentic one, as they imagine, but rather the established Western image, a “staged authenticity” that has been carefully orchestrated (Buntman 1996: 272). These perceptions promote ideologies and have formed homogeneous images to represent whole cultures.

### 2.1.7 Virtual spaces

At [www.spench.com](http://www.spench.com), anyone can ‘travel’ and ‘experience’ an “African virtual reality location”, from the Victoria Falls in the Livingstone National Park to sunrise at Red Dunes at Sossusvlei and sunset on Table Mountain. By clicking and moving your computer mouse you can manoeuvre the photographic panoramic scene to any position you desire. The 360-degree rotating effect gives the viewer the impression of being in an alternative environment, much like the panorama rotundas of the nineteenth century. The *Masai village* panorama (Figure 46), available at [www.z360.com/movs/africa4\\_main.htm](http://www.z360.com/movs/africa4_main.htm), is constructed to give the impression that you are standing amongst a real tribe, but with further investigation the image reveals a number of visual clichés. Figures have been grouped together and are positioned as though on display. Most of them face towards the viewer, addressing and recognising the viewer and even appearing to invite the viewer into the scene with a hospitable grin. With the exception of the isolated child on the left (in this illustration), all the figures appear to be ‘dressed up’, showcasing their ‘traditional’ best and ‘authentic’ costume. It is remarkable how closely some of the motifs in this virtual space resemble the illustrative descriptions of Africans of the previous centuries.<sup>65</sup> The digital space has been based on preconceived perceptions and gives its audience exactly what they expect, suspending its figures somewhere between being and non-being, between reality and fantasy. This space “offers viewers the opportunity to explore their personal interest in the experiences of otherness, satisfy a desire to witness difference and indulge in curiosity about the way other people live their lives” (Buntman 1996: 273). The ‘virtual environment’, however, is nothing but a fabrication, an illusion and a manipulation of reality.

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65. Similar motifs include the male figures carrying sticks, female figure on the right with a baby, the homesteads in the background and the landscape setting. Refer to Figures 12 – 17 in Chapter 1 of this text.



Figure 46. *Masai village in Ngorongora, Tanzania* (2008). Virtual photographic panorama. At [www.z360.com/movs/africa4\\_main.htm](http://www.z360.com/movs/africa4_main.htm)

Virtual spaces allow its users<sup>66</sup> to travel smoothly from one viewpoint to the next, incorporating images of the natural world with artificial images in what Oliver Grau (2003: 7) calls “mixed realities”, where it is often impossible to distinguish between original and simulacrum. In virtual reality,<sup>67</sup> a panoramic view is joined by a sensorimotor exploration of an image space that gives the impression of being in an alternative environment or another place. The still, passive aspect of watching is replaced by total immersion into a world whose reality exists contemporaneously with our own, giving the user a more intimate relationship with the image than was possible before. The user, bombarded with information of another world, is completely surrounded by the illusion and exists ‘inside’ the image space affecting the course of events (Lovejoy 1997: 160 – 161, Rush 1999: 208 – 217). Like the nineteenth-century panorama, virtual spaces aim at producing a feeling of captivation, of presence and impression, of actually being in a place. Virtual environment experiences are further ‘enhanced’ according to the users desires where images are accessed and generated by the users themselves. Virtual spaces have given its users the freedom to enter into new worlds, to override the inadequacies of our existing world and to ‘travel’ to other, reconstructed places (Grau 2005: 193 – 211). We tend to speak as if there really is a new and alternative reality, but we are suspicious of these environments and know that we cannot actually leave behind our present world and migrate to this domain because we know that it is only an illusion.

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66. “An illusionistic image is no longer something a subject simply looks at, comparing it with memories of represented reality to judge its reality effect. The new media image is something the user actively *goes into*, zooming in or clicking on individual parts with the assumption that they contain hyperlinks” (Manovich 2001: 183).

67. Virtual reality refers to a three-dimensional experience in which a ‘user’, with the help of head-mounted displays, data gloves, or body suits experiences a simulated world that appears to respond to the user’s movements. The virtual environment is one in which cybernetic feedback and control systems mimic interaction with real objects, such that the environment appears to be real and is its own reality (Lovejoy 1997: 160 – 161, Rush 1999: 208 – 217).

## **2.2 Digital video and “the hermeneutics of suspicion”**

Illusive optical devices have affected the way in which the world is seen and represented and how events have been interpreted, as well as how we acquire and understand knowledge. Visual technological media has transformed the way images communicate, and the way in which they are distributed and transmitted. Prior to digital media, visual information was considered static in the sense that the image, although editable in film or capable of being manipulated by its authors, was fixed. Once transferred to the digital language of the computer every element of the image can be modified. The image becomes ‘information’ in the computer, and all information can be altered, making it indistinguishable from any other image. Computers have challenged the conventional notions of visual representation and have opened up new ways of how ‘visual realism’ functions (Lovejoy 1997: 154 – 159, Mitchell 2005: 309 – 335). They store numerical information in a database which is programmed to appear as a visual image. This data can be formulated, altered or manipulated to model images that change an already existing image or create completely new simulations.

Computers, as Manovich (2001: 177) suggests, the “new, digital illusion generators”, have undermined the accepted perception of ‘truth’ of an image and opened up a completely new paradigm for representation, allowing doubt and suspicion to enter the minds of their observers. Paul Ricoeur (1970: 32 – 36) draws our attention to the way in which meaning is interpreted as an “exercise of suspicion”. He refers to three philosophers, namely Karl Marx, Friedrich Nietzsche and Sigmund Freud, collectively as the “school of suspicion”. These philosophers questioned the objective truth in their respective disciplines, and as Ricoeur explains, “they [looked] upon the whole of consciousness primarily as ‘false’ consciousness”. What has come to be known as the “hermeneutics of suspicion” is “a method of interpretation which assumes that the literal or surface-level meaning of a text [image] is an effort to conceal the political interests which are served by the text [image]. The purpose of interpretation is to strip off the



concealment, unmasking those interests” (Ricoeur in Pepa 2004). In view of this, we would assume that audiences would confront images with a new level of scepticism and insecurity about their motives, yet visual ‘information’ continues to reassure audiences of their perceptions. They are thus liberated from their suspicion and trapped in the image’s illusions believing it to be a true reflection of reality. We lose sight of the fact that these images are deceptive interpretations of reality and not mechanical transfers of the exterior world; that visual technologies are not neutral but are often directed towards mass consumerism.

Appropriating surveillance footage and capturing video footage in the shop and exhibiting it in the space of an art gallery, enables the viewer to question these videos and their media. The videos are not merely a view into another space; they evoke suspicious qualities about the nature of the media used and image-making in general. Video has enabled us to record images in real time, to immediately transmit them in close-circuit systems and allowed us to re-experience events with playback options, while surveillance has made it possible to revive a record of events at a particular time and space. These devices have a reputation of being ‘believable’ and depicting ‘proof’ (for example in criminal prosecutions), whereas digital images have a dubious character as they can easily, and without visual evidence, be transformed. By combining strategies of all of these mediums, in the form of digital video (an ‘inter-media’), and utilising them as material for art, the motives and ideologies behind them are revealed. The displayed videos record ‘real events’ but have also been altered and manipulated by using editing techniques and ‘effects’, such as the manipulation of time and repetition. In reality there is no ‘innocent’ image. What may appear to be a portrayal of unselective and exact observation of everyday life is merely a representation taken from selective viewpoints.

Video 4 (Track 4 on the enclosed DVD, Figure 47) deals with several levels of suspicion. In Video 4 the individual in the middle of the screen closely examines those who pass him. He is conscious of his surroundings and continually

distracted by anyone in it. He suspiciously watches the two black men before they enter the screen only looking away once they have passed him. Once they have left the screen he glances at them again. As previously discussed, social encounters in the shop and its surroundings are rooted in assumptions and ideas about one another, based on a socio-historical milieu. These perspectives form mental images about each other. It would be naïve to deny, due to high and violent crime, that we live in a country where we are preoccupied with suspicion, that socio-historical perceptions and our own ideologies have caused particular social 'types', cultures and races to be more susceptible to suspicion than others; a form of stereotyping and image shaping that has persisted for many centuries.<sup>68</sup> Jonathan Raban<sup>69</sup> (Fishko 2007) points out that the "sceptical, suspicious nature of checking up on society" is "an infliction of our time". We are aware and alert of one another, scoping each other with doubt and distrust, using visual technical technologies (i.e. surveillance cameras) to confirm this suspicion. The suspicious mental images that we shape of each other in our social encounters are a product of perceptions and our refusal to challenge them.

The interpretation of Video 4 is an "exercise of suspicion". We read the image in a specific context and associate it to this framework. These associations refer back to stereotypes and stereotypical readings even though we know that things are not always as they appear. The video camera only allows us to see a fragment of the view and we have no idea what is happening outside of this frame. The edited videos of the shop are pointers towards the way in which media are able to create illusions and manipulate perceptions of people and their environments, as well as how its effects are mesmerising for viewers as they too become accomplices in this voyeuristic journey.

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68. Western stereotyping of the "black man as brute" (Pieterse 1992).

69. Jonathan Raban's discussion is concerned with terrorism and surveillance and their social implications.



Figure 47: Angela de Jesus. Video stills from Video 4 (2006 – 2009). Detail from video installation, *In exchange* (2009).

## Chapter 3

### Surveillance/Power/Entrapment

In his description of Jeremy Bentham's panopticon (Figure 48),<sup>70</sup> Michel Foucault (1977: 200) explains that "visibility is a trap". In the confinement of the cell the individual is seen as an "object of information, never a subject of communication". The model of the panopticon signifies a way of obtaining rational order, clarity and control. The "all-seeing" prison represents absolute surveillance, where every relationship between the surveyor and those who are surveyed is restricted to the visual, where a single authority has power to exert their gaze onto any activity or human subject.<sup>71</sup> Images can create similar relationships between viewer and subject (especially in images that portray 'otherness' or difference). 'Knowledge' is embedded in the visual and the viewer is placed in a superior, hypocritical position. From this vantage point, the viewer is able to enjoy looking voyeuristically and to acquire information undisruptively. The constant visibility of their subject ensures "an automatic functioning of power" whereby the viewer's gaze ensnares its subject (Foucault 1977: 201). The subject finds himself or herself entrapped in a disempowering visual mechanism.

It has persuasively been shown, in the writing of Green (1986), Wallis (1995), Olin (1996) and others that power is clearly encoded in the paradigm of looking and being looked at. Surveillance (and other modes of looking) is an exercise of

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70. Jeremy Bentham Panopticon (or Inspection House) is a design of "a cylindrical building of four to six stories consisting of a large number of single cells. The cells were arranged circularly or polygonally around a central watchtower with galleries and viewing boxes. The tower served as the architectural and administrative centre, from which the guards could see into every cell without being seen by the prisoners. This was made possible by a clever and extremely practical lighting arrangement. Windows in the sides of the outer cylinder kept the prisoners always in the light, while the guards remained hidden in the dark centre...Bentham based his ideas on the concept, that people who constantly think they are being watched – because they know they are under surveillance but cannot control exactly when they are really being observed – would have to lose the ability, and finally the desire to do wrong" (Kaschadt 2002: 114 – 117).

71. The model of the panopticon can be compared to the universal surveillance of Orwell's telescreen in his acclaimed novel *Nineteenth eighty-four* (1949).

hierarchical observation and Foucault's assessment of the panopticon has established surveillance as a rational means of ordering society. According to Foucault, our social and cultural environment, and personal life experiences are fraught with ideological power struggles. The ways in which we look offer insights into social meanings, ideological positions, image interpretation and visual transactions.

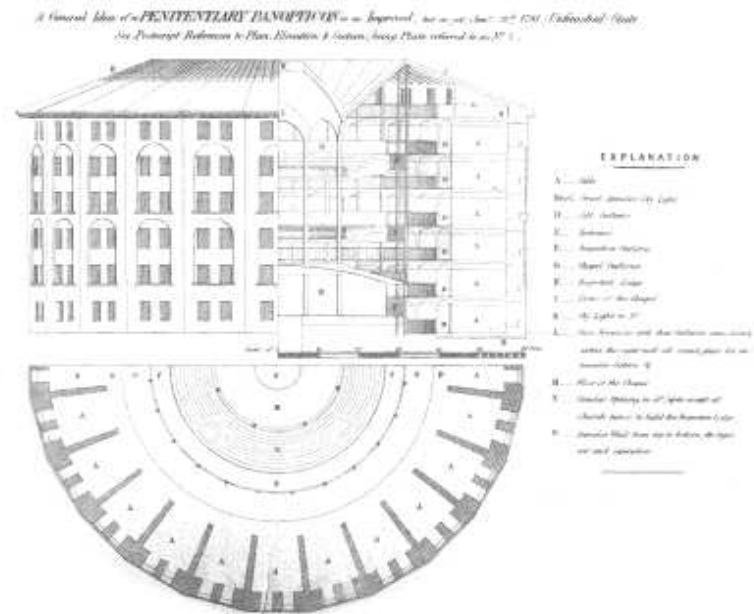


Figure 48. Jeremy Bentham. *Penitentiary panopticon* (1791). Floor-plan and front view.  
Drawing by Willey Reveley.

Historical perceptions related to colonialism, representation, racism and stereotypes have developed power positions in our social structures. Power positions are constantly changing and shifting from one viewpoint to the other. In our daily encounters we are continuously challenged to face and reassess these ideologies and constructs.

The visual exchanges occurring in the shop are laden with power struggles, and the surveillance camera is constantly recording this. These power struggles affect exchange, our interactions and behaviour towards each other. We are conscious of the relationship between others and ourselves, and we are continually put into a position, directly or indirectly, where historical perceptions and stereotypical ideologies come into play; where we have to reconsider our own prejudices, and where we often overcompensate for or deny past preconceptions. In the space of the gallery, viewers are induced to re-evaluate their own preconceived assumptions and ideologies when confronted with an image. Behind the camera there is always difficulty in representing relationships in an image without unintentionally reinforcing misconceptions or indulging in new forms of cultural exploitation. Over time images and representations have become increasingly more complex and nuanced, as they have become saturated with several meanings. The contemporary interpretation and representation of images is not only rooted in past connotations but relies on other images we have encountered, within or outside of its context.

Issues of representation and power relations associated with images, and the way we interpret them, play their role in society. Modes of looking and the gaze, in all its forms (colonial, apartheid,<sup>72</sup> postcolonial and intercultural), have interrogated and regulated meaning and have prefixed identities into categories and ideological constructs that, like our cultural life, influence the interpretation of images. Many problematic perceptions still exist in either repetitive contemporary imagery or as mental representations leading to numerous debates. Okwui Enwezor (1999: 376 – 399) has sparked controversial dispute about who has 'the right' to represent whom. He argues that archival modes of representing and viewing 'the black subject' have re-surfaced in contemporary

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72. Colin Richards (1999: 348 - 374) refers to the apartheid gaze in his article *About face: Aspects of art history and identity in South African visual culture*.

art, specifically when white artists represent the black form.<sup>73</sup> Racial and cultural misappropriations have taken place in various forms and several 'subjects' have been misrepresented by other individuals. Thus it has become increasingly significant to find new ways of presenting subject matter, to draw attention to the way we look at images, to scrutinise established representational and viewing positions, to be aware of image ideologies and to put images into a context that queries its meanings outside the frame of the picture. It is less about who has the 'right' to represent whom or who has represented whom, than it is about the manner in which we choose to represent or interpret ourselves and others, and our sensitivity or consciousness in addressing intercultural relationships.

This chapter is an investigation into notions of looking and interpretation. It closely considers the power plays involved in the processes of looking and being looked at, the "politics of representation", and the will to dominate and control the subject of vision in surveying practices (e.g. in photography or surveillance technologies). It scrutinises surveillance as a record and concludes that surveillance practices have many familiarities with a theatrical stage. The chapter deciphers how after-images can induce particular modes of interpreting, elucidating how interpretation is embedded in practices beyond the threshold of visibility. This chapter unravels examples of how contemporary artists use representational strategies to either maintain or deny colonial, cultural and/or racial ideologies, and how these images often trap viewers in complex ambiguities of mottled meanings. The power plays related to the visual transactions of the shop (that is, the visual exchanges occurring in the shop and the visual exchanges taking place in the gallery space between the viewer and the exhibited videos) are shaped by these notions of looking and are open to interpretation. The application of manipulative strategies to the videos of the shop either address or take these notions apart, question the nature and

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73. Enwezor writes "everything seems haunted by this paradoxical affirmation of origin and disavowal of past histories...what needs interrogation is the usage of any fixed meaning of blackness as ideology of authenticity, or whiteness as a surplus enjoyment of superiority" (Enwezor 1999: 398).

complexities of images and leave viewers to probe the basis of their perceptions. As in cultural interchange, on the one hand the 'power plays' involved are overturned, on the other they still persist.

### **3.1 The “after-image” and the surveillance record**

According to Joan Ramon Resina (2003: 1 – 22), an image does not stand only for itself but recalls other images or mental representations that are associated with it. We read and interpret images through a process of layering past information, derived from other images, combined with the information given to us by the image we see. Resina's (2003: 2) concept of the “after-image” implies that “the image is not conceived in a narrowly optic[al] sense but in a larger visual one”. He explains that the “after-image” is the visual sensation that lingers after the image has disappeared. “We always turn to our mental apparatus to grasp and decode the external organisation of stimuli”, in what Resina calls “a persistence of mental images”. Image interpretation rests on an unstable montage of imagery and mental images associated with the subject and the viewer relies on these presumptions.

Images are interpreted differently depending on who is viewing them; therefore they must also say something about our individual perceptions. James Elkins (1996: 51) has argued that as the viewer looks at the image, the image uncannily looks back. He says “to see is to be seen, and everything I see is like an eye, collecting my gaze, blinking, staring, focusing and reflecting, sending my look back to me.” What we see tells us more about ourselves than the object viewed. This reciprocal process of seeing, or visual exchange, implies that images have the ability to literally communicate and project our desires back at us. They effect and convey emotions within ourselves and “look back at us across a gulf unbridged by language” (Mitchell 2005: 30). Different modes of interpretation rely on previous associations and individual perception.



