

Queer Visual Activism in Contemporary South Africa

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Abstract

This study provides the first detailed analysis of not only the works of contemporary queer visual activists in South Africa but of the networks, both local and global, through which their work is produced, circulated and takes its meaning. Through exploring the ways in which queer visual activists in South Africa move between recognised art institutions and grassroots organisations, building communities and political networks, I develop a nuanced understanding of how queer visual activism operates as a mode of expression in South Africa; one that situates activism beyond the image, performance or artefact.

This project is a study of queer visual activism in contemporary South Africa, based on fieldwork data collected in 2015 and 2016 through participant observation, semi-structured, in-depth interviews (on average 1h 25 minutes) with 21 people, (recruited through purposive and snowball sampling techniques), and analysis of their visual practice. Ten of the original sixteen interviewees were also involved in a process of participatory analysis. My analyses focus on the work of FAKA, Robert Hamblin, Selogadi Mampane, Collen Mfazwe, Kate Arthurs, Dean Hutton, Zanele Muholi, Athi Patra-Ruga.

The way in which these queer visual activists create both symbolic and literal value through their practice, troubles the binary emerging in some of the literature on visual activism between 'protest art' (as authentic) and art based in institutions (as inauthentic - because of its complicity with global capital). Many of those I interviewed saw not just art institutions, but also commercial advertising spaces, as significant opportunities both to access capital, and to influence public opinion.

My work historicizes the practices of contemporary South African queer visual activists both in relation to art and resistance under apartheid, and in the context of the HIV/AIDS epidemic and visual responses to it across the world. I argue that because visual representations were central to structuring and maintaining the racism and sexism that underpinned colonialism, and later apartheid, the challenging, rejecting, and remaking of these representations, is central to the process of decolonisation.

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Declaration

I declare that the research contained in this thesis, unless otherwise formally indicated within the text, is the original work of the author. The thesis has not been previously submitted to this or any other university for a degree, and does not incorporate any material already submitted for a degree.

Signed:

Date:

1. Introduction

This thesis seeks to open a space of inquiry into how queer visual artists and activists in South Africa are using their practice to counter and dismantle institutional racism, sexism and homophobia. In addition to identifying who some of the significant queer visual activists are, my thesis seeks to understand how queer visual activism is understood in contemporary South Africa and how this differs from or is similar to other contexts. My central research questions include: How might visual activism be seen as a strategy of resistance? Why has queer visual activism become an important site of activism in the present? To what extent is visual activism a collaborative process? In what ways can fine art be considered as activism? What does queer visual activism tell us about queer lived experience in South Africa? What are the tensions between aesthetics and politics? How is queer defined in the South African context? To what extent does visual activism foster solidarity? Why have queer visual activists from South Africa become so visible internationally?

One of the difficulties with these research questions was that I was looking for visual activists while trying to work out what constitutes visual activism. I wanted to understand how my participants conceptualised queer visual activism, without imposing an a priori definition. So, rather than asking 'does this work constitute visual activism?', I asked 'what is it about this work that constitutes visual activism?'. I wanted also to explore the social and political production of visual activism, because I had a hunch that much of what was 'activist' about visual activism was situated in the social interactions that were formed through the processes of image production, and that much of this would be lost if I only looked at the visual artefacts themselves.

1.1 Using 'queer'

The fourth chapter of this dissertation contains a detailed discussion of the politics of sexual identity in the South African context, however the way in which I am using the term 'queer' deserves some explanation at this point. My use of 'queer' in this thesis reflects the different ways in which it is used by those I interviewed. Here I draw on

Gammon and Isgro's (2006:172) work in which they suggest that there are (at least) three distinct uses of the word 'queer'. Firstly, it is used to stand in for homosexuality (i.e. to denote gay or lesbian); secondly, as a linguistic shortcut or collective term for the 'troublesome and inconvenient' "laundry list" of 'marginalised sexual desires, formations and subjects' (Gammon and Isgro, 2006:173); and finally, as an anti-normative stance (Seidman, 1997; Warner, 1999) that is less about identity and more about critiquing or deconstructing normative or privileged identities. David Halperin perhaps best captures this use of 'queer':

Queer is by definition *whatever* is at odds with the normal, the legitimate, the dominant. *There is nothing in particular to which it necessarily refers.* It is an identity without an essence. 'Queer' then demarcates not a positivity but a positionality *vis-à-vis* the normative – a positionality that is not restricted to lesbians and gay men (Halperin, 1995: 62)

A fourth use of queer that is particularly relevant to artistic practice, is the use of queer as a verb – the idea that one can "queer", challenge or disrupt normative understandings or ways of being.

Among my respondents, those who identified as queer generally identified with both the second and third uses of the term. In other words, they occupied marginal gender or sexual identities, as well as an anti-normative social politics. Most regarded their practice as queer/ing. Some respondents (see Chapter Four) identified a tension between "lesbian" and "queer" and preferred the specificity of "lesbian".

In this thesis I use a variety of terms to express sexual identity, to reflect the usage of terms in the field. Generally I use LGBTQI, which stands for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Intersex. In Chapter 4 I use LGBTI where I argue that 'Queer' is an identity currently being mobilised against LGBTI because for some of my interviewees it represents not just sexual identity, but also an intersectional politics.

The remainder of this chapter introduces the contextual background to my study, which engages with gender, race, sexuality and representation in a country still emerging from fifty-years of apartheid.

1.2 Birth and death of the (South African) Rainbow Nation

It is hard to describe, for those who were not there, the sense of excitement and euphoria that accompanied the end of apartheid in South Africa, and the sense of pride in Mandela's election as president in 1994. For queer South Africans, added to this extraordinary moment, was the ushering in of a number of significant legal reforms,¹ among them, the Equality Clause in the Constitution (ratified on 8th May, 1996), which explicitly outlawed discrimination on the grounds of gender and sexual orientation (van Zyl, 2005: 235; Gevisser and Cameron, 1995), and the Civil Union Act, passed in November 2006, which made South Africa the fifth country to legalise marriage for same-sex couples (Judge et al, 2008).

The visual iconography of this era was full of images of Mandela and rainbow colours, or Mandela surrounded by a multi-ethnic group of smiling children (van Robbroeck, 2014; Gqola, 2015). The 'Rainbow Nation', a symbol introduced by Desmond Tutu, became the structuring national myth of the 'new' South Africa (Evans, 2010:309; Munro, 2012: 245), a nation that did not yet exist in 1990 when the African National Congress (ANC) and other political parties were unbanned (Hart, 2013: xviii) and Simon Nkoli, Bev Ditsie, and other members of the Gay and Lesbian Organisation of the Witwatersrand (GLOW)² organised the first Johannesburg Pride. The 'rainbow' of the 'rainbow nation' was widely viewed to be not just about racial diversity, or non-racialism, but also about gender and sexuality diversity (Reid, 2010; Munro, 2012; Tucker 2010).³

¹ Selected relevant legislation - 1994 Interim Constitution introduced which recognises sexual orientation as a human right; 1996 Constitution passed and LGBTI people allowed to serve openly in South African Defence Force; 2002 Same sex couples afforded same adoption rights as heterosexual couples; 2006 same sex marriage legalised (Baderoon, 2014:341-354).

²The Gay and Lesbian Organization of the Witwatersrand (GLOW) was founded by gay anti-apartheid activist Simon Nkoli in 1988.

³ It is worth noting that although the rainbow flag as a symbol of gay pride was first "debuted" in 1978 at the San Francisco Gay freedom day parade, it was in 1994, the same year as apartheid ended in South Africa, that it was officially established as an international symbol for LGBT pride, when Baker

Already present at this time, were the seeds that would come to undermine the rainbow myth in both these understandings of it. The legislative victories for queer South Africans, impressive as they were, were undermined by the fact that they were not rooted in a mass movement but won by a small, unrepresentative elite (Oswin, 2007:650; DeVos, 2007; Judge, 2018:14). South Africa's necessary entry into the global economy, and its adoption of a market-friendly macro-economic programme, significantly undermined the African National Congress's (ANC's)⁴ promises of economic equality (Southall, 2007: 70). The ANC maintained an official discourse which posited socialism as the eventual goal of the liberation struggle (Southall, 2007: 69), but their pro-market policies came at the expense of the poor, instead benefiting the established bourgeoisie and senior ANC politicians (Southall, 2007: 70). Although the state invested heavily in infrastructure, for example, a cost-recovery model meant many were still unable to pay for water and electricity (Habib, 2013:6). Although there has been a change in the distribution of wealth since 1994, with the upper classes significantly deracializing, poverty is still mostly a preserve of the black population (Durrheim et al, 2010). South Africa remains the most socio-economically unequal country in the world (Sulla and Zikhali 2018), a factor made more acute by widespread service delivery failure.⁵ Although there has been a moderate decrease in poverty levels since the end of apartheid in 1994, there has also been a sharp rise in income inequality (Bhorat, 2015). The legacy of South Africa's Natives Land Act of 1913, which stripped black people of their right to own property (an act then reinforced by the later apartheid legislation) is also still evident, with white South Africans owning 72 percent of the 37 million hectares of land held by individuals (Gumede and Mbatha, 2018).

(the flag's original designer) made a mile-long version of it for the 25th anniversary of the Stonewall Riots (Wong, 2018). The etymology of Tutu's rainbow, despite its association with the iconography of pride, is the old testament and the story of Noah's ark (Buqa, 2015).

⁴ The African National Congress (founded in 1912 to win voting rights for black South Africans and leading the anti-apartheid struggle from the 1940s) has been South Africa's ruling political party since the 1994 election when Mandela became president.

⁵ This is partly due to the legacy of an apartheid state which only served the white minority, but also to choices made by the post-apartheid state, including under-funding and corruption (Habib, 2013:62)

The legislative victories for queer South Africans were not only won by a small, unrepresentative elite but also by a strategy that linked racial discrimination with discrimination based on sexual orientation (Cock, 2005; Hoad, 1999, 2007; Tucker, 2010). This link has been strained by the tensions between 'the universalities and particularities of queer experiences in post-apartheid South Africa' (Judge, 2018). Despite legislative protection, and a large openly gay population, homophobic violence remains high, and the experience of being queer differs vastly depending on one's race, socio-economic and geographic position (ibid). 'Even middle-class black queers struggle to access the rights enshrined in the constitution - not for lack of material resources but for lack of cultural ones - where blackness continues to cohere around heteronormativity' (Livermon, 2012:300).⁶ These factors have resulted in a situation where in fact the only queer subject that South Africa's legislation primarily protects is a white, affluent, cis-gendered, gay man (Visser, 2013; Tucker, 2009, 2010; Oswin, 2007; Livermon, 2012; Stone and Washkansky, 2014; Munro, 2012).

By 2015, when I started my PhD fieldwork research in South Africa, and began interviewing queer visual artists and activists, the 'rainbow nation' had been battered by these realities, and a series of events that had systematically undermined peoples' trust in the state. Critiques of the concept of the rainbow nation began during the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission in 1996 and continued through the years of Thabo Mbeki's presidency and state-sanctioned AIDS-denialism and increasing state repression during Jacob Zuma's presidency, which culminated in the Marikana massacre of 2012.

On August 16, 2012 at a platinum mine near Rustenburg, a town outside of Johannesburg, the South African police opened fire on miners who were striking for a better wage, killing thirty-four people (Gevisser, 2012; Thomas, 2018a). The Marikana massacre was proof for many that the Zuma-led South African government valued its relationship with global capital more highly than the lives of its people.

⁶ Heteronormativity is the assumption that everyone is heterosexual, that 'there are only two sexes, and that each has predetermined gender roles' (Steyn and van Zyl, 2009: 3).

Also in 2012, on 6 October, approximately ‘20 black lesbians and gender non-conforming feminists’ from the One-in-Nine Campaign,⁷ staged a ‘die in’ at Johannesburg pride, and called for a minute of silence to commemorate victims of hate crimes (One-in-Nine Campaign, 2012). A clash ensued between the organisers of pride and the campaigners, with one of the (white) pride organisers threatening to drive over the protesters (McLean, 2013:37; Sizemore-Barber, 2013). The incident and the ensuing discussion it provoked, brought into sharp relief the significant rifts in South Africa’s LGBTQI ‘community’, signalling ‘the co-configuration of blackness with death and whiteness with life’⁸ (Judge, 2018:88). As Jane Bennett, feminist scholar and one of the founders of the African Gender Institute at the University of Cape Town has observed: ‘queer no more consists of a rainbow arc than the rest of South Africa’ (2018:104).⁹

These events, along with many others (Zuma’s rape trial in 2006, the deadly xenophobic violence of 2008, the Nkandla Scandal, to name a few),¹⁰ suggest the promise of utopian equality offered by the post-apartheid rainbow fantasy was at odds with the persistence of vast structural inequities. South African feminist scholar, Pumla Gqola, looking back in 2015 to one of the ANC’s 1994 election posters, analyses the fantasy it presents, and in doing so, she captures the national mood in the country more than 20 years after the end of apartheid. The poster, a visual articulation of the idea of a ‘rainbow nation’, depicts a smiling Mandela, surrounded

⁷ One in Nine reflects the statistic that only one of every nine South African women raped, reports this rape to the police. The actual rate of assault is estimated to be far higher. The One-in-Nine campaign was founded in 2006 as a feminist response to then-Deputy President Jacob Zuma’s rape trial and now advocates for, and draws attention to, the victims and survivors of gender-based violence.

⁸ Ironically, the theme for Pride in 2012 was ‘Protecting our Rights’, a response to the challenge to the Constitution posed by South Africa’s Congress Traditional Leaders (Contralesa), who were trying to have the clause protecting discrimination on the grounds sexual orientation removed. A statement on the Pride website called for political unity in the face of this attack (Sizemore-Barber, 2013:1).

⁹ Similar tensions have been evident in queer communities elsewhere. In 2017 the Queer of colour community in Philadelphia redesigned the rainbow flag, adding both a black and brown stripe to mark the inclusion of people of colour, after several incidents in queer bars in the city in which people of colour were denied entry, on spurious grounds (Wong, 2018).

¹⁰ Zuma was acquitted of raping ‘Khwezi’ a family friend and AIDS activist but is widely believed to be guilty of this charge. ‘Khwezi’ who brought the charge against Zuma faced severe harassment and death threats as a result. She died in exile in 2016 (Gqola, 2015; Thamm, 2016; Thlabi, 2017). 67 people were killed in violent xenophobic attacks in South Africa in 2008 (Landau, 2013). In 2014 the public protector, ruled at £15m of public money had been improperly spent on Nkandla, then-President Zuma’s rural home (Fihlani, 2016).

by a multi-ethnic group of smiling children (Gqola, 2015:1). Gqola argues that this image asks us to see race as colour, rather than race as power, and in doing so asks us to suspend any anger at racial (and linked to this - social and economic) injustice, to work towards a better future for all South Africans:

It requires that we believe a future free of institutionalized white supremacy is possible if we vote ANC...Vote ANC, and *all* our children will be happy (ibid).