Surveillance systems are utilised to enable a record of human behaviour to be retrieved for scrutiny or pleasure. Its technology embeds the ability to notice and track individual behaviour. By default electronic surveillance systems endlessly gather data that remain permanently in the memory of the database and can be processed at any time. Surveillance strategies are intended for transparency but are often opaque and intrusive to their subjects. In modern society people have become accustomed to the omnipresent surveillance camera, but its subjects seldom know that they are being recorded, and even when they do, they are generally unaware of the extent. Today surveillance is no longer reserved for a few, privileged companies. Small businesses and private individuals use surveillance cameras for personal protection or for voyeurism. O'Neill (2006: 21) argues that in our surveyed society "voyeurism is ok". Surveillance has become "something like a comfort blanket" which reassures and 'safeguards' us, or provides us with entertainment in the form of reality television programs or commercialised exhibitionism on the Internet.<sup>74</sup> Forms of reality television have taken the 'record' of human behaviour out of the context of surveillance and transmitted them (as an image) into the homes of its television viewers. These forms offer, as Michael Rush (2003: 36 – 38) suggests, "a mix of reality and fantasy", a "mechanism of desire which promises to reflect viewers back to themselves, but ends up bouncing back what the viewer longs to see." It is plausible that the voyeurs are not entirely detached from what they see, that the viewers' experience is an involved one and that their response is extremely complex and ambiguous.<sup>75</sup> The surveillance 'record' is read as an image, therefore all the implications linked to the image become relevant when interpreting it. We read the surveillance 'record' through after-images as well as with our own individual perceptions and desires.

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74. Commercialised exhibitionism has become increasingly more flexible with today's webcam. The webcam has enabled online exhibitionists to broadcast their daily lives through the virtual window of the computer screen to web voyeurs (Gross, Katz & Ruby 2003: xii).

75. As Helen Piper (2006: 136) describes, it is the "process of 'people watching' and the commensurate need to interpret, weigh up and learn from it that provide the principal source of audience fascination with these programs (reality television) rather than the debased, voyeuristic and even salacious impulses more commonly ascribed to them". Reality television provides an emotional and therapeutic involvement for its viewer (Robins 1996: 140).

Representations of difference (or 'otherness') are often directed towards particular modes or approaches that have established specific 'trends' and ways of interpreting. These include, among others, anthropological types, images linked to audience amusement and subversive images that have addressed discriminatory methods of representation. Images that follow these 'trends' bring to mind mental representations of past images (or other images comparable to them). Examining these modes of interpretation enables us to look more closely into its politics of representation, and provides us with an opportunity to consider how their meanings have transformed. Paul Landau (1996: 140 – 141) explains that "once images get put into circulation, they move out beyond the orbits in which their meaning had placed them," and they take on new meanings to fit into several contexts. Images communicate both the original 'messages' ascribed to them as well as a variety of meanings that have attached themselves. It is within all these perspectives that we read images.

### **3.2 Panopticism: Anthropological modes of interpreting the other**

Louis Agassiz's attempts to classify mankind and prove his theory of "separate creation"<sup>76</sup> led him, in 1850, to acquire fifteen silver daguerreotype plates of slaves that were recruited in the plantations of Columbia, South Carolina (Figure 49) (Wallis 1995: 40). These highly detailed photographs show front and profile views (and at times rear views) of seven black slaves.<sup>77</sup> They are predominately naked, in seated or standing positions, and adopt the static image of a 'scientific specimen' and 'racial type'. The daguerreotypes were designed to assess the proportions of the human body and to obtain material for phrenology and physiognomy research. They acted as 'scientific applications' designed to analyse the physical differences between the races, as well as to demonstrate the racial hierarchy that relied on categories based on outward physical

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76. Similar to Polygenesis – a theory proposing that the different human races are actually different species (Wallis 1995: 40).

77. The daguerreotypes were divided into two series. The first group depicts the full body of two standing men and the second group depicts the heads and torsos of three men and two women (Wallis 1995: 40).

characteristics such as skin colour and bodily proportions.<sup>78</sup> The daguerreotypes are similar to the trend of numerous anthropological photographs (for example Figure 49) that were designed to portray the 'needed information' to researchers and ensured that ethnological subjects' bodies could be both measurable and comparable.<sup>79</sup> Although Agassiz's daguerreotypes do not contain the 'measuring stick', characteristic of the anthropological photographs, they do exhibit ethnological conventions as well as the obvious power roles involved in this visual transaction. The individuals become 'object(s) of information' locked in a visual mechanism that is concerned with conveying 'knowledge' to the viewer (Foucault's description of panopticism).<sup>80</sup>

The 'subjects' followed a typological system that depended on the eighteenth century widespread interest in the body (especially in the shape of the skull)<sup>81</sup> that was later stored in the archives as devices of regulatory control.<sup>82</sup> The form of the head was often shown in crude ranking systems that ranged from the primate head to the classical Greek god (Figure 25).<sup>83</sup> With these taxonomic classifications most Europeans came to believe that Africans were fitted by

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78. Carolus Linnaeus designed a system of biological classifications that established the idea of a hierarchical structure of classification based upon observable characteristics and helped to characterise the concept of race. Although François Bernier was the first to divide the world into four separate races, the Linnaeus system shaped the modern idea of race (American Anthropological Association 2007).

79. Many of these anthropological photographs followed the 'Huxley system'. "Thomas Huxley's instructions in the context of anthropological theory at the time: 'The subject' was to be photographed naked in the four established anthropometric poses, with a plainly marked measuring scale placed in the same plane. For the full-length, full-face portrait, 'the subject' was required to stand with heels together, the right arm outstretched horizontally, and the palm of the hand turned towards the camera. In the profile view, the subject should be turned to the left, the arm bent at the elbow as that it would not obscure the contours of the body, and the back of the hand turned towards the camera" (Godby 1996: 120).

80. "The anthropometric photo mapped measuring grids of bodies in a cartography of biological conquest" whilst the image places the viewer (or anthropologist) in a superior position and the subject in the position of the 'other' (Landau 1996: 132).

81. Hence close attention was paid to the photographing of the heads in Agassiz's daguerreotypes.

82. Alan Sekula's *The Body and the Archive* (1986) pays particular attention to the ways in which typologies (in criminology, ethnology, etc.) were created for the archive, how these became devices for the surveillance and control of bodies, and how these served ideological investments.

83. It placed humankind on a scale ranging from animality to godliness, with the European placed next to the Greek god and the African next to the ape (Bindman 2002: 203).

'nature' for enslavement and that the physical attributes of a person could reflect their interior moral being. Notions of what were beautiful ('the Caucasian ideal' as morally pure) and what aroused feelings of disgust (images of difference as evil) were thought to be embedded in the physical descriptions of human beings and created parallel aesthetic perceptions (Bindman 2002: 11 – 22). Although many of the ideas of human variety were circulated before the eighteenth century (in the form of generic text and imagery), it was only with such pseudo-scientific descriptions of racial classification that these views were legitimised.<sup>84</sup>

The disindividualising and dehumanising processes in the empirical and observational analysis of Agassiz's subjects, transform them into artefacts with no concern for the personality of the sitter.<sup>85</sup> The subjects as 'objects' can neither communicate with the viewer, even when the viewer looks directly at them (in the case of the frontal views), nor have the desire to do so. They reject any engagement or visual exchange with their spectator and their expressions seem distanced and disinterested. Brian Wallis (1995: 40) states that "the individuals sit or stand facing the camera with a directness and forthrightness that is at once familiar and utterly strange...Here, the seated women calmly reveal their breasts, and the standing men are stark naked. But their attitudes are detached, unemotional, and workmanlike. In what seems to be a deliberate refusal to engage with the camera or its operator, they stare into the lens, their faces like masks, eyes glazed, jaws clenched." Then again, this does not prevent the viewers from engaging with the daguerreotypes. If anything the viewer takes on the position of the voyeur more comfortably, indulging in their curiosity of 'otherness' and indiscriminately surveying the bodies of the other.

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84. Alan Sekula (1986: 63) argues that the operations of apartheid in South Africa was "probably the last physiognomic system of domination in the world". It conditioned an intense surveillance national state that mastered a subtle bureaucratic taxonomy of different racial and ethnic groups.

85. "[P]ower is realised only by the subjection of the body as the object of knowledge, and the function of this power lies in its ability to extract knowledge from the body...in this analysis of how and why the body becomes, at a certain moment in time, the nexus of power/knowledge relations in a disciplinary society that Foucault's work has been of the most profound importance" (Green 1997: 126).



Figure 49. Louis Agassiz's slave daguerreotypes (1850). (Top left) "*Delia, daughter of Renty, Congo*"; (top centre & top right) "*Drana, daughter of Jack Guinea*"; (bottom left) "*Jack (driver). Plantation of B.F. Taylor, Esq.*"; (bottom centre & bottom right) "*Renty, Congo. Plantation of B.F. Taylor, Esq.*" (1850). Daguerreotypes.

Photographed by J. T. Zealy.

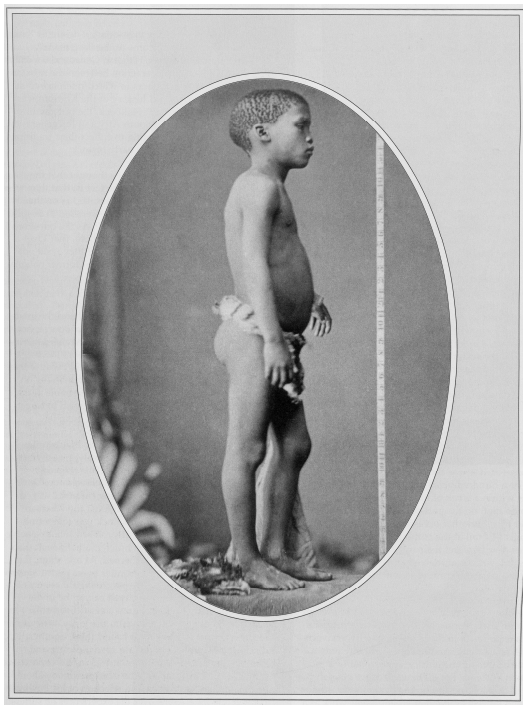


Figure 50. Young boy photographed with 'measuring stick' (ca. 1877). *Carte de visite*.



Figure 51. Pieter Hugo. *Steven Mohapi*, Johannesburg (2003). *Looking aside*. *South African studio portraits* (2003 – 2006). Photograph.

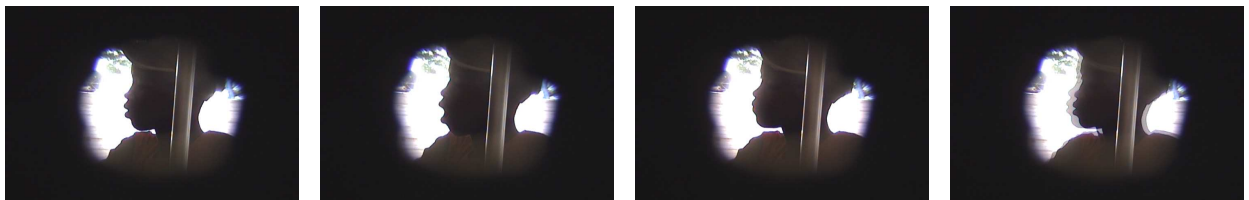


Figure 52: Angela de Jesus. Video stills from Video 5 (2006 – 2009). Detail from video installation, *In exchange* (2009).

The anthropological trend evident in Agassiz's daguerreotypes creates a panoptic relationship between the viewer and the subject. The subject is seen as an object of observation and categorised into a specific type. This is a trend and mode of interpretation that has provoked questions and complications regarding representation. Many contemporary works of art have fallen into the 'pitholes' of this mode, either out of negligence or with the aim of deliberately destabilising it. Nonetheless, these images have the ability to recall early anthropological shots, and it is in terms of these shots that we interpret the images.

Pieter Hugo's portrait photography contains a strange and uncomfortable ambiguity that on the one hand can be compared to the exploitation of Agassiz's daguerreotypes, but on the other, displaces its viewers from the superior position of observing. Hugo has photographed several series of controversial and transgressive subject matter that includes South Africans with albinism (Figure 51), deceased Aids victims, Nigerian animal tamers, and people in Musina. Hugo's detailed photographs, which are intensely concerned with the depiction of tactile surfaces, portray his subjects more typologically than as portraits. His subjects appear to be positioned and grouped into specific cultural types and according to ideologies that are concerned with their representation rather than with their persona. Although Hugo claims that his subjects are fully aware of his motives and the implications of the photographs,<sup>86</sup> it is arguable that his representations of difference and his anthropological approach exploit his subjects, as it gives the viewer a conventional ethnographical distanced vantage point to observe the photographs.

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86. In Hugo's interview with Joanna Lehan he says: "The fact that I ask people if I can take their portraits is significant. They are adults, in control of their own intellects. They would surely have a sense if they were being exploited. I'm sure they can make up their own minds. I think there's something condescending in assuming responsibility of other people, and announcing that they are incapable of doing it for themselves, whether it's a culture or an individual...People, no matter what class of society they're from, are aware of the power of images" (Hugo 2007).

Hugo's *Looking aside* series<sup>87</sup> may be read as after-images of anthropological photographs. In other words, the subjects follow, and the viewer reads them, in terms of the anthropological approach of typology and panopticism that are reminiscent of Agassiz's daguerreotypes. 'Knowledge' of the subject from anthropological, ethnological or other panoptic-like stances is based on observations from a distanced viewpoint and in Hugo's photographs the viewer takes on this privileged "all-seeing" position, voyeuristically surveying the bodies of the subjects while the subjects have no means to return this gaze. The anonymity<sup>88</sup> of the subjects and the distance between them and the viewer, offers the viewer the freedom to interpret the photograph as he (she) chooses.

In an attempt to disturb and unsettle his viewers, Hugo presents provocative subject matter, which makes the viewer uncomfortable. Hugo looks directly at people whose appearance makes us "look aside" (Stevenson 2006). In doing so, he forces the viewer to confront their preconceptions and prejudices when encountering people who differ from the "the norm". The disconcerting subjects compel the viewer to look away, but at the same time the viewer is captivated by an arresting image of beauty and nuance. This may compromise the hierarchal power positions associated with anthropological photographs, but the captivation in Hugo's photographs places the viewer back into his (her) hypocritical position and traps the viewer into a complex and unsettling array of meanings.

Video 5 (Track 5 on the enclosed DVD, Figure 52) of the shop depicts a scene through a peephole, consequently placing the viewer in the position of the voyeur. This entices a voyeuristic curiosity and desire associated with the nineteenth-century peepshows and is a reminder of the anthropological shots discussed above. The image of the black child in profile is reminiscent of Agassiz's daguerreotypes, Hugo's *Steven Mohapi* photograph (Figure 51) and

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87. Hugo photographed several South Africans who either suffer from a skin defect, such as albinism, or a sight defect, frontally in a studio.

88. The only reference to Hugo's subjects is the title name, but this does not tell much about them. Ironically, Agassiz's daguerreotypes titles say more about its subjects than Hugo's photographs.



the numerous anthropological study images, still in existing archives. The bar that is in the centre of the video is comparable with the 'measuring stick' in Figure 50. The depicted youth, like Agassiz's subjects, does not engage with the viewer, instead his profile is passive, dreamy and bored. The bright light that comes from the centre of the video and creates a prominent outline of the child's face is playfully reminiscent of Plato's cave, as well as being a hypnotic device. The metaphor of the cave suggests that by ascending 'into the light' we can access knowledge of the world, whereas many anthropological shots were undertaken to gain insight into the nature of humankind. The child in the video is lit from behind while his anthropological resemblance (his profile and his prominent features) places him in a position to source knowledge. The light functions in a similar manner to that of the modern cinema screen, drawing the viewer into a mesmerising image that denies their escape.

At a certain point in the video the child yawns. The yawn recalls images of the stereotypical "lazy African boy", a popular type in advertising and other forms of popular culture, especially in America where this type was known as the *Sambo*.<sup>89</sup> This stereotype is rooted in slavery, where slaves were thought of as primitive, childlike and dependant and where adults were talked about as a "boy" or "girl". Significantly these terms, circulated in mass media, were used in South Africa and other colonies to refer to black individuals and continue to re-surface today in interracial interactions as a form of discrimination.

The representation of the youth in Video 5 can be read as a derivative image of "Africa" as it resembles the many mesmerising images Westerners are captivated by. In this video, however, disruptive strategies are employed to prevent the viewer from indulging in the scene. The bar, comparable to the 'measuring stick' usually placed behind or next to the subject in anthropological

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89. "The *Sambo* has been ubiquitous in American popular culture as the prototype of the contented slave, the carefree black – the eternal child, the eternal dependent, happy though given to unaccountable moods of depression, lazy, enjoying the banjo and the dance, passionately religious, but passive in most other things – a rather spirited but lazy, overgrown child" (Pieterse 1992: 152 - 153).

studies, is in front of the youth and cuts his face into two (a pole that acts as an iconoclastic tool).<sup>90</sup> The viewer is confronted with the bar and is aware of the split, whilst the irregular organic shape of the peephole steers the viewer away from the conventional clinical viewfinder further disrupting the viewing process. When reading the video the viewer enters a dichotomy of being forced into the position of the voyeur, but at the same time is unable to indulge in the video. The video provides contradictory interpretations because even though the youth is reduced to an object he still has an existential presence that interferes with this objectification. Viewers find themselves in a conflicting yet compelling position.

### **3.3 Audience amusement, voyeurism and ‘the stage’**

Live ethnological shows and their images were moments in intercultural visual exchanges where the ethnographical gaze tended to turn people into artefacts as a tool for education as well as objects of entertainment. The shows were a popular form of mass entertainment in Europe and the United States in the late nineteenth century and attracted long queues of inquisitive crowds eager for a view. Images (normally in the form of photographs) were circulated in advertising as a record of these ‘ethnological finds’. These images “strengthened the seeming reality of the type by objectifying the individual but also by using props and other details to accentuate the ‘truth’ of the depiction” (Wallis 1995: 49).

Farini’s<sup>91</sup> “African Earthmen” studio shoot (Figure 53) shows a photographic advertisement of a family of “Bushmen”, taken to London to participate in ‘ethnographic exhibits’<sup>92</sup> with their manager W. A. Healey. The children (except

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90. Chapter 4 of this text discusses iconoclastic gestures.

91. G.A. Farini, an American showman in 1885, journeyed from Europe to the Kalahari to search for diamonds, to look for ranch land and to capture bushmen for his sideshows from which he fed off the curiosity of his audiences for profit and financial gain (Landau 1996: 133).

92. “Amongst many things, the mass entertainment of live ethnological shows formed vehicles for inscribing and broadcasting messages of power. The ethnographic display, as public spectacle, served to provide a physical embodiment of what the observer was not. In these seemingly playful acts of looking at difference, the nation was constructed as progressive, technologically advanced and the product of civilisation, whose past and future were along a

for the youngest who is naked) and their parents wear leopard-skin 'costumes' while the males hold bows and arrows. They are all positioned next to an animal carcass. The photograph is a display and the items are props on a set stage, in a show of 'Africanness'. The photograph moulded the presentation into an exoticised image that confirmed Africans' inferiority and primitiveness, established by earlier pseudo-scientific and other objectifying images and portrayed its subjects amongst attractive props in the same way as they were exhibited at their ethnographical shows, in a way that fascinated their audiences. W.A. Healey's placement in the photograph is comparable to the measuring stick and is clearly to communicate and compare the descriptive and cultural differences between Westerners and Africans. The tall tuxedo-clad man contrasts with the near nakedness of the other figures and his position at the back, with his patronising gesture, assures his superiority (Bogdan 1988: 176 – 199). It even appears that he has deliberately been raised (perhaps by standing on a platform) in an attempt to make the other figures appear smaller and also as a way to show this hierarchy. He is the only one (except again for the youngest child, who appears restless) who does not look at the viewer, as though to indicate that he is not the one up for scrutiny. The carefully arranged photograph follows ethnographical conventions by placing the "Bushmen" subjects in a position for examination and simultaneously fulfilling the desires and expectations of its audience.

Pieter Hugo's photograph of *Jan, Martie, Kayala, Florence and Basil Meyer in their home* (Figure 54), like Farini's "African Earthmen" shot, satisfies the viewer's curiosity and fascination for 'otherness', in a form of scopophilia that is associated with voyeurism. Hugo's subjects, specifically the squint-eyed child who is placed in the centre and appears as though presented by the gesture of the mother-figure on her left, can be compared to many nineteenth-century 'freak'

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path of history already preordained. The displays served to remind audiences of a primeval, savage Africa, lost in a stagnant, nationless world" (Gordon *et al.* 1996: 265).

shows.<sup>93</sup> These performances showcased people with abnormalities for audience amusement, while Farini's "African Earthmen", due to their "ethnicity", were displayed and perceived as "freaks of nature" (Bogdan 1988: 176 – 199).<sup>94</sup> The particular composition of this display, including the positioning and near-naked bodies, the placement of hands and the assembly of items, plays to the audiences' enthrallment of difference and something strange. Hugo himself admitted (at his *Messina/Musina* walkabout at Oliewenhuis Art Museum, Bloemfontein, in February 2008) that in his experience of showcasing this photograph, South African audiences are fascinated by it and "sometimes laugh". The subjects are placed in the vulnerable position of 'the object' creating a comfortable viewing position for its viewer.

Hugo's photograph stirs up various emotions in its viewers. The collection and arrangement of the memorabilia, comparable to Farini's props, draws the viewer in. It is significant that Hugo chooses to include the objects in this specific photograph, places the subjects at a distance and portrays their entire bodies sitting, as most of the 'family portraits' he decided to exhibit in his *Messina/Musina* series are shot in close proximity and show little or no personal objects. In the photograph the school photographs in the background against the wall, the mass-produced objects on the shelves, the lace curtains and the bronze wall-hangings of religious icons and African wildlife souvenirs, act as objects on a set stage. They are a reminder of something familiar, possibly even something we have seen in our own or in an acquaintance's home. The poor white family seated on the couch, similarly to the objects, remind us of somebody we know, have seen or perhaps even ourselves. This response is similar to that of the reality television viewer. In reality television the audience's fascination depends on a comparison of the reality of their own lives to those on the screen (Robins

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93. Hugo's subjects also recall the photographs of Diane Arbus, which depict people who were often seen as 'social outcasts' for example: carnival performers, transvestites and eccentrics.

94. The "Bushmen" body descriptions were of huge interest to nineteenth-century crowds, as their bodily proportions were different to those of Europeans. Sara Baartman, in particular, created huge excitement in audiences and even became "something of a celebrity" (Schrine 1996: 348 – 350).

1996: 140, Piper 2006: 136). When looking at Hugo's photograph we recall images that we can associate with our own experiences. We identify with Hugo's photograph yet it is difficult to identify with Farini's "African Earthmen" photograph. The identification with Hugo's photograph could perhaps be due to the racial inversion but is more likely associated with, as Gerhard Schoeman (2008) suggests, the 'seeming reality' and the "matter-of-factness" in the photograph. Farini's "African Earthmen" are photographed in a studio while Hugo's subjects are captured in their home, in what appears to be an everyday "natural" setting. We associate Farini's "African Earthmen" photograph immediately with a stage, but Hugo's photograph is more complicated because it appears to be 'real'. Hugo's photograph delicately fluctuates between empathy and amusement, "matter-of-factness" and theatricality enticing the viewer as well as stirring up fears in the viewer that reflect an uneasiness and identification with the situation.

The particular arrangement of objects in the domestic interior spaces of Zwelethu Mthethwa's photographs (for example Figure 55) provide a means to communicate information about its sitters (and their existence) to the viewer, but also lends itself to being seen as part of a constructed installation that can be compared to the photograph of Farini's "African Earthmen" and Hugo's photograph. Mthethwa depicts people in the interiors of their informal settlements. The interior of these houses, although makeshift and cramped, are brightly decorated with collages of vividly coloured commercial pages and products that enliven the scene with an irresistible energy, transforming the photograph into a narrative portrait that is concerned with the individual's humanness rather than their anthropological nature (Zaya, Godby & Macrí 1999, Macrí: 2000: 69 – 74).



Figure 53. Farini's "African Earthmen".  
PRM Moseley Collection B11 4b.



Figure 54. Pieter Hugo. *Jan, Martie, Kayala, Florence and Basil Meyer in their home.* Messina/Musina (2006 – 2007). C-Print.



Figure 55. Zwelethu Mthethwa. *Untitled* (1991). C-Print.



Figure 56. Angela de Jesus. Video stills from Video 6 (2006 – 2009).  
Detail from video installation, *In exchange* (2009).

Figure 55 depicts a seated man in the private interior of his home, a few household utensils and clothing hanging on the patterned walls of *Breeze* soap labels. Mthethwa's photograph employs strategies that change the relationship between viewer and subject by the subversion of colonial archival approaches. The use of colour, for example, averts the exploitative methods of many early black and white 'documentary-style' photographs and adds a contemporary dimension that restores pride and affirms a sense of ownership to its occupant (Godby 2001: 200). Most striking, however, is the deliberate confrontation between the viewer and the individual portrayed. Mthethwa's utilisation of a direct visual exchange between the individual and viewer has put the viewer into a questionable position. By doing this, Mthethwa intended to reverse the power plays involved in looking and replace the hegemonic gaze of the viewer with a gaze that empowers its subject.<sup>95</sup> The materialisation of images of "shack chic" used in interior decorating publications and prompted by the release of Craig Fraser's book *Shack Chic: Art and Innovation in South African Shack-lands* (2002) has, however, resulted in a new and complex understanding when analysing Mthethwa's photograph. Milia Lorraine Khoury (2006: 65) gives an explanation to this:

In publications like *Shack Chic* this process of photographing has reverted back to a colonising eye. People are exoticised and 'othered' once again, by the scrutiny of the lens. There is an element of spectacle in these images by Fraser, as if these people are expected to entertain, and their living quarters are looked upon and perceived as curious and strange. The hyper-real colour in these images suggests an untrue depiction of reality, with the 'truth' element from Mthethwa's quasi-documentary style erased.<sup>96</sup> Further Mthethwa found his images, documenting that which already existed; Fraser's *Shack Chic* images appear staged and manufactured.

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95. The image "re-establishes moral equity" between viewer and subject "in which subjectivity is forced to turn in on itself" (Macrí 2000: 71).

96. This is ironic because in Mthethwa's photographs it is the "dramatic" colour that sets it apart from earlier anthropological shots (Godby 2001: 200).



When made aware of the hyper-real spectacles of “shack chic” the initial objectives of Mthethwa’s photograph are diverted and transformed into an image that is read through these spectacles. Mthethwa’s photographs can be interpreted as a constructed one-man-show with the ‘commercial wallpaper’ comparable to a back-drop of a stage and the utensils and clothing to props that have been placed in an arrangement. Mthethwa’s photographs, like those of “shack chic” as well as Farini’s “African Earthmen” and Hugo’s photograph, seem very selective and orchestrated. He chooses to depict only the walls and the top of the roof, not the floor of the interior, and in so doing, he emphasises the aesthetically pleasing ‘commercial wallpaper’ as well as creates a viewpoint for the audience, much like the perspective of a stage. The attractive wallpaper reveals a relationship between the mass-marketed consumer products and the image of the “black subject”, exploited and exhausted, as a commercial product.<sup>97</sup> Mthethwa’s sitter (similar to Farini’s “African Earthmen” and Hugo’s subjects) is completely aware of the camera and his expression, while pleasant and inviting (associated with his placement as a product among advertising labels of other products), wavers between vulnerability and uncertainty.

The private environments of “shack chic” are geared towards audience indulgence. It places its audience in a comfortable viewing position that ‘screens’ it from the realities of the poverty that the environments deal with. Mthethwa’s “empowering images” endeavours to dignify the individuals, but falls into a trend of images, that portray a concept of “wishful thinking”. This perception is one that either assumes that the people living in these circumstances accept and even enjoy living in their homes, or that their position is demeaning and that they should be patronised or pitied.

The voyeuristic videos of the shop, although they appear as records of everyday life, are highly selective. The surveillance footage is reminiscent of a stage, as both surveillance and the stage provides its audience with a limited and select

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97. In advertising, tourism and other forms of mass media (refer to Chapter 1 and 2 of this text).

view. Video 6 (Track 6 on the enclosed DVD, Figure 56) provides the viewer with a compressed bird's-eye view of several moments over different days in a contracted time period. This footage has been cut and assembled to form a short video. The frames overlap and transform in to one another and showcase people moving in and out of the view of the camera. The 'floating' view gives the impression of power and omnipresence but it is misleading as the camera only shows what is in front of it and the viewer has no way to determine what is happening outside of the frame.<sup>98</sup> The viewer is offered both a selective point of view and a selection of different moments where, again, it is not possible to establish what has occurred before or after the moment. This complexity turns the video more into a spectacle than a device for observation. The red and white tiled floor becomes a stage,<sup>99</sup> the fridge with commercial products becomes the props<sup>100</sup> and the subjects become characters that move across the stage and occasionally look at the viewer, while the peculiar motion of the characters in 'fast forward' movement is a reminder of early silent cinema,<sup>101</sup> turning the surveillance assemblage into a theatrical video.

The viewer is offered a voyeuristic glimpse but gets caught in the never-ending loop of images, appearing and disappearing, whilst its speed and low resolution prevents the viewer from indulging in the image and sympathising or identifying with a particular character.

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98. The footage has been taken from a fixed surveillance camera in the shop.

99. The floor resembles the black and white flooring of the seventeenth-century painter, Jan Vermeer. Vermeer painted interior scenes of seemingly everyday events but these scenes were actually orchestrated and painted inside his studio. The studio became a painterly set where he could construct different settings (Alpers 1983: 222 – 228).

100. This is similar to Mthethwa's 'commercial wallpaper'.

101. An example is the popular and theatrical films of English comedic actor and director Charlie Chaplin. Chaplin's films depend on exaggerated gestures and movement to communicate with and amuse people.

### 3.4 The paradox of the “after-image”

Many contemporary artists (such as Santu Mofokeng and Carrie Mae Weems) have employed strategies to unravel power plays associated with looking and visual exchange in an attempt to reverse or eliminate them. The concept of the “after-image” complicates this process. We are left with a paradox, a trap where the image may represent one thing but is perceived in another conflicting way, or where the artist may use such ambiguities to engage in this conflict.

Santu Mofokeng has done much to ‘rehabilitate’ the representation of black nineteenth-century families in his series *Black photo album/look at me: 1890 – 1950* (Figure 57 & 58). His series takes the form of a photo album, presenting a collection of appropriated and digitally reworked photographs of black South African families. Mofokeng collected these photographs from the descendants of families where they hung on the walls of their homes or were stored as keepsakes (Williamson 2002, Firstenberg 2002: 60 – 61). The title suggests a confrontation with the viewer. It aggressively addresses the viewer, as though speaking for these men and women, by demanding to be looked at as individuals (Leffingwell 2004). Mofokeng’s album attempts to account for the personhood and human spirit of his subjects, but in doing so, says more about colonial discourse.

By setting up an archive of these photographs, Mofokeng contests the typological collections of the colonial archive and tries to replace them with images that show the sophistication and character of the individuals. Mofokeng appropriates photographs that apply “Victorian photographic portrait conventions of composition, posture, setting, props, and costume in [the] rendering...[of subjects] with accoutrements of marriage, sports, femininity, and Christianity” (Firstenberg 2002: 60). Figure 57, for example, depicts a studio shot of a seated couple dressed in Western attire and placed in front of a backdrop of a foreign setting that represents a classical pillar and urn. With this Mofokeng attempts to

subvert the comfort zones of racial and cultural memory by questioning the politics of representation and the objectifying gaze of the camera, and by providing the viewer with an opportunity to consider an alternative means of imaging the “black subject”. The irony of this imitation of Western conventions, however, suggests “mimicry” (Bhabha 1994: 85 – 92).<sup>102</sup> Homi K. Bhabha explains “mimicry” to be constructed around ambivalence, to have “emerged as one of the most elusive and effective strategies of colonial power and knowledge” and to have created a “desire for a reformed, recognisable Other, as a subject of a difference that is almost the same, but not quite.” “Mimicry” is always a “site of interdiction” and what Mofokeng’s photographs do is to repeat rather than represent. The subjects are placed in a position where they are seen as interpreters of both Western culture and their own.<sup>103</sup>

In his installation, Mofokeng exhibits the photographs as a slide projection (Figure 58) interspersed with commentaries as well as notes that, when possible, name the sitters, the photographer, the location, the date and the process of the portrait sessions.<sup>104</sup> The notes aim to establish a system and context whereby these images can be archived while the commentary (that asks questions such as “Who are looking?” and “Whose gaze is it?”) tries to direct questions back at the viewer. These questions intend to expose, analyse and dislocate the power plays involved in visual exchanges, as well as to recover an identity for these individuals. In doing this Mofokeng suggests incongruity as he chooses to exhibit not the ‘original’ images but a projected image of the images (an after-image). The subjects are fixed in a “partial presence...both incomplete and virtual”, that does not say much about who these people are, but rather speaks about the conventions associated with their image (Bhabha 1994: 86).

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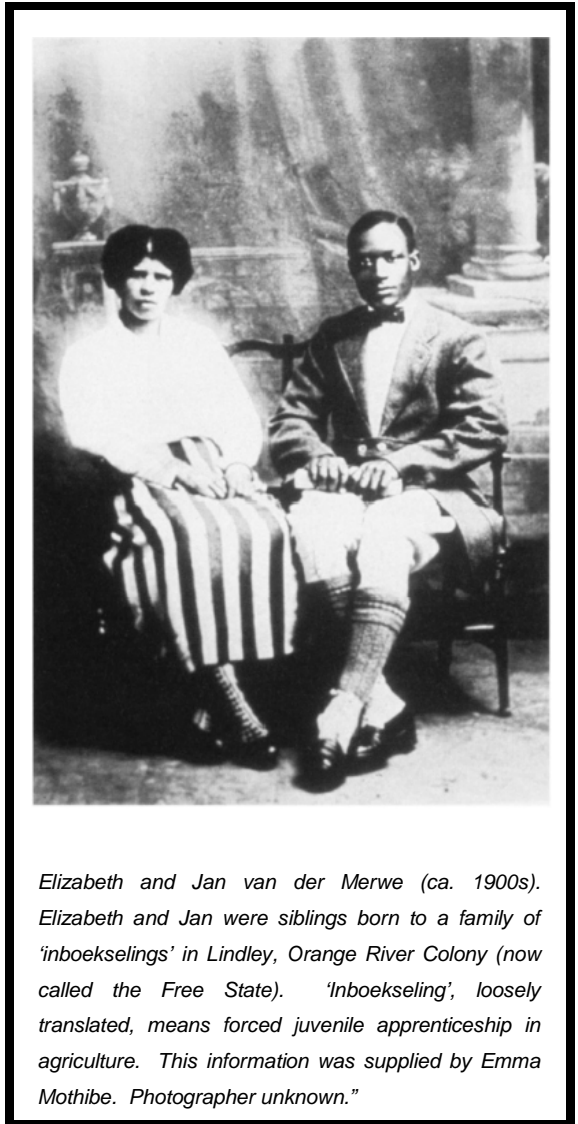
102. Mofokeng’s appropriated photographs are comparable to many nineteenth-century photographs of Boer or British colonial families, especially when comparing their poses, gestures and position of hands. Significantly, they are also comparable to Hugo’s ‘family portraits’.

103. Homi K. Bhabha (1994: 85 - 92) explains that the “reformed colonial subject” is seen and ‘othered’ by colonists as well as by people from the same culture as them. This is because the “reformed colonial subject” is seen as an example of someone with the same cultural morals and intellect as the colonist.

104. The work has been presented in this way at several exhibitions including the 2nd Johannesburg Biennale (1997).



Figure 58. Santu Mofokeng. *Black photo album/look at me: 1890 – 1950* (1997). Slide projection.  
Installation shot.



*Elizabeth and Jan van der Merwe (ca. 1900s). Elizabeth and Jan were siblings born to a family of 'inboekselings' in Lindley, Orange River Colony (now called the Free State). 'Inboekseling', loosely translated, means forced juvenile apprenticeship in agriculture. This information was supplied by Emma Mothibe. Photographer unknown."*

Figure 57. Santu Mofokeng. *Black photo album/look at me: 1890 – 1950* (1997). Slide projection.