This framing offered protection to the existing elite, and for the majority, a deferred hope; the majority were expected to prioritise stability above equity. As political theorist Richard Pithouse writes, “In South Africa the rainbow may have offered a way out of war – a war that would not have been easily won – but the equivalence that it posed between oppressors and the oppressed sanctioned a fantasy of innocence that has sustained the crime” (Pithouse, 2016).

By 2015, a generation of South Africans, colloquially known as the ‘born-frees’ (because they were born after the end of apartheid) frustrated by the slow pace of social and economic change in the country, began to voice their discontent. On 9th March 2015, a political science student, Chumani Maxwele, having contacted the press, threw a bucket of human excrement¹¹ at the statue of the 19th-century British colonialist Cecil John Rhodes at the University of Cape Town (UCT), asking ‘where are *our* heroes and ancestors?’ (cited in Fairbanks, 2015). Maxwele’s use of poo was an attempt to express a ‘collective disgust’ at the lack of transformation at the University (and by extension in the country) and make others at UCT understand the daily indignities experienced by the majority of black South Africans (Nyamnjoh, 2016:78). Maxwele’s protest provided a focal point for what became Rhodes Must Fall (#RMF), a movement that called for the decolonising of universities.

Rekgotsofetse Chikane, son of the Reverend Frank Chikane (the former chief of staff to the country’s second black president, Thabo Mbeki) and one of the leading organisers of #RMF, argues that its primary purpose was ‘to break the rainbow in order to build a nation’ (Chikane, 2018). Chikane quotes writer Panashe Chigumadzi, who describes the rainbow as ‘the fantasy of a “colour-blind”, “post-race” South

¹¹ Maxwele had collected the poo from the side of road in Khayelitsha, a township on the outskirts of Cape Town. For many people living in Khayelitsha, the ‘sewage system’ comprises of plastic boxes which the municipality collects from families on a weekly basis (Fairbanks, 2015).

Africa' (ibid). What was seen as a helpful nation-building symbol in 1994, was seen by 2015 as a damaging fantasy.

This moment of post-apartheid reckoning in South Africa links to, and has to some extent inspired (and been inspired by), a second global 'decolonial moment'.¹² The #RMF movement and the other student movements that emerged at universities across South Africa in 2015, drew inspiration from the existing Black Lives Matter movement in the United States,¹³ and itself directly inspired the Rhodes Must Fall movement in the United Kingdom. Central to this moment, as exemplified by Maxwele's protest, has been the recognition that symbols matter (see Chapter Two for a full discussion of this). The journalist Greg Nicolson, reflecting on #RMF argues 'Symbols are vessels of identity and knowledge of the collective and its power...(they) emotionally tie(s) us to who we think we are, where we've come from, and what we represent' (Nicolson, 2016). Francis Nyamnjoh, Professor of Anthropology at UCT has argued that Maxwele's actions were driven by a sense of alienation and frustration caused by the 'resilience of colonialism in South Africa' (Nyamnjoh, 2016:78). The statue of Rhodes was one of many symbols of this resilience.

1.3 Sexuality in South Africa

The 'resilience of colonialism' also impacts on sexuality, which has become one of post-apartheid South Africa's most significant sites of political contestation (Posel, 2005). South Africa's post-apartheid legal reforms position it on the conceptual and geographical frontier of the struggle for LGBTQI rights, surrounded by countries in which homosexuality is illegal. However, the sudden change from the vigilant repression of homosexuality to sexual liberalisation, has also led to the much commented on gap between *de jure* and *de facto* rights for queer South Africans

¹²The first 'decolonial moment' being from 1945-1970 when the majority of ex-colonies claimed independence from their colonial powers (Craggs and Wintle, 2016:4). South Africa gained nominal independence from Britain in 1910, sovereignty in 1936, and left the commonwealth in 1961, to preserve minority rule, but its first 'decolonial moment' comes much later, in 1994 (after a transition out of apartheid that began in 1990), with the end of apartheid and its white minority regime.

¹³ A movement started by three black women, two of whom identify as queer (Dernikos, 2016:53).

(Tucker, 2010). In this section, I explore some of the origins of this gap.

Reid (2010) refers to the Equality Clause (same-sex equality) as the “canary” of the South Africa constitution - the test of the gap between the Constitution and public opinion. He writes:

Nowhere is the paradox between the ideals of the South African Constitution and lived reality more apparent than in public contestations around gender and sexuality. Gay and lesbian equality has come to occupy a symbolic place as a litmus test of the success of constitutional democracy in South Africa. And yet, because gay and lesbian equality is not widely supported, it is also one of the key moral barometers testing the gap between the Constitution and public opinion.

Judge refers to this gap as South Africa’s ‘queer paradox’, marked by both legal inclusion and murderous exclusion (2015: iii). As Gunkel points out, this homophobia ‘needs to be contextualised within the broader culture of violence that links gender-based violence, homophobia and racism’ (Gunkel, 2010:7). South Africa’s high levels of gender-based violence have been referred to as an ‘unacknowledged gender civil war’ (Moffett, 2006:130). South Africa has the highest rates of rape in the world,¹⁴ as well as the highest rates of intimate partner femicide (Abrahams et al, 2013; Matthew et al, 2015). These figures suggest that despite the promise of gender social justice in South Africa’s constitution, ‘the government is hard put to deliver (this justice) in the cultural context of competing heteropatriarchies’ (van Zyl, 2009:371). Levels of danger are particularly high for black lesbians who not only live in an environment of ‘homoprejudice’,¹⁵ (Mkhize et al, 2010:19; Lewin et al, 2013) but also a culture in which violence against women is ‘normal’ (Bennett, 2006). The South African geographer Glen Elder’s (2003:922) writing on violence in South African hostels suggests that post-apartheid South Africa is best understood through a lens of heteropatriarchy as the dominant ideological formation. He argues that this lens allows us to recognise both the patriarchal social systems (in which men occupy positions of power over women) and compulsory heterosexuality (or

¹⁴ According to police figures from 2017/18, 110 rapes per day are recorded nationally (Africa_Check, 2018).

¹⁵ Homoprejudice is a discriminatory attitude towards homosexuality, marked by hostility and aggression (Logan, 1996).

heteronormativity),¹⁶ which creates and maintains the heterosexist binary of masculinity and femininity and its associated social expectations (ibid).

Colonialism and apartheid both institutionalised white supremacy through heterosexuality (McClintock, 1995; Ratele, 2001; Tucker, 2010; Gunkel, 2010:28), and both regimes obsessively regulated gender and sexuality (McClintock, 1995; Stoler, 2002; van Zyl and Steyn, 2005). Examples of this in the apartheid-era are the 1949 *Prohibition of Mixed Marriage Act*, the 1950 *Immorality Act*, the 1957 *Sexual Offences Act*, all concerned with maintaining the 'purity' of the white race (Ratele, 2001). The apartheid state actually financially supported gender reassignment surgery for white South Africans, arguably because the existence of liminal expressions of gender so troubled the normative conceptions of white masculinity (Swarr, 2012). Public discourse around homosexuality in apartheid South Africa, revolved principally around white male homosexuality (Elder, 1995:60). Conversely, same sex relationships between (black) migrant labourers living in city hostels, were condoned by the apartheid government, because they were seen as facilitating productive, and non-violent labour (Moodie, 1989; Wa Sibuyi, 1993; Elder, 1995; Epprecht, 2004). This connection between the migrant labour system of racial capital, which took men away from their families and wives, and same-sex sexual activity (which has been documented as a feature in same-sex hostels in South Africa)¹⁷ has been suggested as one of the arguments supporting the belief that homosexuality is unAfrican, a key theme in contemporary debate (Holmes, 1995; Tucker, 2010). In other words the forced migration of labour that took men away from their families and placed them with other men, is seen as the cause of this (unAfrican) same-sex activity.

Other arguments supporting the belief that homosexuality is unAfrican characterize it as an imperialist import that has been imposed by the 'Gay International'¹⁸ (see

¹⁶ Steyn and van Zyl define heteronormativity as 'based on the assumption there are only two sexes, and that each has predetermined gender roles' (2009: 3). It is this assumption that leads to homophobia.

¹⁷ See Moodie, 1989; Achmat, 1993; Hoad, 2007:78; Reid, 2013:20.

¹⁸ This term comes from Massad, 2002.

p.74/75 for a fuller discussion of this). Contestations around gender and sexuality are particularly complicated because of the ways in which both were constructed through colonial and apartheid racism which laid claim to both black men and women's bodies, and constructed entitlement to women's bodies as a marker of masculine power (McClintock, 1995; Stoler, 2002; Hassim, 2013; Gqola, 2015). Hassim (2013:12) observes that this history also significantly limits the contemporary space for feminist claims. It means that both race and culture are often invoked against claims for women's rights, where critiques of black men are seen as threatening their limited social power and are easily dismissed as racist.

Sexual identity politics in South Africa are characterised by their imbrication in this complex history, in which race remains the primary constituent identity (Distiller and Steyn, 2004:7); thus, sexual politics cannot be understood without an awareness of, and sensitivity to racial politics in its national, regional, and global articulations. Gunkel (2010:43) argues that claims that homosexuality is unAfrican by Africans cannot be understood outside of the context of global racism. In particular, she links this claim to a defensiveness resulting from the way in which discourses around HIV/AIDS framed African sexuality as other.

1.4 Queer Visual Activism

The questions I consider in this thesis, about how queer visual activists position themselves and their work, emerge from and are situated within the complex context of South Africa's post-apartheid politics. I began this project after working on a paper looking at how the South African legal system managed hate crimes, a project that reacquainted me with the work of a number of scholars from the University of Cape Town (Lewin et al, 2013), and made me aware of the importance of the work of queer black photographer and visual activist Zanele Muholi. I was particularly fascinated by Muholi's insistence on describing themselves¹⁹ as a 'visual activist' and at the circulation of their images in both activist circles and fine art galleries

¹⁹ Muholi's preferred pronoun is 'they' a choice that they attribute not just to a non-binary gender expression, but also to an acknowledgement of Zulu culture in which they do not exist as an individual but are accompanied by both ancestors and community attachments (Gevisser, 2018).

(Muholi, 2009; Scott, 2015; Muholi, 2018; Wolfe, 2018). Although I engaged closely with Muholi and their work over time (including inviting them to give a talk at the University of Brighton in 2015), I came to understand, partly through conversations with Muholi themselves, the importance of looking at the network of connections both that Muholi's work has made possible and that has made their work possible (something I explore in detail in Chapter Six). It also became clear that the prominence of Muholi's work had come to inadvertently eclipse a vibrant and underexplored queer cultural scene in South Africa (some of which I explore in Chapters Four, Five and Six of this thesis).

I was also driven by a lack of clarity, both on my part, but also reflected in the literature, about the nature of visual activism. It seemed to me both that there was a disjuncture between its conception in South Africa and elsewhere, and also that much of the social work done through visual activism, was not articulated in the writing about it, which tended to focus not on the process of production, but on its product, and the dissemination or exhibition of this product (I explore these ideas in my literature review, Chapter Two, and in Chapter Six). What this meant was that much of the writing, for example on Muholi's work, recognised the importance of the symbolic or epistemological intervention made by their images, but very little else. Throughout the thesis, I try to be attentive to the multiple forms and levels through which visual activism operates. Throughout the thesis I argue that the images we see influence the quotidian shaping of ourselves and the world in powerful ways. They indicate which dominant positions are legitimised or challenged. Visual representations were fundamentally important, not only to maintaining the racism of colonialism and apartheid, but also its sexism and homophobia. Any attempt to dismantle these legacies therefore involves challenging and remaking these representations. The queer visual activists whose work and lives form the focus of this study, are attempting to do just this. Their activism challenges institutionalised racism, sexism and homophobia.

Chapter Two provides a literature review, in which I situate South Africa's contemporary queer visual activism within the country's own histories of visual

resistance – from the work of anti-apartheid culture workers and photographers, to those working in the current ‘decolonial moment’. This chapter includes a section which critically explores writing on Muholi’s work, and points to what I see as the privileging of aesthetics over political context in much of this literature. The second half of this chapter looks at the emerging contemporary literature on visual activism in Western Europe and the United States, which has primarily been linked to street protests. I then situate all these forms of visual activism within the more developed literature on art activism, which extends back in art history to the 1960s, and sketch out three broad forms of practice that comprise this field.

Chapter Three describes the methodological approach I adopted for this study and the methods used, including recruitment, data collection; and data analysis. Aside from my in-depth interviews with individual respondents, my research consisted of observational methods including attending exhibitions, talks, social events, and paying close attention to informal discussions and interactions. These interactions proved invaluable in shaping my ideas and in encouraging me to interview particular people, who I might otherwise have overlooked.

Chapter Four, Five and Six provide the analytical core of my thesis and are based on data gathered in the field. Chapter Four examines the (re)emergence of the use of ‘queer’ as an identification in South Africa, of particular interest given the argument that one cannot use ‘queer’ outside of a Euro-American context.²⁰ Precisely because of concerns about colonialism and neo-colonialism in the South African context, sexual identity categories are fraught with political tensions. In Chapter Four I outline the extensive debates in the literature on sexualities and the politics of naming before moving into a discussion of my data in which I examine the ways in which queer identity is being used by many of those I interviewed as a tool to navigate a particular decolonial moment. I argue that given the death of rainbowism as a structuring national myth in post-apartheid South Africa, an identification with queer (as opposed to LGBTQI) is one that offers an alternative and intersectional symbolic architecture of hope that for white South Africa reflects their grappling with

²⁰ see for example the debate between Epprecht (2008) and Spurlin (2010) on this issue.

privilege, and for black South Africans a claiming of power. For both it is an identification that allows a sense of political agency. This chapter utilises interviews I conducted in 2015 and 2016 with queer visual activists including Selogadi Mampane, FAKA, Athi-Patra Ruga, Robert Hamblin and Dean Hutton and also includes readings of some of their works.