Contemporary artists often make use of imagery that recalls conventions related to the image; they utilise the concept of the “after-image” to address and engage in the perceptions of their audiences. Carrie Mae Weems produces art that addresses formal and political issues surrounding African-American culture and draws attention to the associations of images with her series of appropriated photographs, *From here I saw what happened and I cried* (Figure 59). Weems selected nineteenth and twentieth-century archival photographs of black men and women ranging from the time of slavery in the United States to the present day. Among them are photographs depicting explicitly erotic poses, beaten bodies, the “mama” figure and four of Agassiz’s slave daguerreotypes. Weems rephotographed these pictures (after-images of the original), enlarged them, and toned them in red (Schuman 2005). Each photograph has been framed and covered with a sheet of glass inscribed with a sandblasted text added by the artist. The texts suggest ‘mental images’ and evoke several ideologies and stereotypes imposed and associated with the images of the depicted men or women. By placing the photographs in frames with circular ‘view finders’, as though the viewer is looking into a peephole or camera, she draws attention to the eye of the viewer, viewing technologies, notions of looking and spectatorship.<sup>105</sup> By adding captions over the photographs she presents several different racial identities and assumptions conjured by scientific, political and social agendas.

Weems’s appropriated photographs firstly draw attention to the human beings who have been positioned in front of the photographic apparatus to provide ‘knowledge’ to its viewer but by recontextualising them she attempts to dislocate the gaze and give the subjects a ‘voice’ (Wallis 1995: 58 – 59). Secondly, Weems focuses on the ways in which images recall perceptions of race, gender and class and how we read images through an understanding of these

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105. The pure form of the circle became a symbol for the divine omnipresence and unceasingly watchful eye (Schmidt-Burkhardt 2002: 17 – 31).

assumptions. Thirdly, she compels viewers to reassess their own moral and ethical constructs, and plays on viewers' assumptions in order to usurp them.



Figure 59. Carrie Mae Weems. *From here I saw what happened and I cried* (detail) (1995). Installation of monochromatic colour photographs with sandblasted glass.

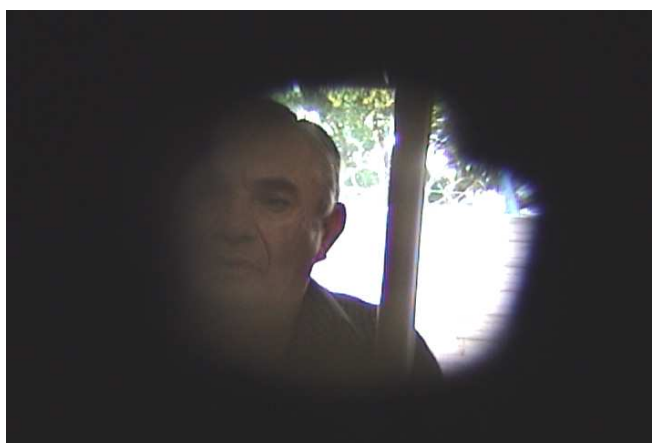


Figure 60. Angela de Jesus. Video still from Video 7 (2006 – 2009). Detail from video installation, *In exchange* (2009).



Figure 61. Mustafa Maluka. *The weight of being a minority role model detail from Bad for your health/wrong colour* (2001). Interactive website.

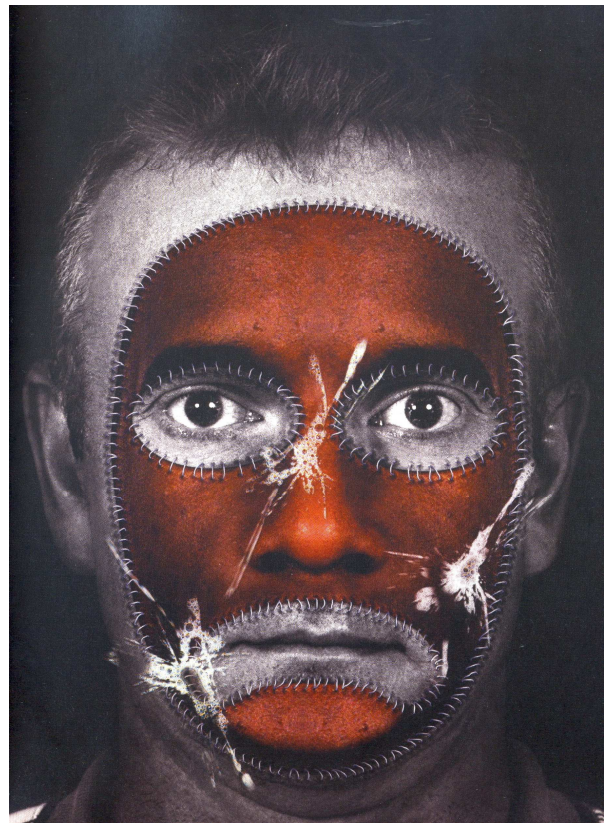


Figure 62. Mongrel. *Colour separation* (1997). Digital image.



Video 7 (Track 7 on the enclosed DVD, Figure 60) of the shop places the older white man into the objectifying position of the subject. In this video the viewer is encouraged to look at the individual as an object of vision, similarly to Video 5 and to Weems's stereotypes. The peephole, the mesmerising light, the slow motion and the bar or 'measuring stick' (in this case positioned conventionally next to the subject) is a persuasive device for indulgence. Yet the unsettling movement of the subject whose face is only partially revealed, the organic peephole which makes the viewer exceedingly aware that they are looking at someone without their possible knowledge or consent, and the extreme slow motion that discloses vulnerability and uneasiness, averts this indulgence. The video is complicated because the viewer yearns to look at it, but at the same time is uneasy with the act of looking. The man is ensnared and trapped in an image that disempowers him, yet his depiction recalls stereotypical images associated with white hegemony. Significantly, this video draws our attention to shifting power positions in the shop that are also related to viewing.

Visual technology and "technology memory" have provided an incessant pool of images that are available and support the invention and evolution of images. We can access an array of images (or images associated to other images) or transform an image with a few inputs on a computer.<sup>106</sup> Its "extensive use...does not exhaust the archive [of images] but merely enlarges it" and where "history...[is] suspended in an inescapable present in which anything and everything is available and everything can be made and remade" (Belting 2003: 86). Mustafa Maluka composes his works from elements of appropriated American hip-hop, graffiti and pop culture that have filtered through mass media technologies into Africa. Maluka retrieves images of people from magazines and the Internet and appropriates them by repainting and reworking them onto abstracted backgrounds. These images evolve over a period of months, with the repeated application of thin layers of paint that destabilise any authentic identity

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106. It is possible to access an endless amount of images by searching on web browsers, such as *Google Images*, and it is possible to manipulate an image in programs such as *Adobe Photoshop*.

or identification based on racial and ethnic traits, and that present these anonymous individuals as a constant flux of transnational and multicultural urban personas (Goniwe 2005: 222 – 225, McIntosh 2007). Portraits are traditionally the affirmation of an individual but Maluka's portraits are indeterminable and reveal nothing of their subjects;<sup>107</sup> their motile identities are “beyond individualism” where the “everyman” image is a “substitute for the elite” (Bal 2001). The way in which Maluka appropriates his images and the ambiguity of his subject suggests a constant reinvention of image and plays on viewers' assumptions and expectations of images of identity. Maluka (2002) says:

I am interested in the ways that people produce meaning. Individuals do not create their views of reality on their own, they are guided by and utilise a system of meaning created through interaction with others. It means that people make sense of a remark or a sign by reference to the context in which it occurs. I'm constantly playing games with people's assumptions. People connect particular bits of information I give them to other information that's already in their heads

Maluka's use of a vibrant layered colour and the juxtaposition of his portraits against graphic elements that resemble a vibrating globalised city (or digitalised image), appears to be in conflict with the intimately framed and head-on treatment of subjects that are linked to the “iconic immobility” in the “classical tradition of portraiture” (Maluka 2007).

It is not surprising that Maluka has taken his paintings to the ubiquitous and evolutionary domain of the Internet as his inactive paintings already suggest mobility. In his interactive work *Bad for your health/wrong colour* (Figure 61) the images respond to the interaction of its audience. In Maluka's portrait, *The weight of being a minority role model*, the eyes blink and follow the cursor of the computer mouse, and the viewer (user) is rewarded with a kiss when clicking on

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107. “A portrait, in the history of western painting, stands for the individual, the genre for individualism. Success, too: only the successful can have their portrait painted. Or are worth the painter's while” (Bal 2001). Maluka titles his paintings with random music lyrics that invoke and attach new meanings to them.

his mouth (Bal 2007). Users are encouraged to participate in the artwork as they are placed in a position of control and power, and their interaction is remunerated.<sup>108</sup> But with the paranoid eyes of the subject following the user's every movement, it is difficult to determine who is watching whom.

The collection and inclusion of several layered images, which are always shifting and unstable, suggest the way in which we read these images. In Maluka's work we encounter alternating images by our ability to change them at will and it is only through this array of images that we fully interpret the work. As an image of Maluka's own spinning head verbalises, we must "participate and observe."<sup>109</sup>

The Mongrel group is comprised of several individuals from different cultural and racial backgrounds, living in different geographic locations. Their collaborative projects, that specialise in digital media, are made possible by networked applications, search engines and exclusively designed software that regulates and organises data to address issues of race, ethnicity and class. Mongrel asks how people are monitored, classified and channelled (in technologies such as search engines) into a range of viable, culturally homogeneous positions (Thacker 2000: 70, Mongrel 2006). Technological mediums, such as the Internet, operate similarly to the archival systems. They gather, collate and permanently store information about their users that can be retrieved by others. This technology's ability to notice and track individuals and their behaviours is a process of surveying control, an omnipresent surveillance mechanism where the user cannot easily know when they are the subject of monitoring (Lyon 1994: 1 – 16, Lessing 2005: 218 – 221).<sup>110</sup> Mongrel draws our attention to the opaque and perpetual tactics of ordering and cataloguing that such technologies perform, as

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108. Another example is in a section of the work entitled *Money is of no use in the jungle*. By clicking on the dollar symbol you are 'rewarded' with the image of dollar bills whirling down from above.

109. On the title menu of the Maluka's interactive work, there is a floating head of a self-portrait of Maluka. As the user moves the cursor onto it, it spins around and comments through a speech bubble.

110. Web browsers have now implemented technology that enables users to select the kind of data they want to give away.

well as “the racial classification of people by search engines, hoping to break through the propaganda of official multiculturalism” (Stallabrass 2003: 86).

Mongrel makes use of the computer morphing and image-manipulation application, *Heritage gold*, in their series of forty images entitled *Colour separation* (Figure 62). The series was constructed from over one hundred photographs of relatives and community members related in some way to the core Mongrel group. These photographs were merged digitally into four distant types, both male and female, resulting in eight artificial, anonymous, ethnographical stereotypes. They wear the masks of their ‘other’ stereotype, which has been digitally sewn onto their faces and covered in spittle, in an image of conflicted identity. The only colour that remains is that of the mask as the rest of the image has been desaturated. Like Maluka’s layering of paint, masking the face of the anonymous subject encourages the viewer to be caught up in racial conflict, and examines the complexities of categorical ‘othering’.

Apart from the racial conflict that is implied by the spittle (a form of iconoclasm), it also indicates the presence of a viewer. The spittle appears as an afterthought or a reaction towards the “mongrel”. Although we have no idea who has done the spitting, it does imply that someone has already looked at the image. The viewer becomes mindful of the process of looking as well as the implications and effects this process generates. Although this scrutiny of power plays causes the power position to become vulnerable, the anonymity of the subjects in Mongrel’s images, as in the case of Weems stereotypes, Maluka’s portraits and the individuals of the shop, provides the viewer with the comfort to interpret them as he (she) chooses.

It would be naïve to claim that looking has lost its subjective position and thus its power. Like the surveillance or video camera, our view is partial, we choose what to see, accentuate and omit, and what we choose to see is a direct reflection on ourselves. The videos of the shop encourage self-reflection as it

gives us a means to examine our perceptions and social constructs in cross-cultural exchanges. Foucault (1999: 64) explains that “visibility is a trap” and this includes looking, for looking encompasses a complex range of paradoxical meanings and practices.

## Chapter 4

### Conflict/Fear/Iconoclasm

Social encounters and visual exchanges in the shop transpire over uncertainty, apprehension and paranoia. These interactions occur with an insinuation of uneasiness, wariness and anxiousness between each other that has been induced by perceptions and social circumstances. “Africa” being constantly represented by mass media through its conflict, wars, poverty and diseases, and the refusal or inefficacy to deal with social difficulties (such as South Africa’s crime dilemma and the Aids phenomenon) has resulted in perceptions of a continent in permanent turmoil and Afro-pessimism (Njami 2007: 13, Kellner 2007: 22 – 23). While several African scholars,<sup>111</sup> and artists alike, continuously attempt to rethink the existing notions and constructs of what constitutes the contemporary realities of Africa, it is often clouded by certitudes, intuitions and negative images that have prolonged and remain Africa’s legacy. Africa’s reality is hard to pinpoint, for its reality is constantly being questioned and doubted, because the word “Africa” already imposes certain labels and nuanced meanings,<sup>112</sup> and because the reality we know depends heavily on our experiences and our ability to choose what that reality is. Emotions and the destructive images that accompany these ‘realities’ slip into the subconscious and provoke feelings of aggression, insecurity and vulnerability that affect daily encounters, and at times lead to episodes of violence, xenophobia, anxiety and agoraphobia.

Images mean so much and have, as Bruno Latour (2002: 14) suggests, “trigger[ed] so much enduring passions” that we have come to a point where we constantly apply strategies to try and deface them. It seems, however, that the

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111. Scholars such as V.Y. Mudimbe, Olu Oguibe, Kwame Anthony Appiah, Zine Magubane and others.

112. As Ruth Simbao (2008: 59 - 60) suggests, “Africa” is maintained as an “intentionally undetermined category” which carries with it preconceived notions that speak, not of the continent, but of the “quote-unquote-place viewed in connection to a quote-unquote-race” making it a complex and nuanced term.

act of disrupting them has made these images even more complex and in turn has generated an unlimited flow of meanings. The concept of “iconoclasm” proposed by Latour (2002: 18) depends on the urge of “uncertainty” between needing images, creating and maintaining them, but at the same time a need to expose, denounce and fear them. The formulation of and the response to images is a continuous conflicting confrontation (clash) of on the one hand attempting to debunk them, but on the other hand submitting to their illusions, our perceptions and accepted ideas. These views constantly interfere with each other while the paradoxical effects of images, which are entangled in the connection that each image has with others, complicates the image and our reactions even further.

In the video installations based on footage of the shop the viewer is made conscious of intervention. That is, of the specific strategies that the videos have been subjected to: for example, the disruptive peephole that obstructs our view and the manipulation of time that exposes certain details not always visible in real time. The strategies operate as iconoclastic gestures and include: concealed objects, confined spaces and the frame of video, obstructed views, blurred movement and disrupted sound. The gestures compel viewers to become more aware of the way they look at and scrutinise images. The strategies intend to induce conflicting interpretations in the viewer that are associated with the conflicting perceptions occurring in the visual transactions taking place in the shop. This chapter takes a closer look at the edited videos of the shop, their affiliation to other images and the iconoclastic gestures that are part of their making, in the light of conditions associated with cross-cultural aggression, violence and fear. The violent attacks (in the form of assaults and robberies)<sup>113</sup> and the cross-cultural conflict that is experienced in the shop – as well as in acts of iconoclasm and image subversion – and the corresponding parallel tendencies of vulnerability and subjection also evident in the shop and in

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113. Small take away shops and supermarkets are often targets of robberies, most likely because they work with cash and have inadequate security.

images, are investigated. Alongside this is a reflection of how these tendencies have influenced the videos of the shop, and how the iconoclastic strategies applied to the videos have made their meanings even more conflicting, complicated and nuanced.

#### **4.1 Iconoclastic gestures: Violence and proliferation**

Images partake in an interlocking relationship with their viewers that has largely and at length shaped our knowledge and/or perceptions of the world. This has given images a sense of ordained importance and, in turn, has made them targets of iconoclastic acts that attempt to denounce and deprive them of this power (Freedberg 1989: 378 – 427, Gamboni 1997, Mitchell 2005: 123 – 143, Belting 2005: 308 – 309). By damaging the image or its symbols of power, as suggested by David Freedberg (1985: 25), somehow the power itself seems to diminish. Then again, as Dario Gamboni (2002: 88) states, “elimination is the other side of preservation” and “attempts to get rid of a specific image or of images at large almost invariably lead[s] to a proliferation of new images” and evidently, new meanings.<sup>114</sup> Images compel our attention and often, regardless of the consequences, arouse emotional responses of resentment that move us to anger or hostility. Iconoclasm, however, is more complicated and precarious than the simple destruction of images and, while many acts of iconoclasm seem wild and unpremeditated, there are often occasions when this is not so. The edited videos of the shop, and much art since modernism,<sup>115</sup> have used

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114. “The gesture of aggression itself, in retrospect or seen from a different perspective, can reveal itself to be a gesture of reverence – and vice versa” (Gamboni 2002: 88). Mitchell (2005: 18) explains that “iconoclasm is more than just the destruction of images; it is a ‘creative destruction’, in which a secondary image of defacement or annihilation is created at the same moment that the “target” image is attacked.”

115. “Metaphorical iconoclasm became a distinctive element of the artistic program of the ‘avant-garde’ around the time of World War I. The Futurists proposed to...demolish the museums and libraries...and the Dadaists [especially the Readymades of Marcel Duchamp] radicalised the rejection of past art into an overall condemnation of art as such, seen as part of the values and civilisation that the War revealed to be false and destructive” (Gamboni 2002: 108 – 109). Postmodernism was the golden age for “avant-garde iconoclasm” – amongst others, Robert Rauschenberg asked Willem de Kooning to give him a real drawing to be erased and the self-destroying works Jean Tinguely were executed. Contemporary “metaphorical artistic iconoclasm” (artists destroying other artworks as artistic statements) and literal “anti-



iconoclastic methods and awakened sensibilities in a purposeful and selective manner to subvert and create controversy around accepted ideas, social constructs and assumptions.

In the gallery installation of the videos of the shop the viewer is made increasingly aware of numerous iconoclastic gestures which persistently re-emerge in the installation space. These iconoclastic approaches obstruct, eclipse, rupture, blur, dim, displace and replace the images of the videos and aim to provoke emotional responses within viewers that threaten viewing constructs. The several obstructions in Video 8 (Track 8 on the enclosed DVD, Figure 63) of the shop hamper the view so that only a partial sight of the scene is detectable by the viewer. The obvious dark barrier in the centre of the video creates a split screen, or triptych, that constantly diverts the viewer's attention between the two sides and the barrier. The viewer is denied access to what is occurring behind the barrier. It becomes an aggressive device that alludes to several obscurities associated with this video and an approach that impedes the view as well as suggesting deliberate erasure, perhaps even censorship.<sup>116</sup> This limited view(s) (in the form of one or multiple peepholes or ruptures) make(s) the viewer conscious of the rectangular frame of the video screen and draws the viewer's attention to its confined space. This is an unrelenting trait of all video media – the camera acts as a blinker capturing only what is in front of its lens, omitting all other information or details surrounding it. This trait is accentuated by the impediments in the videos that contrast with the luminescence of the screen and interrupt, erase and conceal the view. The counter, in Video 8, forms an additional barrier that separates the viewer from the activities taking place in the scene while the *Black label* beer can on top of the counter adds another barrier

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artistic vandalism" has become increasingly blurred, putting the artistic status of the so-called authors of iconoclastic gestures and destructive "actions" and "performances" in the context of contemporary art theory and practice (Gamboni 2002: 114 – 123).

116. It is a common strategy in documentaries or news broadcasts that an individual's face is obscured by a black strip or blurred when they wish to remain anonymous. Censorship also evokes political connotations, as though something has intentionally been left unrecorded or wiped out – for example the violent police attacks that were censored, and later uncovered by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, towards political prisoners in the apartheid state.

that blocks and defaces the individual behind it, as if in an act of *damnatio memoriae*.<sup>117</sup> These barriers are not iconoclastic in the literal sense of demolition, but rather one of desecration that ‘breaks’ the image and constitutes a deliberate absence that prevents the viewer from indulging in the scene.



Figure 63. Angela de Jesus. Video still from Video 8 (2006 – 2009).  
Detail from video installation, *In exchange* (2009).

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117. *Damnatio memoriae* was an ancient Roman practice (a modern term despite its apparently legalistic Roman formulation) where the features or bodies of images (and other historical records) of someone who had been condemned were transformed (in a form of “airbrushing”) or effaced completely in an attempt to forget them, deface them or deny that they had ever existed - a notion of censoring, damning and even continual punishment. A mark of iconoclasm that was both a sign of the new and equally an erasure of the old. It called explicit attention to what was erased and the fact that it was erased – memory is erased but ironically by erasure it is made more memorable (Elsner 2003: 214 - 219).

It is difficult to pinpoint any individual in the video and make sense of what is happening behind these barriers as the viewer is only offered glimpses into a view that brings more complexities to the scene. On the left people move rapidly into and out of sight, at times appearing or disappearing altogether – this is typical of economic exchange as the relationships in the shop are predominantly temporary. The mirror depicted on the top left of the video screen presents reflections from a different perspective within the same scene. There is an interesting dynamic between the individual moving in and out on the left, and the reflection above this because the reflection only shows fragments of bodies (usually the lower body, in Figure 63 the mirror reflects a child) while only the individuals' upper bodies are portrayed outside of the mirror frame. A comparison can be made between the video camera and the mirror, both trace what is placed in front of them, both are restricted and show only fragments of the whole setting. The mirrored reflection within the video scene is a *mise en abyme*.<sup>118</sup> The view we are offered on the left of this video encompasses an iconoclastic gesture because it provides several frames within the rectangular video frame. This suggests a continuation of images, or as Latour (2002: 32) has put it, a “cascade of images” where one image never quite reaches the foundation of the reality it intends to record, but always refers to another image, which then again refers to another image.<sup>119</sup> One image is displaced and replaced by another as an after-effect or an after-image.

On the right of the video, the viewer's attention is occupied with the uncomfortable restlessness of the seated individual who appears to be in a drunken state. Although the person is constantly visible the viewer is unable to relate to him because the blurred movement disallows fixation. His unsettling presence – once more a suggestion of the after-image as the overlapping blurred

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118. *Mise en abyme* (French term meaning “placing into infinity” or “placing into the abyss”) refers to the reduplication of an image within another image that generally implies a sequence appearing to recur infinitely (Stoichita 1997: 217 – 218).

119. “Images do count; they are not mere tokens, and not because they are prototypes of something away, above, beneath; they count because they allow one to move to another image, exactly as frail and modest as the former one – but different” (Latour 2002: 32).

movement that cross fades into each other insinuates continual movement – is interfering. The fluctuating sound adds yet another layer of disruption to the video; a cacophony that the viewer is unable to make sense of. The endless repetitive tone of non-specific sounds elicits an emotional response that we cannot help but be affected by, its resonance inscrutable and perplexing. The comfort the viewer craves in indulging in what he (she) sees is denied by the audio track, which additionally (like the visual track) recalls other violent sounds and images associated with the scene and impedes the viewing process.

Besides the strategies in the videos themselves, at times, the processes of capturing and retrieving the videos of the shop suggest iconoclastic gestures. This is because the video camera is hidden in a box where viewing holes have been pierced and cut out with a sharp tool. In the case of retrieving, selecting and editing raw video material and surveillance footage, the videos are digitally cut, pasted and rearranged, and then manipulated further with editing tools that often resemble iconoclastic instruments – such as the slice or cut tool represented by a scissors or a razor blade in most image (e.g. Adobe Photoshop) and video (e.g. Final Cut) editing programs. The edited videos of the shop employ iconoclastic approaches that attempt to aggressively draw attention to stereotypes and viewing habits. These approaches create conflicting meanings and expose ideologies; but they are more complex and ambivalent than this. For the concept of the after-image implies that we can never completely destroy or be free from the original image, as subsequent images recall preceding ones.

The satirical approaches and transgressive themes of the popular *Bitterkomix* anthology has raised extremely uncomfortable questions about racial stereotyping and the confused state of the South African cultural and socio-political landscape; as well as fallen under the critique that the redeployment of these stereotypes has simply reenergised and entrenched them. *Bitterkomix* represents ample contradictions and exigencies of South African society; the

authoritarian power of the past and the power politics of the present (Meesters 2000). The publication's iconoclastic sensibility, its bold graphic style and its references to genres from popular literature or culture, present social and political commentary with a dark, sometimes cruel, sense of humour. It offers ironic images that raise thought-provoking questions about entitlement, guilt and fear. The comics, that host work by Anton Kannemeyer (pseudonym Joe Dog) and Conrad Botes (as well as several contributions and collaborations by other artists including Lorcan White, aka Mark Kannemeyer, and Ina van Zyl), deal with contentious issues and subject matter most tend to avoid.<sup>120</sup> *Bitterkomix* is characterised by its sexually and racially charged imagery, its irony and destruction of taboos, its acerbic attack and debunking of white Afrikaner ideology and its critique and ambivalent attitude towards the broader South African society (Barnard 2004: 719 – 754).

In a parody of the cover of Hergé's *Tintin in the Congo*<sup>121</sup> (Figure 64) Anton Kannemeyer has re-drawn this controversial publication's cover calling it *Pappa in Afrika* (Figure 64). It features Boetie and his black 'chauffeur' driving through a Sierra Leone-like landscape<sup>122</sup> with AK-47 toting soldiers, skulls, dead bodies and maimed people (de Vries 2007). Boetie, Kannemeyer's pre-pubescent, Tintin-inspired alter-ego is a white African trapped in his own incriminating skin – a character who cannot escape his colonial past and guilt regardless of his personal political convictions (Shainman 2008). Kannemeyer utilises Hergé's contrast of the bland eternally youthful appearance of the young hero Tintin with the exaggerated racist appearance of the pitch-black, thick-lipped colonial African stereotype (Barnard 2004: 742). The saccharine world of Hergé's adventures is

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120. The relatively large amount of sexual and violent scenes in *Bitterkomix* has raised a storm of controversy and censorship problems, provoking an explicit silk-screen by Anton Kannemeyer to be damaged with spraypaint at an exhibition of his work in Durban (Meesters 2000).

121. *Tintin in the Congo* is the second of the Adventures of Tintin, a series of classic comic-strip albums written and illustrated by Belgian illustrator Hergé (Hunt 2002: 90 – 92). *Tintin in the Congo* has often been criticised as having racist and colonialist views, as well as several scenes of violence and disregard towards fauna and flora.

122. A lasting feature of the civil war in Sierra Leone that ended in 2002, in which thousands of people died, is the atrocities committed by the rebels, whose trademark was to hack off the hands or feet of their victims.

turned on its head by the machine-gun-toting soldier standing guard and the 'poor natives' watching the "sponsored by *De Beers*"<sup>123</sup> car filled with United Nations food supplies and boxes labelled *Texaco*<sup>124</sup> and *Halliburton*<sup>125</sup> (de Vries 2007). Ironically the hospitable smile of the soldier and Boetie's content expression are reminders of many tourist images which invite its viewers to indulge in the scene.

Kannemeyer's ironic re-appropriation provides an after-image of this commercial image, where the giraffe in Hergé's image is replaced by a crafted African memento in Kannemeyer's work; where Snowy, Tintin's faithful dog, has been removed from the car and is seen barking at a native. Kannemeyer's work deliberately intends to recall, displace and replace Hergé's comic in an iconoclastic manner.

Anton Kannemeyer's *Alphabet of democracy*<sup>126</sup> deliberately provokes strong initial emotions of outrage and/or disgust through racial stereotyping and controversial images (such as *B is for black*, *N is for nightmare* and *Z is for Zuma*) in Hergé trademark "clear line style" and then "attempts to deflect this emotion onto a more fundamental and perhaps less obvious target of critique" (Barnard 2004: 743 – 744). In this context the word "democracy" becomes a

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123. There has been controversy and accusations directed towards *De Beers* company for allegedly housing workers in subhuman conditions in their diamonds mines as well as being accused of being one of the businesses that profited from, and was involved with, the South African apartheid government. *Anglo American*, the partial owner of *De Beers*, has also been fiercely criticised for human rights violations in the Congo (Macalister 2005).

124. *Texaco* is an American oil retail brand. Its flagship product is fuel and its brand name is strong in West Africa. In 1996 *Texaco* paid \$170 million to settle racial discrimination lawsuits filed by black employees at the company. This was particularly damaging to *Texaco*'s public relations and one of the largest racial discrimination lawsuit settlements in the United States (Holt & Boor 1998).

125. *Halliburton* is an oil field services corporation with international operations in several countries. It has been in the forefront of several media and political controversies in relation to its previous work for the United States government, its political ties and its corporate ethics. The company has been at the centre of numerous inquiries over alleged accounting malpractice, suspicious payments to officials and allegations of improper dealings in Kuwait, Nigeria and Iraq (Buncombe 2007).

126. The *Alphabet of democracy* is an ongoing project which can be seen in *Bitterkomix*'s most recent publication *Bitterkomix 15* (2008). This issue deals with white fear, colonialism and other social issues (de Vries 2008: 58).

subversive, an iconoclastic gesture that imposes a provocative outlook on South Africa's socio-political setting in an attempt to uproot it. Kannemeyer's interest in tackling these cultural issues, however, is again at risk of falling victim to critique that suggests that by depicting his obscene subject matter he is entrenching them, that his method is an offensive reinforcement of racist stereotypes. Such critique is not unfounded, as Gamboni's (2002: 88) suggests, for the desecration of images results not only in the formation of new images but in the persistence of old ones. Thus Kannemeyer's gestures do not avert ideas and stereotypes but rather add more meanings (or mis-meanings) to the images that make them even more complex.

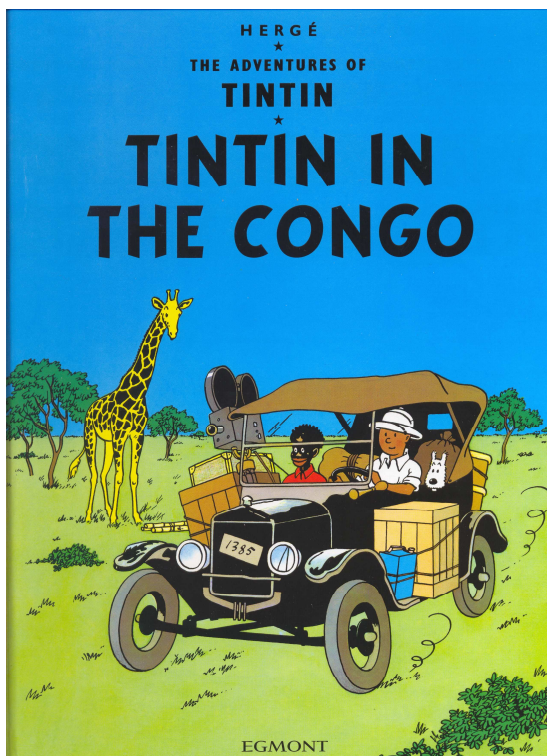


Figure 64. Hergé. *The Adventures of Tintin. Tintin in the Congo* (first published in French in 1946).  
Cover illustration.

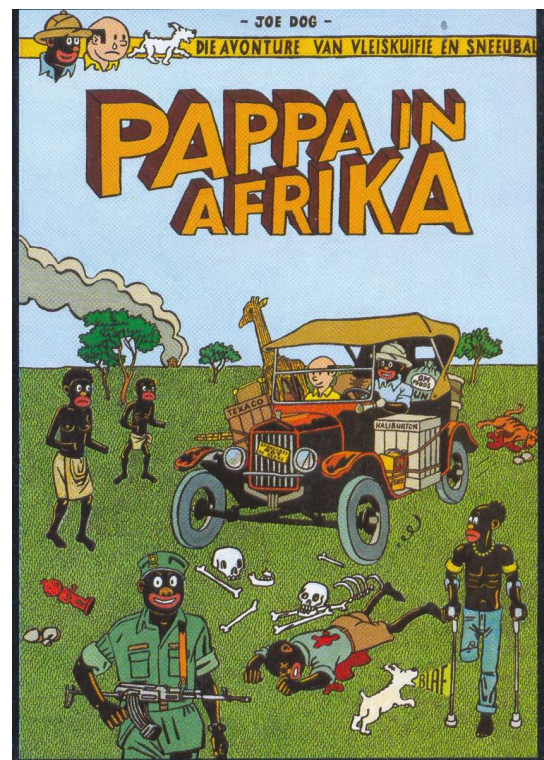


Figure 65. Anton Kannemeyer. *Die avonture van Vleiskuijie en Sneeuwal. Pappa in Afrika* (2006 - 2007). Lithographic print.

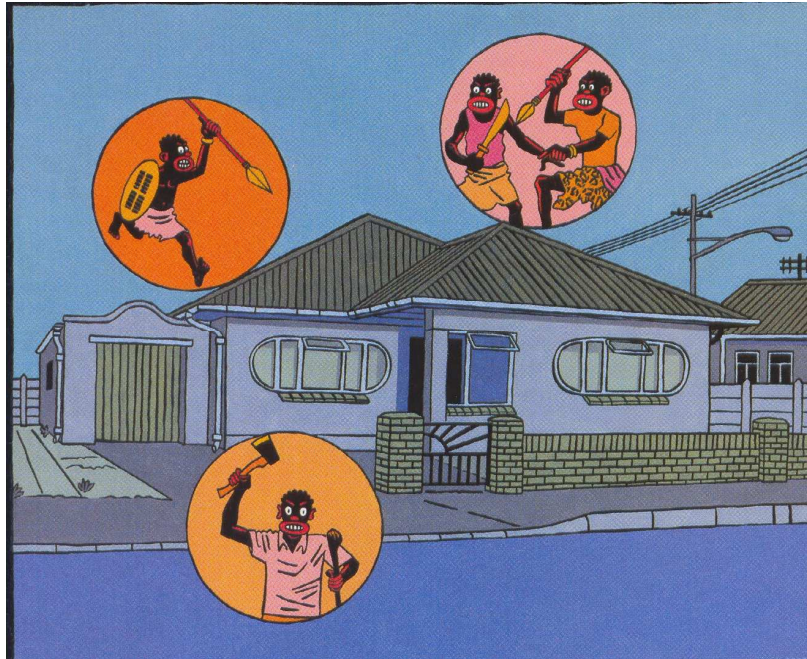


Figure 66. Anton Kannemeyer. *N is for nightmare* (2008). *Alphabet of democracy* (2006 – 2008). Lithographic print.



Figure 67. Angela de Jesus. Video still from Video 4 (2006 – 2009).  
Detail from video installation, *In exchange* (2009).



In *N is for nightmare* (Figure 66) Kannemeyer depicts a suburban home with suggestions of perversion, guilt and paranoia; represented by the appearance of Hergé-like black African stereotypes in circular frames superimposed on the house. The depicted Hergé-like stereotypes attack each other and threaten the viewer with intimidating weapons and gestures that intend to hack, slash and puncture. The image is a play on white fear and pokes fun at racial perceptions, paranoia and suspicion in the white South African psyche. This is a consciousness that can be compared to Video 4 (Track 4 on the enclosed DVD, Figure 67) of the shop. It is probable that the individual in the middle of the screen, in Video 4, who perceptibly watches the two men passing by, has formed mind-images of the black men that resemble Kannemeyer's circular superimposed frames – visual transactions that are based on perceptions, paranoia, suspicion and apprehension.

The iconoclastic gestures, in the form of the deconstructed peephole and the dividing pole that splits through the face of the child, utilised in Video 5 (Track 5 on the enclosed DVD, Figure 68) of the shop disrupt the viewing process and deliberately complicate the image. With this approach in mind, the peephole begins to resemble a bullet-hole more than a viewfinder, and the pole becomes a metaphorical violent weapon that attacks and breaks the image. There is another concern when investigating Video 5, a reflexive moment where one begins to query why it has been captured and presented in this way. Where the space of the video becomes a claustrophobic 'trapped' environment with its selective and limited view provided by the peephole, and where the pole alters from a dividing weapon to a protective barrier.



Figure 68. Angela de Jesus. Video still from Video 5 (2006 – 2009).  
Detail from video installation, *In exchange* (2009).

## 4.2 Fear and the vulnerability of the image

Iconoclastic acts have often been motivated by a desire to reveal an image as just that, a mere image with no supernatural embodiment of something that is alive. “We fear the image which appears to be alive, because it cannot be so; and so people may evince their fear, or demonstrate mastery over the consequences of elision, by breaking or mutilating the image; they disrupt the apparent unity of sign and signified by making plain the ordinary materiality of the sign” (Freedberg 1985: 35). People are afraid of images, and they make us anxious. We fight over them, destroy them, and blame them for our own bad behaviour (Mitchell 2005: 141). Ironically it is in these iconoclastic acts that we treat images as if they have real presence, as “pseudopersons”, with a living and humane reality.<sup>127</sup> Often iconoclasts target the subject of the image by cutting off their hands or feet, by effacement or by ‘blinding’ them with attacks on the eyes as though the “image possess a kind of vital, living character” that makes it “capable of suffering harm” and “feeling what is done to it” (Mitchell 2005: 127). The disfigurement, vandalism, humiliation or degradation of an image (like the mutilation of a living body) can be just as forceful as its actual destruction, and can turn this destruction of the image into a specular image in its own right.