Chapter Five explores two very different bodies of work, both of which initially challenged my own conceptions of what constituted visual activism – the quiet paintings of Kate Arthur, and the much louder performance work of FAKA (Fela Gucci and Desire Marea). I argue in this chapter that both their work, in different ways, creates ‘sites of becoming’ facilitating their own self-actualisation and that of their immediate community. These ‘sites of becoming’ allow for a form of prefigurative politics that can be seen as a form of activism.

Chapter Six uses a political economy lens through which to analyse queer visual activism. In the first half, I outline the social networks that queer visual activism both creates and is sustained by. I do this an analysis of Muholi’s *Faces and Phases* project, informed by several interviews with Collen Mfazwe, a participant in this project, who is also a queer visual activist in their own right. I also examine the collaborative work between fine art photographer Robert Hamblin and the transwomen sex workers support group Sistaaz Hood. The second half of the chapter explores the ways in which queer visual activists make strategic use of global capitalism (including the art market) to draw attention to their demands and to sustain themselves and others who form part of their communities.

Chapter Seven offers a conclusion which pulls together the key arguments of my thesis, and suggests areas for future research.

In the chapters that follow I move across and between global theoretical approaches to visual activism, and engaging very closely with visual practice, mindful both of the importance of specific local context and transnational connections. Dismantling colonialism is a global project, but I am interested in how this project manifests in the

South African context, and ultimately in its connections to queer community formation and movement building. South Africa in many ways, because of the history of apartheid, represents an amplified version of many of the decolonial challenges currently playing out on the world stage. The work of queer visual activists working in this context offer a way to understand the complexities of undoing the intersecting oppressions of homophobia, misogyny and racism.

Chapter 2: Understanding Visual Activism

Introduction

This chapter introduces two salient aspects of the contemporary context of visual activism – the increase in visual production ushered in by new and ubiquitous digital technologies - digital cameras, mobile phones, social media (Rose, 2012), and the global project of decolonisation (Mirzoeff, 2017). After locating South Africa’s contemporary queer visual activism within a broader historical trajectory of anti-apartheid activism, and HIV/AIDS activism, I consider the writing on Muholi’s work, which I argue, provides a way to understand some of the complexity of visual activism not only in the contemporary post-apartheid context but in global perspective. I then explore the emerging global literature on visual activism in the United States and Western Europe before situating both bodies of literature; one located in South Africa, and the other in the United States and Western Europe, within the broader and more extensive literature on art activism. In doing so, I hope to both broaden and deepen understandings of visual activism.

The concept of visual activism - using the visual as a form of activism, or to catalyse or support other forms of activism - is one with which many will be familiar. However, visual activism as a *term* has only come into popular circulation since 2010, post the Arab Spring and the Occupy movement.²¹ It has been used in a diverse range of contexts to describe a very broad range of activities from protest graffiti (Thomas, 2018a), to political funerals (Thomas, 2017), to action research using photo elicitation (Wilson and Milne, 2015), to fine art photography that allows the photographic subject some control over the framing of their portrait (see Hallas, 2012).

²¹ The biennial conference of the International Association of Visual Culture (IAVC) held in San Francisco from 14–15 March 2014, was titled ‘Visual Activism’, and from the conference came the special issue of *Visual Culture* on visual activism (Bryan-Wilson et al, 2016). Also in 2014 at the Institute for Contemporary Art (ICA) in London, there was a panel session co-organized by Katy Parry and Giorgia Aiello titled ‘Visual Activism(s): Tactics, Technologies and Styles’ recognising the ‘crucial role that both media and publicity play in furthering contemporary causes’ (ICA, 2014).

Bryan-Wilson et al (2016:7) credit black queer South African photographer Zanele Muholi with the invention of the term visual activism, ‘as a flexible, spacious rubric to describe her own practice, which documents and makes visible black lesbian communities in South Africa’ (ibid). Certainly Muholi is the person most associated with the term and introduced it in relation to their own work at their first solo show *Visual Sexuality: Only Half the Picture*, at Johannesburg Art Gallery in 2004 (ibid). However, Cvetkovich’s earlier (2001:285) writing on queer activist groups in New York also uses this term. Cvetkovich’s writing details the work of *Fierce Pussy*, whose projects included wheat-pasting posters on the streets of New York (Burk, 2015), and the *Lesbian Avengers* who staged performative protests (Rand, 2013). Both groups were formed by members who were at the frontline of AIDS and queer activism throughout the 1980s and early 1990s (Rand, 2013:122). Also in 2001, South African visual theorist Kylie Thomas notes first hearing the term ‘visual activism’ used by South African documentary photographer Gideon Mendel to describe his own HIV/AIDS activist work (Thomas, 2017:266).²²

2.1 The contemporary context of visual activism

Although, in many ways, visual activism is coterminous with art activism, what differentiates it is that it often exceeds or is situated outside the formal institutions of the art world (Bryan-Wilson et al, 2016; Demos, 2016; Mirzoeff, 2015, 2017; Sholette, 2017). The move from art activism to visual activism is similar to that made by early proponents of visual culture, a field of inquiry based on a term coined in 1964 by McLuhan in *Understanding Media* (2016). Visual culture emerged from a frustration with the limitations of art historical analysis, in particular the separation of “high” and “low” cultural forms, but also the separation of analysis into disciplines depending on form, e.g. film theory, television studies (Jones, 2003:1; Jackson, 2016:173). The use of the term visual activism gestures to a break with ‘art activism’

²² Mendel was working with *Medicins Sans Frontiers* (MSF) and the *Treatment Action Campaign* (TAC) on a series of photographs and films, that were designed to support TAC’s campaigning for the state provision of anti-retroviral drugs to HIV positive people in South Africa. Rollout of treatment through national health services only began in April 2004 in South Africa (Wienand, 2012:195; Simelela and Venter, 2014).

located in art world institutions, or artistic practice, towards a more democratic use of the visual to catalyse or facilitate social change (Mirzoeff, 2015).

Visual representations were central to structuring and maintaining the racism and sexism that underpinned colonialism, and later apartheid (McClintock, 1995; Kroll, 2012: 56; Enwezor, 2013; Newbury, 2013). It makes sense, therefore, that the challenging, rejecting, and remaking of these representations, as well as creating new forms of representation, are practices that are central to the process of decolonisation (McClintock, 1995; Sholette, 2017:237). Part of what contemporary movements like Black Lives Matter (#BLM) and Rhodes Must Fall (#RMF) have done is 'make white supremacy newly visible' (Mirzoeff, 2017: 28), for those who could not already see it, 'through the ubiquitous distribution of digital images' (of police violence) 'via social media and traditional media' (ibid).

Like many others who argue against the distinction between the aesthetic and the political (Azoulay, 2010; Butler, 1997; McLagan and McKee, 2012; Stoneman, 2013), visual activists recognise 'history as in part determined by struggles occurring at the level of the visual' (Pinney, 2004:8). There has also been a call for more attention to be paid to the visual as an epistemological form (Pink, 2007; Duncombe, 2007; Mitchell, 2011; Rose, 2012). There is also a growing recognition both of the importance of affect in political decision making, and the capacity for the visual to evoke an affective response (Duncombe, 2007; Bennett, 2005; Stoneman, 2013). In other words, visual activists recognise the visual as a powerful political tool.²³

With the growing ubiquity of handheld visual devices (mobiles phones and digital cameras) and social media, the global visual landscape has grown exponentially, and with it the platforms for sharing and disseminating visual media (Mitchell, 2011; Rose, 2012). This feature of the contemporary visual landscape, underpins contemporary visual activism.

²³ See for example <http://visualsecialmedialab.org/> and <https://www.aestheticsofprotest.com>

Chapter One established the contemporary South African context as a second 'decolonial moment', precipitated by the failure of rainbowism (the first being in 1994, with the fall of apartheid, and Mandela's inauguration as President). This call for decolonisation is also evident in the United Kingdom and United States with demands from students and academics to decolonise university curricula (Gopal, 2017), and for the removal of the symbols of colonial domination. The moves to take down the statues of slaveholders in the United States, and the Rhodes Must Fall movement in South Africa and in Oxford in United Kingdom, have played a key role in recent protests, where young people are contesting ongoing injustice, and they recognise the visual field as something that is bound to power relations.²⁴

Visual representation is one of the social technologies that contributes to the discursive construction of social identities (McRobbie, 1978, 1991; De Lauretis, 1989; Butler, 1990; Gill, 2007). Back (2007:83), for example, writes about racism as 'a regime of power that thinks with its eyes'. The institutionalised racism of apartheid was progressively normalised through its visibility, with the use of visual mechanisms such as the signage for "whites only" toilets or benches delineating the division between constructed categories of race (Enwezor, 2013; Richards, 2013). Curator Okwui Enwezor, writing in the *Rise and Fall of Apartheid* reminds us of Foucault's insight that power does not merely act negatively through repression, but also positively through actively producing social reality:

Apartheid's social reality was not only the regime of law, but the construction of the necessary context in which the inferior status of Africans was established (Enwezor, 2013:25).

The following section outlines the visual resistance that emerged during the apartheid period (1948-1994) to counter this institutionalised racism, and then at the visual activism that has emerged since 1994.

²⁴ On South Africa see Naicker, 2016; Marshall, 2017. On the UK <https://rmfoxford.wordpress.com>. On the United States <https://hyperallergic.com/430694/san-francisco-racist-statute/> <https://hyperallergic.com/396031/baltimore-removes-all-its-confederate-monuments-in-dark-hours-of-wednesday-morning/>

2.2 Visual activism in South Africa

Art and photography in South Africa have a long association with political struggle. Visual media played a significant part in the anti-apartheid struggle, both in raising awareness of state repression and in consolidating the anti-apartheid movement. Posters were used to advertise protests and raise awareness of resistance to apartheid, art centres affirmed the value of individual black South Africans beyond their position as labourers, and photojournalists played a role in shaping how people outside of South Africa came to see apartheid.²⁵ Photographers were working to expose the daily realities of apartheid, and to counter the way in which photography had historically constructed race, exemplified by the ethnographic photography Duggan-Cronin (Jayawardane, 2012), the “native studies” of photographers like Larrabee and Levson (Minkley and Rassool, 2005; Mason, 2010; Enwezor, 2013:29; Newbury, 2013:230). Newbury calls the pass book mugshot²⁶ the ‘instrumental cousin’ of ethnographic photography because of the way in which pass books were used to control black South Africans (Newbury, 2013:230).

Black South African artists were working in a context where, after the introduction of the 1953 Bantu Education Act, black students were only taught subjects that would prepare them for unskilled service-based jobs in the labour market (Williamson, 1989:9), and were denied access to the galleries and museums that were the sole preserve of South Africa’s white population (Lilla, 2017). In this context, their art work became a refusal to accept the limits to their personhood placed on them by the apartheid state. The term ‘visual activism’ was not used until after the end of apartheid, but has since been applied retrospectively (Thomas, 2017: 266). What might now be termed visual activism, was at the time described using terms such as photojournalism, protest art (Brutus, 2006; Allen, 2009), struggle art (Newbury, 2009), or resistance art (Williamson, 1989; Allen, 2009:398).

²⁵ This section is intended to be indicative rather than exhaustive.

²⁶ The passbook was an identity document which South Africans were required to carry and stipulated where they were allowed to both work and travel. It was used to restrict and control the movement of Black South Africans.

The dissemination of images helped consolidate the anti-apartheid movement within South Africa (Robbins, 2013:16), and raise awareness internationally. Photography, in particular, was instrumental in drawing attention to the repression of apartheid: 'It was through photography that the reality of apartheid became globalised' (Richards, 2013:234). Throughout the period of apartheid (1948-1994), the visual arts occupied a dual role of documenting and undoing apartheid (Robbins, 2013:25). Many photographers and artists saw themselves as activists first, and artists second. Hayes (2011), divides anti-apartheid photographic production into two distinct time periods, one prior to the mid-1980s (1948-1985), and the other from 1985-1994, when there was a significant rise in international interest in South African visual production²⁷ (Hayes, 2011:263). This legacy of international interest in South African culture production, and the entry of South African visual producers into the international media and art market remains significant to contemporary visual activism which draws symbolic and literal capital from the international art market.

While Hayes's (2011) pre- and post-1985 chronology is useful for marking South Africa's entry into international markets, following photography's stylistic responses to politics suggests a slightly different narrative, one punctuated in 1960 by the Sharpeville Massacre²⁸ (Von Blum, 2005: 5; Enwezor, 2013:25;), and in 1976 by the Soweto Uprising²⁹ (Von Blum, 2005: 8; Newbury, 2007). Both events were key turning points in the anti-apartheid struggle, when the extent of state brutality was made clearly visible, and many were radicalised as a result (Newbury, 2009; Enwezor, 2013:37; Richards, 2013). Within the 'humanist style',³⁰ exemplified primarily by the photographers associated with *Drum* magazine from 1951-1965, 1960 (Sharpeville) marks a move from 'liberal humanism' to a more radical 'critical humanism', influenced by the Black Consciousness Movement (Richards, 2013).

²⁷ The documentary photography collective Afrapix perhaps best exemplifies that work of this period.

²⁸ The Sharpeville Massacre began as a peaceful protest against pass laws on 21 March 1960, at which the South African police opened fire, killing 69 people, and wounding many more (Enwezor, 2013:34).

²⁹ The Soweto Uprising on 16 June 1976 saw hundreds of school age students march in protest against being taught in Afrikaans. The police opened fire. 13-year-old Hector Pieteron's death was famously captured by photographer Sam Nzima (Simbao, 2007).

³⁰ The 'humanist style' worked 'in defiance of the dehumanisation of apartheid rather than presenting an alternative political programme' and promoted 'the photographer as a creative individual' (Newbury, 2007:589).

The Soweto Uprising in 1976 set the stage for 'collective struggle documentary'³¹ (Magubane, 1987; Newbury, 2007:590).

This documentary photography is best exemplified by the Afrapix Collective, active from 1982 to 1990 (Krantz, 2008: 295; Thomas, 2012), which was characterised by a split between 'background work'³² with a focus on everyday life, and 'foreground work' which was more newsworthy, and spectacular, or action-based³³ (Hayes, 2011; Enwezor, 2013). Amongst artists and photographers, there were debates about how best to support the (anti-apartheid) struggle, with some arguing for active anti-state propaganda, and others in favour of more nuanced cultural production (Wylie, 2004). Art centres, during this period, focused on encouraging self-empowerment and the reclamation of agency so eroded by apartheid³⁴ (Lochner, 2013: 316). Wylie's (2004) work explores The Medu Art Ensemble's posters, also emblematic of this period. The Ensemble produced posters in Botswana calling for people to support the anti-apartheid struggle, and then smuggled them into South Africa to give to the grassroots organisations that in 1983 grouped together to form the United Democratic Front (Wylie, 2004:60).