Images are vulnerable to violent gestures; unable to protect themselves, they can be destroyed, broken, damaged or manipulated (literally man-handled). This affects not only material images but also mental representations. Pauline Gutter’s videowork *Bullet proof* (Figure 69 – 76)<sup>128</sup> deals with the vulnerability of “the image of the white Afrikaner farmer[s]” as exposed targets. She combines several overlapping and interchangeable scenes, which provide visual as well as audio tracks that suggest attacks on this mental image (i.e. iconoclasm). Although these victims are unknown to their perpetrators they are often attacked

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127. For, as Hans Belting (1994: 261) explains, images are “not mute but capable of speech, which touches the feelings by arousing persons and events of life.”

128. The video is available at [www.paulinegutter.co.za/videos](http://www.paulinegutter.co.za/videos).

because they fit this particular profile, regardless of their beliefs and discriminative values. As described by Mitchell (2005: 20) “iconoclasm is not just a belief structure but a structure of beliefs about other peoples’ beliefs,” as such, “it depends upon stereotype and caricature (image repertoires that reside on the borders of social difference)” and “the images that govern a normative picture of other people”. Gutter represents this kind of image in a framed photograph in one of the opening scenes that functions like a *mise en abyme* (Figure 69). The photograph of a couple, that we assume to be victims of a farm attack, is surrounded by disembodied hands and arms that appear around a table. Gutter utilises the motif of fragments repeatedly, in that she subjects vulnerable segments of bodies for visual analysis by the viewer, throughout the video. These are comprised of several scenes of seemingly decapitated (by the frame of the video) or vulnerably exposed necklines (Figure 70), sliced or injured body parts (Figure 71), and wounded or scoping eyes. She adds another iconoclastic gesture by the use of split screens (either horizontally or vertically) in select scenes (Figure 72). By utilising these techniques she shows the vulnerability of this mental image and suggests the helplessness of people who resemble it.



Figure 69. Pauline Gutter. Video still from *Bullet proof* (2006).



Figure 70. Pauline Gutter. Video still from *Bullet proof* (2006).



Figure 71. Pauline Gutter. Video still from *Bullet proof* (2006).



Figure 72. Pauline Gutter. Video still from *Bullet proof* (2006).

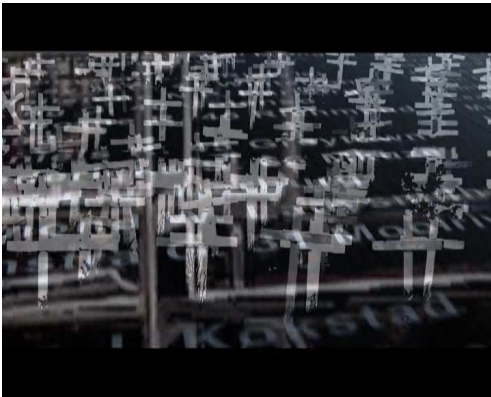


Figure 73. Pauline Gutter. Video still from *Bullet proof* (2006).



Figure 74. Pauline Gutter. Video still from *Bullet proof* (2006).

Gutter's characteristic overlay of motifs, for example the lengthy list of grave inscriptions over never-ending white crosses (Figure 73) and the blood splatters and smears imposed on walls or other objects (Figure 74), suggests an endless array of scenes, most probably to indicate the incessancy and severity of these farm attacks. At the same time this trait exposes the consistent images (after-image) related to violence and their inability to escape from these associations. Gutter begins her video with only an audio track gradually accompanied by distressing imagery. The documentary-style voice-over of a woman (speaking English with a distinct German accent) describing an attack that happened to her is interspersed with random noises of a baby crying, a dog barking and other inscrutable sounds, as well as the opus of repetitive mechanical thuds and bangs as background echoes, creates a parallel overlapping approach to the visual imagery. At times Gutter extorts the voices from the mouths of her characters. In a specific scene Gutter has extracted the woman's voice from her depiction leaving her with the silent gestures that resemble a fist, strangulation and suffocation; unmistakably violent actions that imitate her assailant. With these motifs and sounds, as well as with the tremor and the hurried movement of the operating camera, Gutter invokes fear of immanent violence in her audience. The video incites apprehension, anxiety and even symptoms of agoraphobia – tendencies that are becoming more potent in social encounters.

In the videos of the shop the viewer is confined to the fixed view offered by the peephole and experiences anxiety in an environment where they have little control. Viewing the videos is entrapping, unsettling, and suggests feelings that can be directly correlated to incidences of agoraphobia.<sup>129</sup> Video 9 (Track 9 on the enclosed DVD, Figure 75) directs our attention to the hesitant and fearful manner in which we observe and encounter one another; an experience very familiar and evident in today's South Africa. For, as Pep Subirós (2000: 59) writes, South Africa is a society in which "half the people live in terror of crime

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129. Agoraphobia derives from Greek language and literally translates to "a fear of the marketplace." Agoraphobia is a condition where people avoid spaces or situations associated with anxiety (Dinsmoor 2006).

and the other half considers it a normal part of life, a risk you take, like bad weather or traffic accidents.”<sup>130</sup> It appears that South Africans (those that have the financial means) are finding increasingly more ways to barricade (with fences, bars, alarm systems, security companies, estates, and CCTV cameras) and safeguard themselves in their environments. In turn this creates a confined society, a society that is tense and alert wherever it goes, and one in which its members deliberately detach themselves from each other.

In Video 9 the viewer is a fearful onlooker whose view is mostly concealed and obstructed.<sup>131</sup> The viewer is placed in the position of the hidden camera (which is contained in a box)<sup>132</sup> where they too are restricted and hidden from view, where everything that is seen or heard is limited and unclear. The viewers become victims who hide and watch their attackers from a constrained space. On the one hand the barriers obstruct the view and limit the viewer from indulging, but on the other these blockades are comforting because they create a safe distance of observation. Colin Richards (2006: 92 – 95) argues that in South Africa violence is felt in our social fabric and is visible in much of our cultural work. He suggests that its motivations, mediations and meanings are embedded in contemporary art, and to think of art through violence is important and potentially revelatory in order to understand the depth and density of our lived experiences. The videos of the shop and the video installation are vulnerable to being read as we wish, as they convey non-discursive, nonverbal information that is often ambiguous and can be interpreted in several forms.

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130. In Pep Subirós's (2001: 59) curated exhibition and exhibition catalogue: *Africas. The artist and the city. A journey and an exhibition*, he reveals South Africa and its cities to be places where almost everybody fears everybody else and how this fear is contagious. He describes a daunting journey through the cities, where he was constantly reminded of the economic and political disillusionment, social vengeance and the high crime rate. He also suggests that perhaps the situation in South Africa is a “low intensity civil war that takes the form of crime”.

131. Hindered by the peepholes, bars and camera blur.

132. The video camera was initially hidden to protect it from being stolen.



Figure 75. Angela de Jesus. Video stills from Video 9 (2006 – 2009).  
Detail from video installation, *In exchange* (2009).



## Chapter 5

### Conclusion

The complex relationships between images and their viewers are comparable to the face-to-face communications that transpire in the shop. As Belting (2005) and Mitchell (2005) have confirmed, images embody and possess a real, living presence and it is within this presence that interaction, perception and interpretation takes place. Images can exchange knowledge with their viewers and can have power over them, but images are also vulnerable to suspicion and can be harmed and enhanced through manipulation. Images are permanently in a state of flux, producing after-images that contain new meanings while still recalling past associations. The interpretation of images is a struggle, as they often disclose meanings that are ambiguous or are at odds with each other.

The videos of the shop in the video installation space offer their viewers a 'selectively real' viewpoint. The videos in the gallery space are seemingly everyday records, but in capturing them they become hyper-realities of the shop which is accentuated by their editing, grouping and placement. The videos show people and their interactions in this public space, but are personal and self-reflexive. They say something about ourselves and the ways in which we interpret each other. They compel us to reassess our own ideologies and ethical constructs, and they encourage us to add new meanings to them. The videos play on viewers' assumptions in order to unravel them, yet, as this study has argued, images can never be completely undone and they continue to contain meanings embedded within them.

The video installation in the gallery space is thrilling in a number of ways as it displays glimpses into other people's lives. The viewers are intrigued and take pleasure in the act of looking, indulging in their own voyeuristic desires. They are curious and make comparisons between their own lives and the lives on the

screen. This indulgence, however, is disrupted by an environment of flickering and changing images. The videos constantly demand the viewers' attention and the cacophony of repetitive sounds, which echo through the space, is unsettling. Viewers are enthralled by the people that they watch from the safe position of the gallery space, and at the same time they are distracted by an overwhelming, disorienting space. In the installation the viewers are entrapped in an experiential digital video environment that reflects the stimulating but paralyzing experience of the shop.

Video 1 (Track 1 in video material, Figure 76) captures the fleeting and perpetual moments of exchange in the shop. Exchanges are quick, conflicting, filled with anxiety and preoccupied with suspicion. These socio-economic encounters and visual transactions carry the weight of many socio-political constructs, ideologies, interpretations and perceptions. Yet in a brief moment, where money and goods are exchanged and hands unintentionally touch as they meet across the counter, we connect at a fundamental human level. This study has used the shop as a model in order to understand intercultural interaction, perception and interpretation. While it argues that visual exchanges are inconsistent and distorted, it also reveals a common reciprocity, mutual understanding and a very human vulnerability.



Figure 76. Angela de Jesus. Video 1 (2006 – 2009).  
Detail from video installation, *In exchange* (2009). Video still.

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## **Abstract**

Encounters between the Portuguese explorers of the fifteenth-century and the people living on the southern tip of Africa initiated interaction and trade between Europeans and Africans. My Portuguese heritage within a family of shopkeepers has provided me with a selective point of view from which to investigate the complexities involved in cross-cultural exchange, visual perception and image interpretation. The analysis of appropriated surveillance footage collected from CCTV cameras installed in the shop and the investigation of my own videos captured with hidden digital hand-held video camcorders, elucidates concerns related to intercultural interaction and exchange. In the shop the exchange of goods occurs, concomitantly with an exchange of vision and cross-cultural perception; the video camera surveys this exchange and translates it into images. It is argued that visual and intercultural processes have, with the aid of visual technologies and mediums (such as the panorama and digital video), become central to the ways in which cultures are perceived. This study proposes that interpreting images (for example in the photographs of Pieter Hugo and Zwelethu Mthethwa), like intercultural exchange, is paradoxical and ambiguous, as often these images evoke associations with conflicting meanings. It is argued that iconoclasm complicates image interpretation and visual perception further, as it is related both to destructive strategies and the vulnerability of the image. While the study argues that visual exchanges are by nature inconsistent and distorted, they still expose a common reciprocity and human vulnerability.

**Key words:** Trade transactions – visual exchange – intercultural interpretation – image theory – perceptions of Africa – surveillance – visual technologies – new media – digital video art – iconoclasm.

## **Abstrak**

Ontmoetings tussen die Portugese ontdekkingsreisigers van die vyftiende-eeu en die mense wat op die suidelike punt van Afrika geleef het, het interaksie en handel tussen die Europeërs en inwoners van Afrika geïnisieer. My Portugese agtergrond in 'n familie van winkeliers bied my 'n selektiewe gesigshoek van waar ek die kompleksiteit ten opsigte van kruis-kulturele uitruiling, visuele waarneming en beeldinterpretasie kan ondersoek. Die ondersoek van die versameling en gebruik van beeldmateriaal verkry van Geslote Baan Televisie (CCTV) kameras wat binne die winkel geïnstalleer is, asook die produksie van my eie beeldmateriaal met versteekte digitale draagbare video kameras, is verhelderend ten opsigte van inter-kulturele interaksie en ruiltransaksies. In die winkel vind die uitruiling van goedere plaas tesame met die uitruiling van visie en kruis-kulturele waarneming. Die video kamera oorsien hierdie uitruiling en vertaal dit in beeldmateriaal. Daar word geargumenteer dat visuele en inter-kulturele prosesse met die hulp van visuele tegnologie en media (soos die panorama en digitale video), sentraal staan ten opsigte van die maniere waarop kulture beskou word. Hierdie studie stel voor dat die interpretasie van voorstellings (soos in die foto's van Pieter Hugo en Zwelethu Mthethwa), net soos inter-kulturele uitruiling, paradoksaal en dubbelsinnig is, omdat hierdie voorstellings dikwels assosiasies met konflikterende betekenis uitlok. Daar word geargumenteer dat beeldinterpretasie en visuele waarneming verder gekompliseer word deur ikonoklasme wat verband hou met sowel die destruktiewe gebare en strategieë in voorstellings, as die kwesbaarheid van voorstellings. Terwyl die studie argumenteer dat visuele uitruiling uiteraard inkonsekwent en verwronge is, word erken dat daar steeds 'n algemene wedersyds-menslike kwesbaarheid daaraan verbonde is.

**Sleutelwoorde:** Ruiltransaksies – visuele uitruiling – inter-kulturele interpretasie – beeldteorie – persepsies van Afrika – visuele bewakingstegnologieë – visuele tegnologieë – nuwe media – digitale video kuns – ikonoklasme.

## Notes to the reader

The videos on the accompanying DVD are named Track 1 – 9 and refer to Videos 1 – 9 discussed in the text. The videos are in the *QuickTime* format and need to be played with a *QuickTime* player. This player is part of any *Apple* operating system. For *Windows* computers, the videos can be played through the *QuickTime player* available for *Windows*. A self extracting copy of *QuickTime* 7.6 for *Windows XP* or *Vista* is included on the accompanying DVD or can be downloaded from the *Apple* website (<<http://www.apple.com/quicktime/download>>). The system requirements for *QuickTime* 7.6 are:

1. A Pentium processor-based PC or compatible computer
2. At least 128MB of RAM
3. *Windows XP* Service Pack 2 or *Vista*.

To install *QuickTime* 7.6 from the DVD simply execute the installation file (*QuickTimeInstaller.exe*) and follow the prompts.

Please note that there are some issues with image decoding on the *Windows*'s player. Please make sure that the *Use high quality video setting when available* checkbox is checked under the *QuickTime Player Preferences* menu. This is found under *Edit*→*Preferences*→*Player Preferences*.