Perhaps the most significant gathering of artists and photographers during this period was the 1982 ANC-sponsored multiracial 'Culture and Resistance' conference in Gaborone, Botswana, just across South Africa's northern border (Wylie, 2004:56; Krantz, 2008; 294). Gaborone, at that point, was home to numerous of South Africa's exiles, including the artist collective the Medu Art Ensemble, whose members saw themselves as culture workers, contradicting state propaganda with their own (Wylie,

³¹ Peter Magubane's (1987) *Fruit of Fear Soweto 1976* is an important photographic record of the Soweto Uprising.

³² The photographic collective Afrapix used the terms 'background' and 'foreground' to divide the packages they sent to international press offices. Enwezor (2013:35) calls this 'engaged' photography, showing a critical awareness of apartheid but not challenging it head on. Kroll (2012) calls it 'critical' documentary.

³³ The Bang Bang Club, four photographers who documented the 'township war' in South Africa from 1990-2004 exemplify the extreme end of this spectacular style of documentary photography. The 'township war' comprised violence fomented by the apartheid government-backed 'third force' which attempted to undermine imminent black rule (Marinovich and Silva, 2001).

³⁴ Steve Biko's (1969) book *I Write what I like* and the work of the Black Consciousness Movement was very influential in this work (Lochner, 2013:317).

2004:60).³⁵ One of key debates at the conference was around the extent to which art should be instrumentalised in service of the struggle. Documentary photographer David Goldblatt,³⁶ who has consistently resisted framing his work as activist, argued against the young photographer Peter Mackenzie at the conference (Wienand, 2013: 10), who among others was committed to using their art/photography ‘as a weapon in the struggle against apartheid’ (Krantz, 2008; 294). Goldblatt argued that the job of a photographer was to report reality dispassionately (Hayes, 2013:342). These tensions aside, the notion of artists as culture workers, and the strong connections between artists and activist organisations and networks, is a legacy that continued from this period into post-apartheid South Africa (Allen, 2009) and is evident in many of those I interviewed.

After the end of apartheid in 1994, HIV/AIDS was seen by many as the ‘new struggle’, and many of the photographers, for example, who had been active in the anti-apartheid struggle, turned their attention to photographing the HIV/ AIDS epidemic (Wienand, 2012:177). Again, there were numerous visual responses to the epidemic (Roberts, 2001; Martin, 2004; Marschall, 2004; Allen, 2009; Wienand, 2012; Wienand, 2013; Thomas, 2014), and the close links between activist networks and artists were evident. In 2003, for example, in collaboration with the Treatment Action Campaign (TAC), Medecins sans Frontieres (MSF) in Khayelitsha (a township in Cape Town), Gideon Mendel, Guilhem Alandry and I co-directed and produced a body of work for the Guardian (*Salvation is Cheap*, 2003), and Channel 4 (*The Harsh Divide*, 2003). Through a magazine spread, an interactive website, and a series of short films, we drew attention to the devastating effects of then-President Mbeki’s denialist stance on HIV and the South African government’s decision not to provide anti-retrovirals to HIV positive South Africans³⁷ (Allen, 2009; Thomas, 2014). The

³⁵ Thami Mnyele, a key figure of the ensemble, designed many of the ensemble’s posters in conjunction with his involvement in the Black Consciousness Movement (BCM) and the African National Congress (ANC). Mnyele was killed in 1985 by the South African Defence Force (SADF) in a cross-border strike (Wylie, 2004:58).

³⁶ Goldblatt went on to found the Market Photo Workshop, which has consistently produced politically engaged photographers, including Zanele Muholi. Muholi appointed Goldblatt as their mentor and it was Goldblatt who sponsored their Masters degree in Canada (Gevisser, 2018).

³⁷ Mbeki was president of South Africa from 1999-2008. Until 2004, because of his denial of the link between HIV and AIDS, the South African government did not provide anti-retroviral treatment to HIV

films were also shown in South Africa (on national television and at the Gay and Lesbian Film Festival, 2003).

There were numerous other projects emblematic of different visual approaches to HIV/AIDS – such as the embroidered altarpiece produced by the Keiskamma Art Project in the Eastern Cape³⁸ (Shelver, 2006; Schmahmann, 2010), and the Body Maps produced by the Bambanani women’s group in collaboration with artist Jane Solomon and researchers Jonathan Morgan and Kylie Thomas who at the time worked on the Memory Box Project at the University of Cape Town’s AIDS and Society Research Unit (ASRU). The participatory art-making workshops led to the production of a series of self-portraits that were exhibited and included in a book, *Long Life: Positive HIV Stories* (Morgan, 2003), that drew attention to the work of Medecins sans Frontieres who were providing anti-retroviral therapy to people living with HIV in Khayelitsha, a township just outside of Cape Town (MacGregor, 2009; Thomas: 2014).

The body mapping project has been exhibited widely both in South Africa and internationally but Thomas (2014:13-30), has subsequently raised concerns about the relationship between the images produced and the women that made them, specifically in relation to the ethics of both attribution and income from their sale. Both these concerns are on-going themes with contemporary visual activism, particularly when the images produced enter the art market.

To redress this, the Keiskamma Art Project was set up by doctor and artist, Carol Hofmeyr, in 2000 in Hamburg, in the Eastern Cape, an area badly affected by HIV/AIDS, to provide a means of income generation for many local women, as well giving them both access to information about HIV/AIDS and a space for them discuss its impact. The project has now grown into a well-established centre, with a

positive people (Wienand, 2012:195). It is estimated at least 343,000 AIDS deaths and 171,000 new infections resulted from this decision (Nattrass, 2009:250).

³⁸ The project has also produced a reworking of Picasso’s *Guernica* (Ashmore, 2017)

health and education programme, and a music academy, thus working to strengthen, generate and sustain a community (Schmahmann, 2010, 2015; Ashmore, 2017).

Some of the artists I write about in the chapters that follow, although appearing very different to The Keiskamma Art Project, also use their art practice in this dual way - both to create safe spaces for their communities and to generate income. Their queer visual activism grapples with the intersections of race, sexuality, gender, and class all of which 'come into existence in and through relation to each other' (McClintock, 1995:5), and are expressed and regulated partly through visual representation (McClintock, 1995; Richards, 2013). Although race remains the primary constituent identity in South Africa (Gevisser and Cameron, 1995; Distiller and Steyn, 2004:7; van Zyl and Steyn, 2005), the politicisation of sexuality has been a key feature of the post-apartheid landscape (Posel, 2005: 125).³⁹

Issues of gender and sexuality in South Africa 'have emerged far more prominently' post-apartheid, where they are not subsumed by the broader struggle against apartheid, and there has been more space to explore the relationships between the personal and the political (Hayes, 2011: 264; Thomas, 2014). The history of queer visual activism reflects this. The GALA (Gay and Lesbian Memory in Action) archives at WITS University in Johannesburg houses some early examples of visual activism, such as the Wits Gay Movement (WGM) flyers from the 1980s.⁴⁰ The first pride march organised by GLOW (Gay and Lesbian Organisation of the Witwatersrand) in Johannesburg 1990 was an important visual and political intervention in public space. It was attended by approximately 800 people⁴¹. Speakers at the event included black gay activists Simon Nkoli and Beverly Ditsie, and Edwin Cameron⁴².