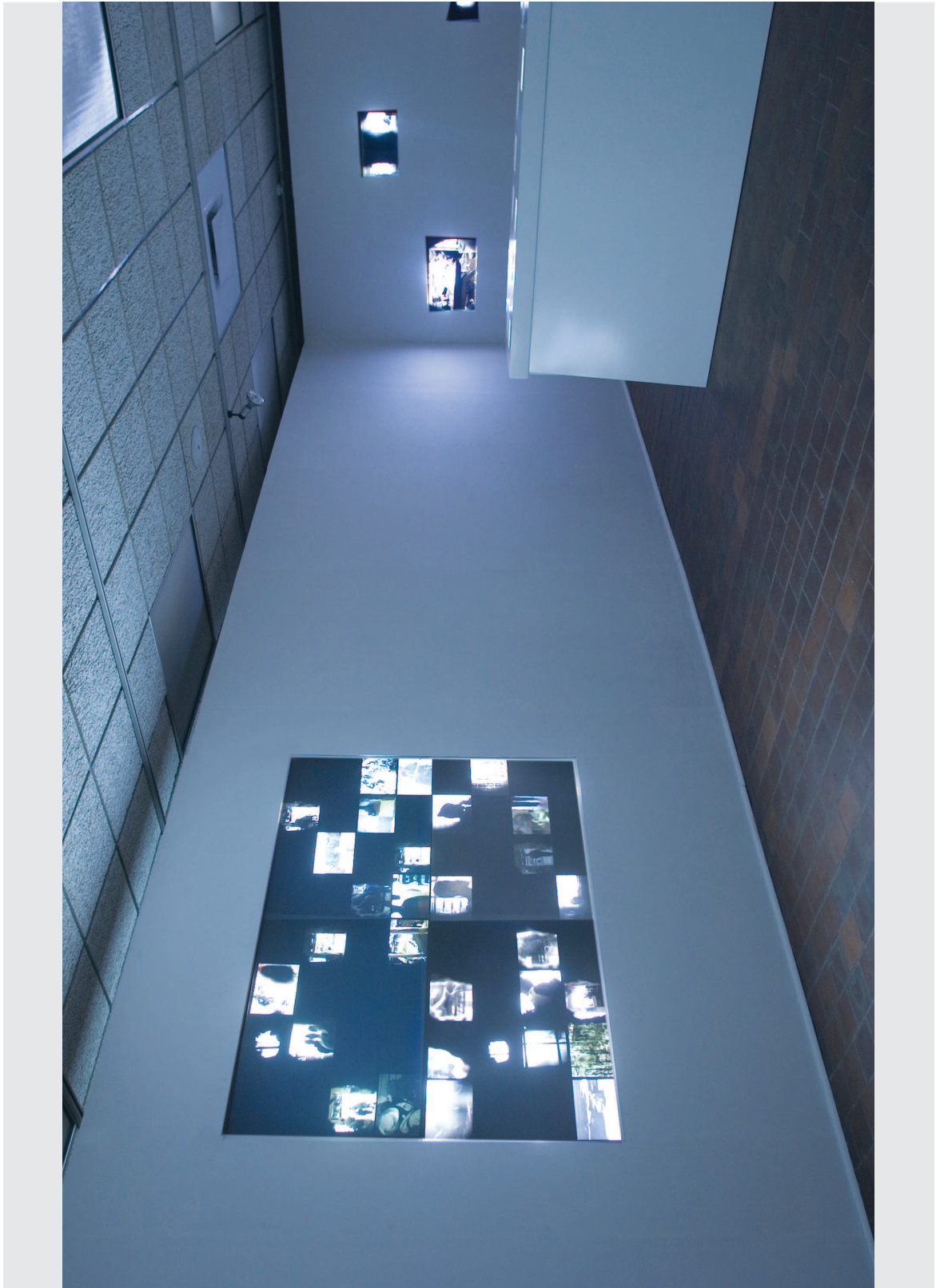
# Addendum





# *In exchange*

*a video installation by Argela de Jesus*



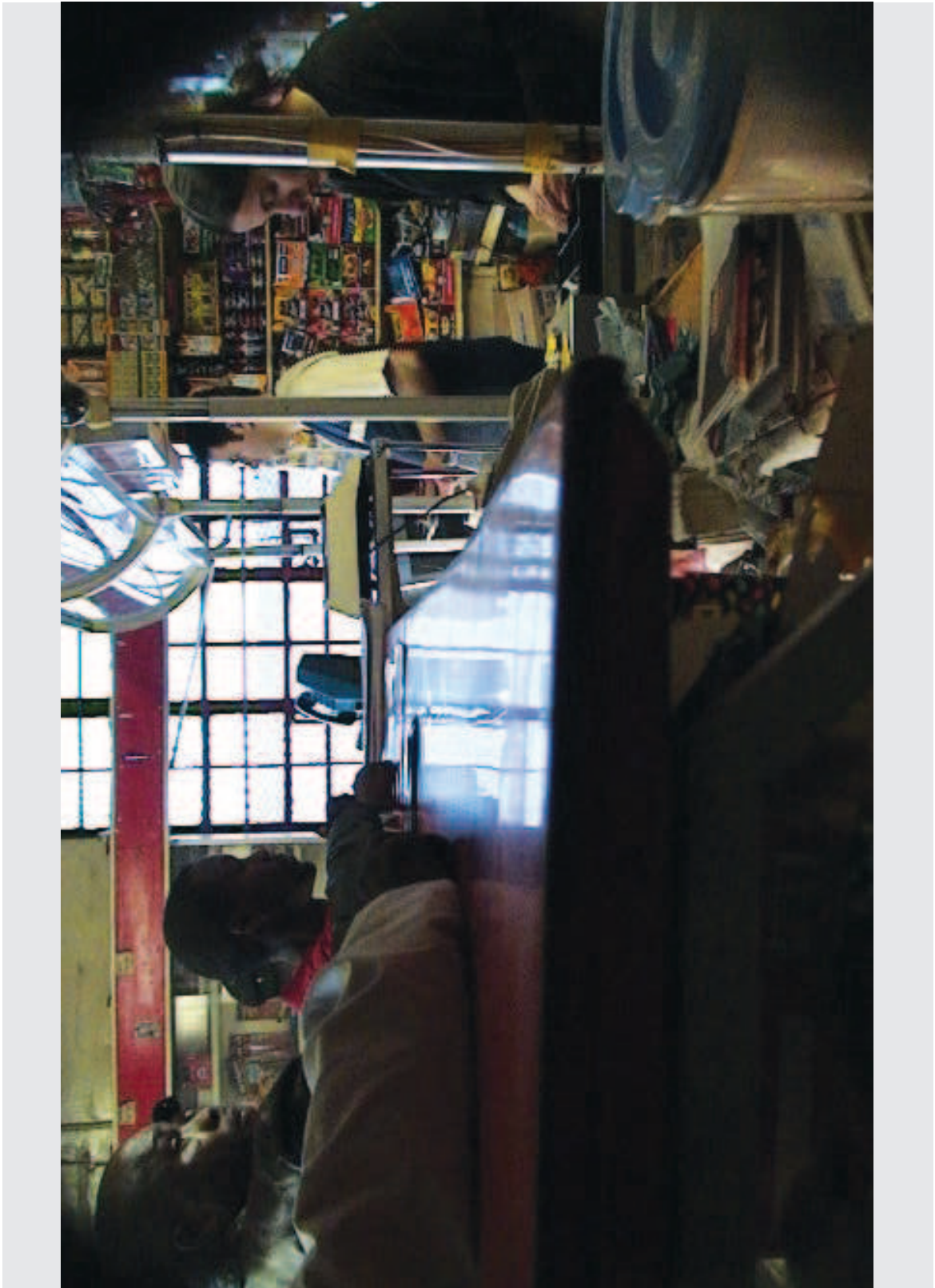
# *In exchange*

*a video installation by Angela de Jesus*

*in partial compliance with the requirements for the  
MA (Fine Arts) degree, University of the Free State*

*Johannes Stegmann Art Gallery  
17 April - 29 April 2009*

*Installation photographs by Rian Horn  
Catalogue layout Lisa Le Breton*



***In exchange*  
a video installation by Angela de Jesus**

In *In exchange* the often-overlooked subtle moments and 'power plays' involved in economic and visual transactions become evident. *In exchange* is a process of interchange. It characterizes the tactile trade between shopkeeper and customer, the visual exchanges in cross-cultural encounters, and the interpretation of videos in a gallery space - an interchange taking place between videos and viewers.

This project materialised in a small take-away shop on one of the corners of a busy street on the periphery of Bloemfontein's central business district and its neighbouring townships. The shop has a tavern accessible through a back entrance and a house next door, hidden by a brick wall, with two large windows. These windows overlook the surrounding businesses, the buzzing constant traffic, a stream of daily pedestrians and the dilapidated surroundings that are in close proximity to the city's taxi rank, cooling towers, a scrapyard and

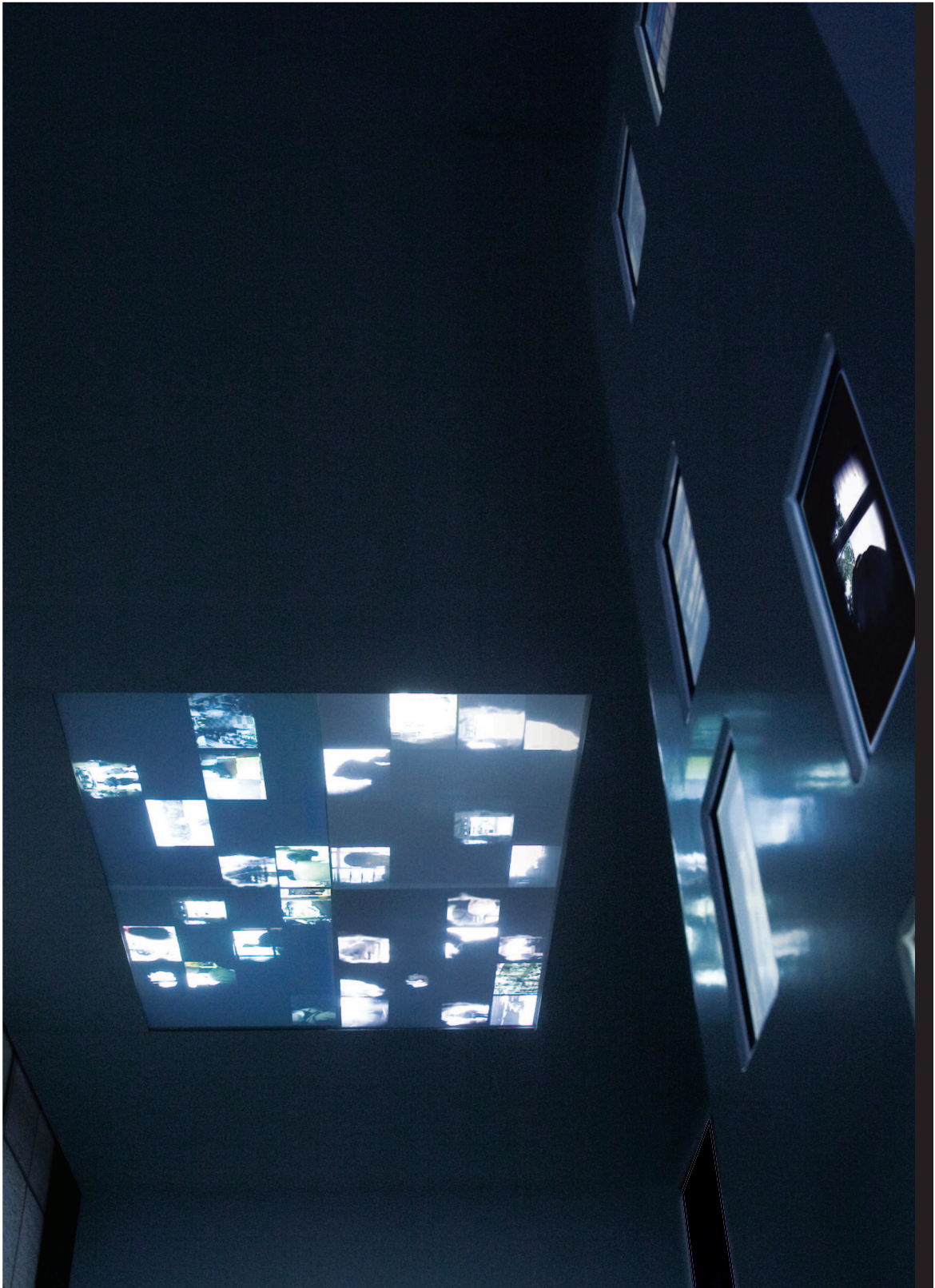
many desolate buildings. The shop sells commercial food and household products but mainly tobacco and alcohol. It targets a black working clientele as well as a diverse range of cultural groups and people, including a poor white community that resides in close-by flats, a variety of homeless people, many African immigrants who live and have set up small businesses in the area, and a young generation of students from the nearby college.

The shop serves as a microcosm of a particular community. It is a place with a constant routine, a unique etiquette, intercultural encounters and interchanges yet also one of paranoia, misinterpretation, misrepresentation, guilt and suspicion. One moment it is benign and friendly, the next tempers are flaring and racial slurs are being hurled. The exchange of money for goods in the shop does not occur trivially, it is part of a cross-cultural multisensory exchange affected by perceptions, assumptions

and ideas of one another. These visual exchanges are products of preconceptions or misconceptions, subject to social and individual ideologies or belief systems and are rooted in racial and cultural notions. With these come complexities such as social tension, violent behaviour, suspicion, xenophobia, anxiety and agoraphobia; social phenomena characteristic of a disjuncted, divided and disconnected society.

My Portuguese heritage within a family of shopkeepers and my experience of working in the shop has proven to be complex and multifaceted. It has however provided me with a selective viewpoint from which to investigate the intricacies involved in intercultural exchange and visual perception. The collection and appropriation of surveillance footage from CCTV cameras installed in the shop and the production of my own videos with hidden digital hand-held video camcorders around these spaces has provided a medium with which to

— Video still from *Video I* on video wall.  
Detail from video installation, *In exchange*,  
2009.



identify and raise questions about forms of economic and visual exchange. It has also given me a means to make sense of my position, as a young second generation Portuguese woman and visual artist, living and working in this environment; a position that is coupled with its own generalisations, assumptions and stereotypes.

In the installation the video works become more than straightforward recordings or observations of the shop. They highlight intercultural relationships and adopt new meanings to represent essential structures of our thinking. Social, racial and cultural constructs are readable in the gallery space because the videos become interpretable images, where even the most apparently straightforward scenes of everyday life can convey nuanced messages. The videos of the shop show people and their interactions in a public space, but are personal and self-reflexive. They say something about ourselves and the ways in which

we interpret each other, and compel us to reassess our own ideologies and ethical constructs.

#### **Visual recording methods, video motifs and editing processes**

The processes of recording and the editing techniques applied to the raw footage enable additional meanings to surface in the videos. Footage is retrieved from the surveillance system and captured by high and standard-definition hand-held video camcorders. Each camcorder is hidden inside a product box in which one or more peepholes have been cut for the camera 'eye'. The video cameras are also used in shooting footage through windows, frames and from other vantage points. Once the footage has been loaded onto a computer, a process of selection and editing begins. In this manipulation phase the footage has the potential to endlessly change and transform.

The peephole, a crucial motif featured

repeatedly in many videos, manipulates the recorded material to reveal only a partial view. The visible peephole frame makes the viewer conscious of the process of looking and of the selective view of the rectangular video frame itself, inducing a reflective process of self-examination as voyeur. The peephole is a distancing device much like other barrier motifs in the videos. The shop counter, protection bars, window frames and lace curtains, frame or obscure subjects. In the videos there is often a play between light and dark; between what is exposed and obstructed, between what is revealed and concealed.

The alteration of real time in the videos allows the viewer to experience a vast period of time in a shortened phase or an extremely short phase in an extended period. An increase of speed makes it possible to compact several moments into a short loop while its decrease emphasises and draws considerable attention to a specific moment in time. The





repetition in loops creates an interminable, unchanging series of events. This cyclical repetition provides an opportunity to re-view the videos and becomes a metaphor for the recurring routines of everyday life; of being trapped in a condition where social constructs continuously and repeatedly reappear, are reinforced and underscored.

#### **Installation choices and video placement**

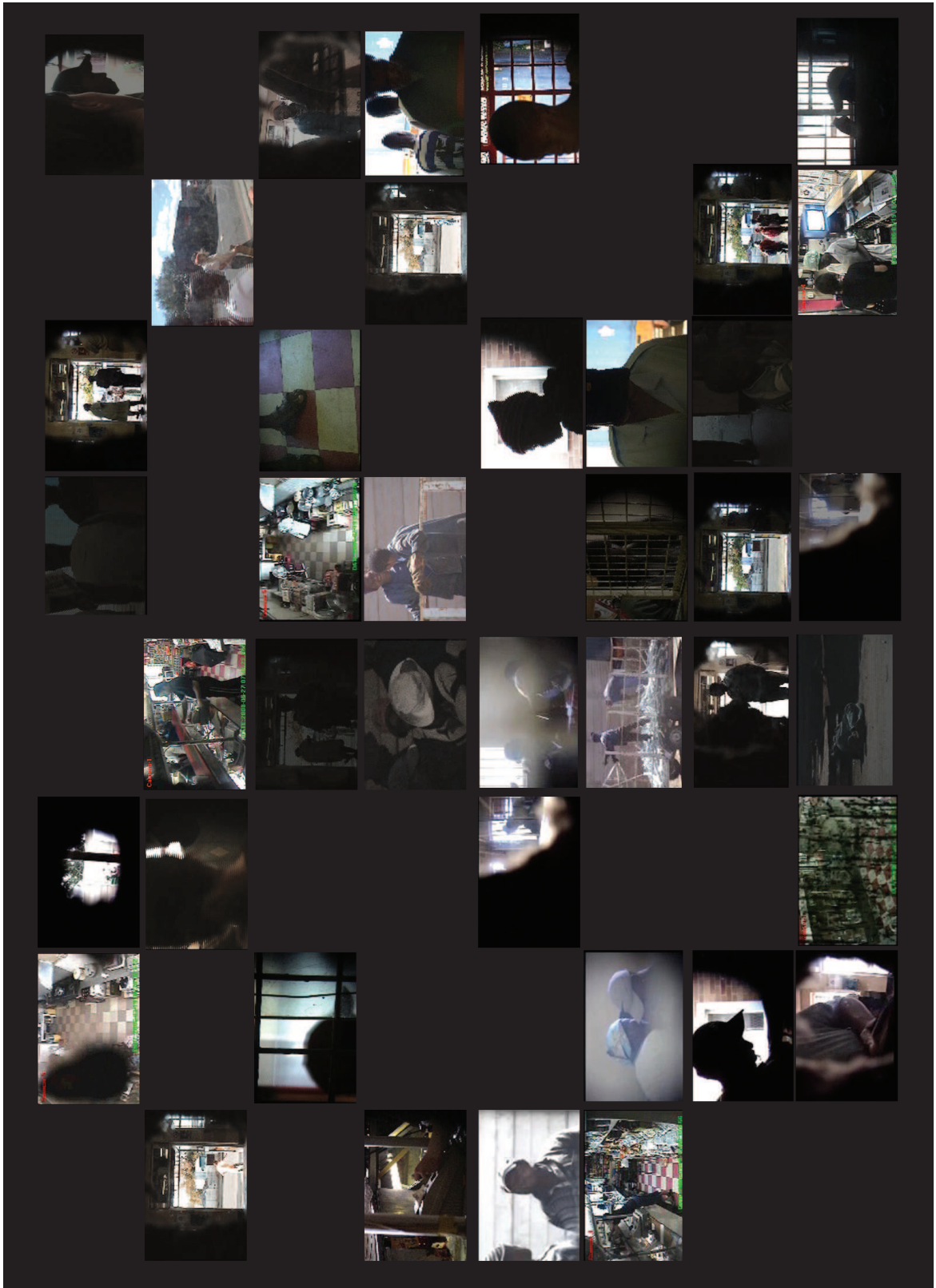
Many installation choices have been prompted by technical and conceptual complications in exhibiting the video works. Conceptual complications are particularly difficult as many problematic and critical associations continue to accompany the exhibitions of African objects and the presentation of ideas related to Africa. This is specifically evident in the ways in which the presentation of artifacts in natural history museums have been criticised. *In exchange* moves away from such restricted conventions

by the configuration of video works that are often in constant flux, and that are deliberately displaced and exhibited in unexpected places. The installation exploits associations in order to subvert them. Its interpretation is layered and often caught up in paradoxical meanings where the viewer associates certain videos with familiar and stereotypical imagery but where contradictory meanings are simultaneously evoked because the videos play with these associations in order to challenge them. The edited videos of the shop employ iconoclastic approaches that attempt to draw attention to stereotypes and viewing habits, as well as to the vulnerability of images.

The video installation falls within the realm of other video art, as certain attributes can be associated with previous video works and installations. The configuration and displacement of videos in the installation space is reminiscent of the recontextualisation of the television monitor in the work of first generation

video artists such as Nam June Paik and Wolf Vorstell. Bruce Nauman's environments also translate into this installation, particularly his works that placed the viewer in self-conscious and vulnerable positions, for example in his installation *Corridor* (1969 – 1970). The work of second generation video artists, such as Bill Viola and Pipilotti Rist, becomes evident in this installation through the use of multi-channel video projections, the juxtaposition of several video works and the integration of sound and image.

The video works in the installation space are experienced in totality but works are identifiable in four parts: a rear-projection comprising of numerous videos that appear and disappear in grid-like alignments, a pair of 'peep-hole' videos which have been separated and juxtapositioned on a separate wall, the fluctuating sound through the space and a counter-like unit with a video wall behind it.



### **The rear-projection**

The rear-projection on the left wall of the installation portrays a collection of videos that form relationships with each other in varying time loops and is reminiscent of a surveillance control room. The arrangement of videos creates an overwhelming series that offers the viewer several scenes and viewpoints of interactions in and around the shop. The loaded visual imagery, and the repetition of videos, shows the

over-stimulation of this setting, yet also the continuity of everyday life in the shop. Videos appear, disappear and re-appear to portray image sequences juxtaposed in various constellations at different times. They generate numerous meanings and make it possible to view familiar videos in various contexts and combinations. The viewer becomes the surveyor who watches and selects certain moments for inspection. The

temporality of the videos along with its excessiveness and the irregularity of the video frames disrupt the grid-like arrangement and transforms this systematic mechanism into an uncontrollable one. The viewer is unable to process all the information provided by the videos in the rear-projection as there are too many videos that demand attention at once.

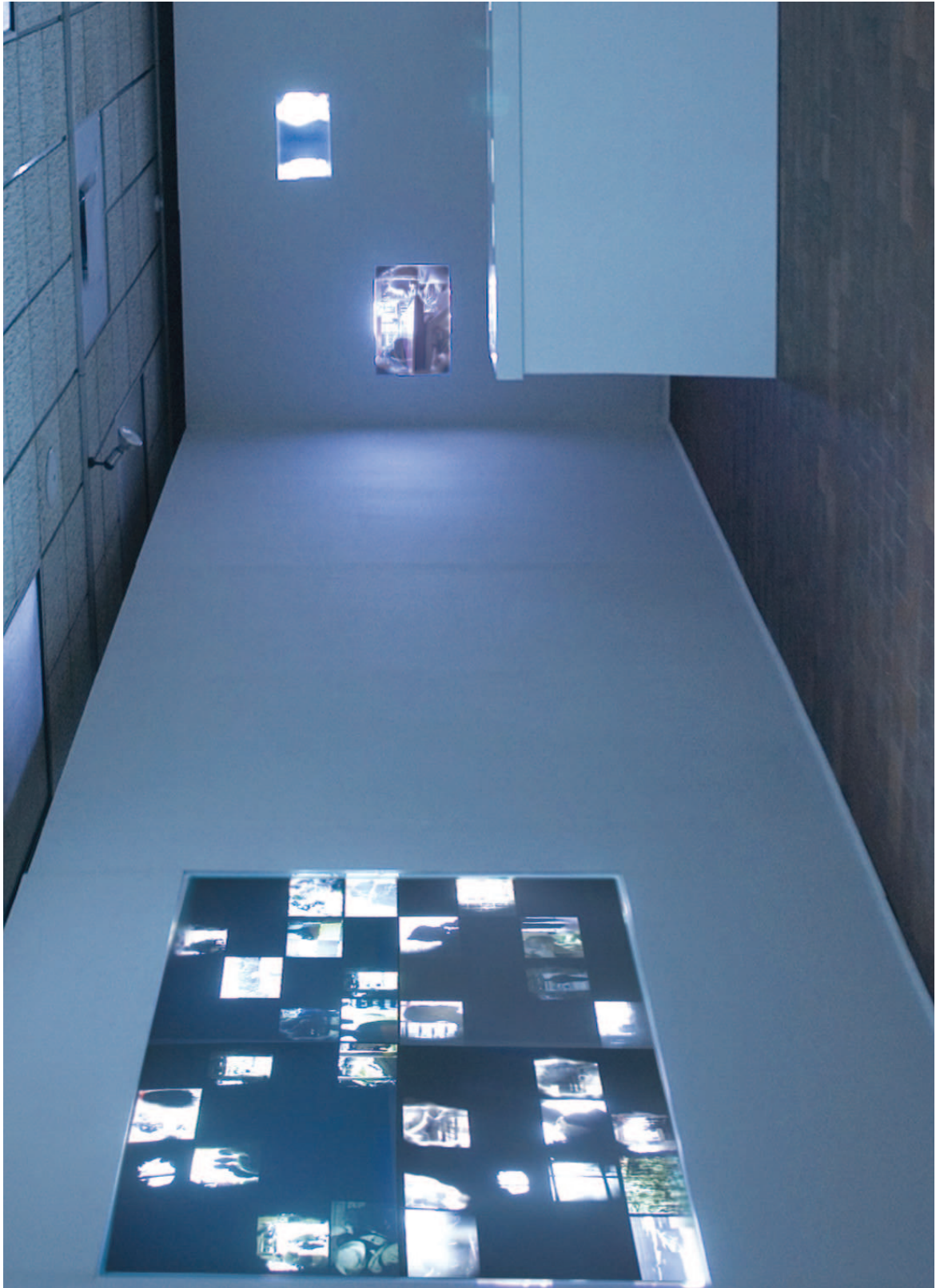


### The 'peephole' duo

The two videos on the wall opposite the rear-projection create a quieter and more reflective moment for its viewers. Both images depict a scene through a peephole which draws its viewer into an encapsulating image. The derivative image of the black child in profile in one video is reminiscent of numerous anthropological images that were designed to analyse the physical differences between various races in order to demonstrate the racial hierarchy that relied on categories based on outward physical characteristics such as skin colour

and bodily proportions. The child does not engage with the viewer. Instead his profile is passive and dreamy, reminding one of stereotypical readings of Africans as primitive and idle. By placing the video of the older white male alongside it, a correlation between the two videos develops. The viewer is encouraged to indulge in both scenes, yet the unsettling movement of the older man whose face is only partially revealed and the irregularity of the peepholes which makes the viewer exceedingly aware that they are looking at people without their possible

knowledge or consent, averts this indulgence. The slow motion of the videos, specifically of the older man, discloses vulnerability and uneasiness and complicates the videos further. The viewer yearns to look at it, but at the same time is uneasy with the act of looking. The older man is trapped in an image that disempowers him, yet his depiction recalls stereotypical images associated with white hegemony. Significantly these videos portray the shifting power positions in the shop.





*In exchange*  
Installation view.  
2009





### Sound

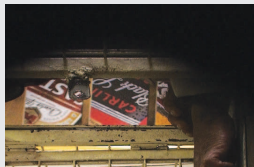
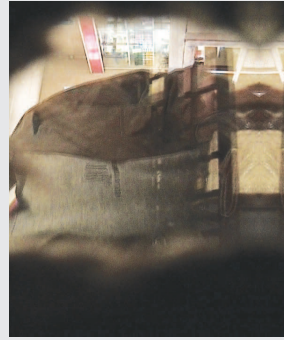
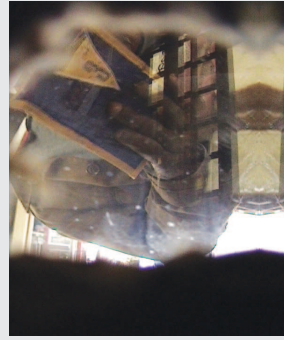
While the luminescence of the screens is mesmerising, the fluctuating sound produces a disruptive and unsettling surrounding tone during the process of viewing. Softer sounds can only be discerned within close proximity to the video works while others are more ob-

trusive and can be heard throughout the installation space; a cacophony that the viewer is unable to make sense of. *In exchange* transmits several sounds recorded in the environment of the shop layered over one another and alternating at different time periods. The repetitive

tone of background noise and non-specific sounds has the potential to elicit an emotional response that the viewer cannot help but be affected by; its resonance is inscrutable and perplexing.

### *In exchange*

Installation detail: counter and video wall.  
2009

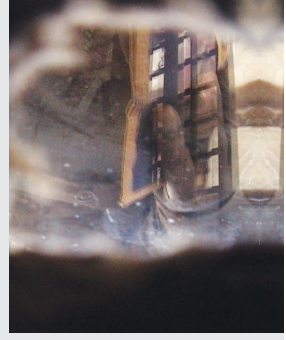


### The counter and video wall

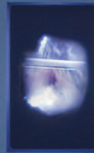
The counter-like unit in the space of the installation and the video wall behind it directly relates to the set-up of the shop. The videos that are embedded in the counter's surface and those which are mounted in the wall behind it attract attention to various notions of display. They become reminiscent of artifacts in a museum as well as products in the shop. Their arrangements are fashioned according to a grid but the rhythm and flow of their placements and of the various sizes of the screens in the wall once again disrupts obvious organisation. Interpretation is further complicated by unconventional spatial placement, for example the screens installed at very high or low points in the video wall.

The counter and the video wall are experienced differently depending on which side of the counter the viewer is standing. Specific videos are only visible from certain sides of the counter. The plat-

form at the back of the counter changes the viewer's perspective of the videos. It enables the videos to be observed from a higher point of view thereby instantly placing the viewer in a dominant, yet exposed, position. Still, the viewer engages intimately with the videos as they are in small formats and therefore only viewable in close proximity. This forms a close relationship or exchange between each video and its viewer, a relationship that replicates the close-up interactions within the shop. Many of the videos on the counter's surface portray footage of details (specifically close-up shots of hands) and emphasise the interaction across the two sides of the counter. Although the counter forms a physical distancing barrier, it is the point of tactile and visual exchange, and of reciprocity in the shop. It is here, in brief moments where money and goods are exchanged, and hands unintentionally touch, that a shared human vulnerability is evident.



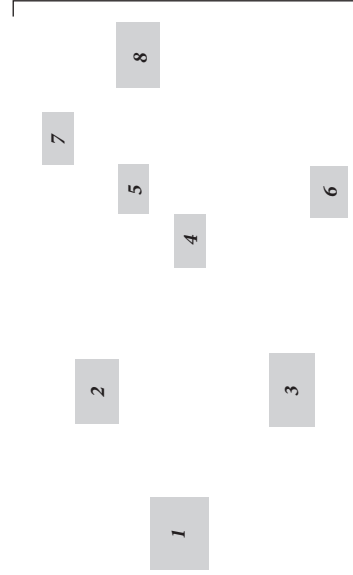
Video stills from videos on counter.  
Detail from video installation, *In exchange*.  
2009



*Video 1* on the video wall shows transactions that occur in the shop and portrays typical imagery that could be associated with this environment. Its larger size, rich detail and intense colours draw viewers into the installation space while particular videos, such as *Video 2* next to it, imply strategies that hamper their view. The visible peepholes, obvious dark barriers and blurred movement in *Video 2* obstruct the scenes and deny viewers access to what is occurring be-

hind them. *Video 7* portrays edited surveillance footage of the shop. Its bird-eye view and elevated position on the video wall is reminiscent of a surveillance screen at the entrance of a shop, which has become common in many public spaces. Its placement incites apprehension in the viewer of perhaps being surveyed and watched. *Video 8* shows a woman in profile repeatedly trying to move away from the derivative position she is entrapped in. The con-

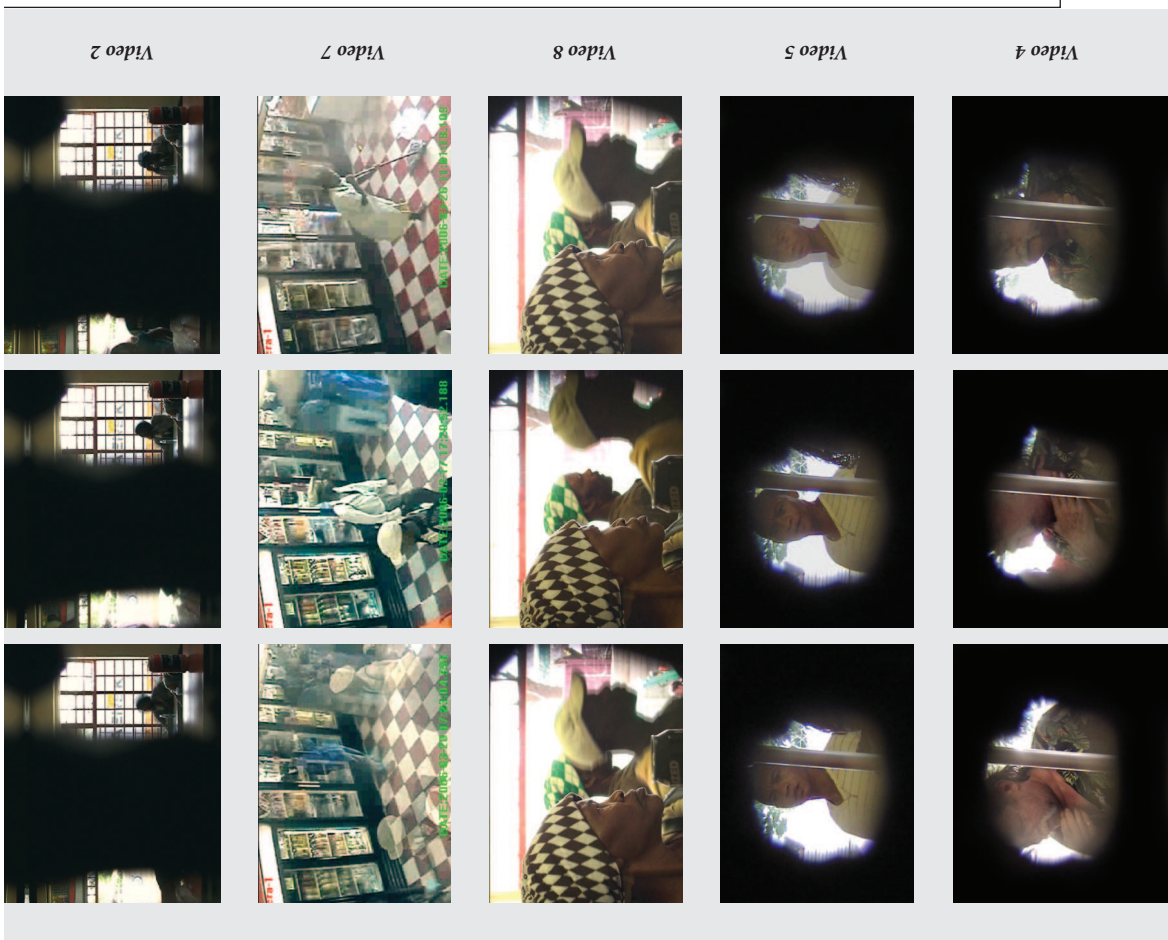
tracting shape formed by the change of light is a reminder of the movement of a focusing eye and emphasises the act of perception. *Video 4* and *Video 5* depict two peephole screens. In *Video 5* the man's attitude is aggressive and confrontational while in *Video 4* another man is restless and paranoid. In *Video 4* the twitching movement of the man obsessively rubbing his neck and his insecurity, revealed by the repeated glimpses over his shoulder, provokes anxiety.



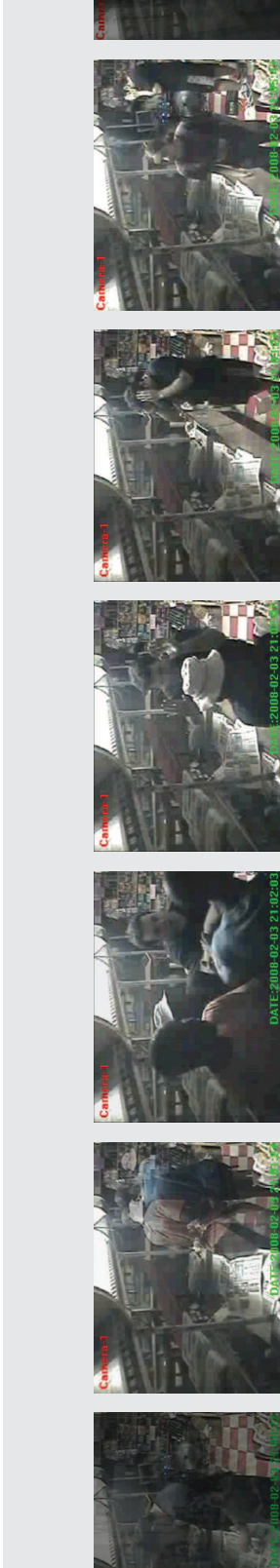
**In exchange**

Installation detail: *Video 1 - 8* on video wall.  
2009





Video stills from videos on video wall.  
Detail from video installation, *In exchange*,  
2009





## Video 6

*Video 3* and *Video 6* on the video wall, hidden and only visible from behind the counter, incite more symptoms of apprehension to the installation space. These symptoms are affiliated to conditions associated with cross-cultural aggression, violence and fear and are directly related to the violent attacks (in the form of assaults and robberies) that have become so common in the environment of the shop. The vulnerability felt in the environment of the shop becomes apparent in the videos. *Video 6* shows footage of violent incidents that have occurred in the shop and corresponds with one of the videos embedded in the counter surface that also portrays footage of a similar incident. The placement of the two videos and their relationship to each other reflect the vulnerability and destabilising position of being behind the counter, even though this is a position generally associated with dominance and control.

*Video 3* is entrapping, unsettling, and suggests feelings that can be directly related to incidences of suspicion, paranoia, apprehension and agoraphobia. In *Video 3* the viewer is confined to the fixed view offered by the peepholes and experiences anxiety in an environment where there is little personal control. This parallels the experience of the installation space as well. The viewer is confined in the space of the installation and placed in the position of the hidden camera, of a fearful onlooker, where they too are restricted and hidden. Everything that is seen or heard is limited or unclear.

The videos in the installation space draw the viewers' attention to the hesitant and fearful manner in which we observe and encounter one another. The installation creates a safe distance of observation, while the disruptive environment limits them from indulging in the scenes.

*In exchange* can be mesmerising as it displays voyeuristic glimpses into other people's lives as in reality television, yet at the same time the installation admbrates the fear-inspired mannerisms that have become so potent in our daily dealings. The people that are watched from the safe position of the gallery space enthrall viewers, but the viewers are simultaneously distracted and disoriented in a space where videos demand constant attention and the cacophony of sound is unsettling. In *exchange* viewers become entrapped in an experiential digital video environment that suggests the stimulating but paralyzing experience of the shop.

## Video 3

— Video stills from videos on video wall.  
Detail from video installation, *In exchange*,  
2009

### Acknowledgements

A project such as this is never short of people who inspired or supported it and I would like to take this opportunity to thank the following for their contribution in making it a reality.

To my two supervisors: Ms Janine Allen-Spies and Prof Suzanne Human for their ongoing input, understanding and patience.	Johannes Stegmann Art Gallery: Arie Kuijers Miranda Pietersen And all the student assistants involved in the exhibition.	To Liza van Soelen for proofreading, Rian Horn for the installation photographs and Lisa Le Breton for the catalogue layout.
To the project sponsors: Lezmin Computers and Pinnacle Micro, especially to Gordon Cloete. National Arts Council	To those who help with the installation: Waldo Human Adelheid Salzmann Michael and Shaun Basil and Linda van Soelen	To my fellow master students.  To my family.
To the Department of Fine Arts, UFS: Ben Botma Jaco Spies	To those who borrowed equipment for the installation: Department of Fine Arts Department of Physics Arie Kuijers Brenda Caldeira Basil and Linda van Soelen	To Brian for his continuous support, help and encouragement in every aspect of this project.
Department of Art History & Visual Culture Studies, UFS: Prof Dirk van den Berg Dr Gerhard Schoeman		