³⁹ For feminist history of women artists in South Africa see Arnold (1996), Schmahmann, B. (2004), and Arnold, A. and Schmahmann, B. Eds. (2005). For a review of the way in which visual and material culture both navigated and constructed a post-apartheid narrative see Coombes (2003).

⁴⁰ <https://gala.co.za/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/Queer-Student-Activism-at-Wits.pdf>

⁴¹ <http://www.sahistory.org.za/dated-event/first-gay-pride-march-held-south-africa>

⁴² Nkoli famously addressed the crowd at the 1990 Johannesburg Pride about the inseparability of race and sexuality "I am black and I am gay. I cannot separate the two parts of me into primary or secondary struggles. They will be all one struggle". Edwin Cameron is well known both for his HIV/AIDS and gay-rights activism. He has served as a high court and constitutional court judge.

In 2002, Beverly Ditsie released *Simon and I*, a film about her relationship with black anti-apartheid and gay rights activist Simon Nkoli.

In 2003, South African film maker Jack Lewis made *Proteus* with the queer Canadian director John Greyson.⁴³ Queer performance work by Steven Cohen (Van Der Watt, 2003; Fanthome, 2010; Lima, 2012; Sizemore-Barber, 2016) and photography by Jean Brundrit (Josephy, 2004; Brundrit, 2010) in the 1990s dealt explicitly with sexual identity, but both are explore white, middle class identity (Gunkel, 2010: 141; Sizemore-Barber, 2013: 32). From 1994-2015, The *Out in Africa* film festival organised screenings of LGBTQIQI films both in South Africa's main cities, and in rural locations. In some cases they organised for people to be bussed to venues in the cities, and in others sent representatives to find and gather local communities for screenings. The festival also supported the development of local short films and a feature film (Peach, 2005; Stielau, 2016).⁴⁴

2.3 Zanele Muholi's photography

Zanele Muholi's photography emerged into this landscape, and their work has become by far the most dominant example of queer visual activism in post-apartheid South Africa and internationally.⁴⁵ One cannot write about visual activism, particularly in relation to the queer South African context, without paying close attention to their work. Muholi is influential, both in South Africa, and internationally; and, has helped shape a generation of queer culture producers. They are arguably the most visible black lesbian photographer internationally, and one of a handful of black women artists prominent in the visual arts field (Thomas, 2014:35). There has

⁴³ *Proteus* is about an Eighteenth century homosexual love affair between a Dutch sailor and a former slave.

⁴⁴ The festival was set up by Nodi Murphy with Theresa Raizenberg and Jack Lewis.

⁴⁵ Muholi graduated from the Market Photo Workshop in Johannesburg in 2003 and held their first solo exhibition at the Johannesburg Art Gallery in 2004. Visual activism as a term from around 2005-2015, was almost exclusively associated with Zanele Muholi, who uses it to describe their work. However, this is beginning to change, and there are others (both in South Africa and elsewhere) using this term to describe their own and other's work – see for example - Imre, 2009; Campe, 2011; LeRoux, 2013, van der Vlies, 2013; De Larch, 2014; Bratchford, 2016; Bah, 2017; Chapman, 2017; Franco, 2017; Schneider, 2017; UNC, 2017; Thomas, 2017; Mirzoeff, 2017. Queer performance work by Steven Cohen, and photography by Jean Brundrit was important in the 1990s as their work dealt explicitly with sexual identity.

been a significant increase in the production of critical literature on Muholi's work over time, from Gqola's (2006) writing on their first exhibition *Visual Sexuality* (2004), to numerous recent theses and dissertations on their work.

Although there is some implicit articulation of the way in which Muholi's images might constitute visual activism in the writing on their work, because of an unspoken assumption of what this means, and perhaps because Muholi themselves have so come to represent visual activism, there is no explicit interrogation of the term. Most of the academic literature addressing Muholi's work constitutes textual analysis (where the image is treated as a text) and is broadly focused on its semantic and epistemological interventions. What this literature does well, is analyse the content of their images, and provide an understanding of the broad context from which they create them. Where the literature falls short is that, on the whole, it does not sufficiently look beyond these images to the detailed context of their creation and consumption, thus missing much of what is activist in their work. When writing on Muholi's work does look beyond the image, it is usually to connect their work to, or illustrate, the broader socio-economic context, particularly the gap between South Africa's constitutional rights for queers, and the reality of queer lived experience. It tends not to explore the queer community that their work has created and sustained, and through which it has been sustained. Although Muholi's work appears to be squarely situated within the fine art market, they mobilise this fine art status to work across multiple and diverse spaces including NGOs, museums, online activist spaces, curated sites, funerals, and universities. This breadth of engagement and dissemination is often missed by a focus only on their photographs.

The fusion between Muholi and the concept of visual activism, is also often accompanied by an emphasis on her exceptionalism, commented on by Matebeni in her satirical piece 'How (not) to write about queer South Africa', in which she quips:

Words such as dream, promise, freedom and queer should appear in your title, accompanied by *the only highly celebrated black queer artist*, Zanele Muholi's photography (my italics, Matebeni, 2014:63).

Presumably this tendency is rooted both in South Africa's regional exceptionalism with regards to queer rights (Lease and Gevisser, 2017; Ncube, 2018), and in Muholi's success as an artist, and the persistent notion of the artist as singular genius (Kester, 2004:3). The effect of it, however, is that it eclipses numerous other queer visual activists,⁴⁶ and the rich history of visual activism from which Muholi's work has emerged. My dissertation addresses this significant gap in the literature and situates this work in broader context.

The following section uses the visual activism literature on Muholi's work to tease out the ways in which it is seen to be activist. In the literature I consider visual analysis dominates, and it sees Muholi's work as intervening on three levels: epistemologically, semantically, and affectively. Their work is an important addition to South Africa's photographic archive, but also a subversion, and reworking of this archive; and it carries significant aesthetic power. Here I outline five devices that recur in the literature as key components of Muholi's work: its documentation, non- iconicity, complexity, queering of the gaze, and affect.

Muholi sees their work as following in the tradition of the American photographer Joan E Biren, and writer Joan Nestle, both of whom created significant lesbian archives (Muholi, 2009: 6), as well as American sociologist W.E.B. Du Bois (Salley, 2012; Baderoon, 2014). As Gunkel (2010) argues, it is partly *what* Muholi's images make visible that is subversive. They are creating images that counter both a racist and sexist history of representation (Lewis, 2011); images of the black female body that are in themselves violations of this body (Munro, 2012:225). Muholi's work constitutes an archival intervention because there has been so little self-representation of black lesbians (Muholi, 2009; Munro, 2012:198; van der Wal, 2016:12). Their *Faces and Phases* project (2006-2014), is a substantial visual archive of more than 250 photographs of black lesbians and trans men (Baderoon,

⁴⁶ Beyond Muholi's work, there are numerous other queer artists who are contributing to a vibrant contemporary culture-space (e.g. Ruga, Ntladi, Mfazwe, Hlobo, FAKA, etc – see Brundrit, 2010; Matebeni, 2014; Le Roux, 2013; De Larch, 2014; Bongela, 2016; Thomas, 2017). Several of these visual activists are the focus of this dissertation.

2014: 327). The timeline in the back of Muholi's *Faces and Phases* publication literally inserts their work into the trajectory of key historical events pertinent to queer activism on the African continent (Baderoon, 2014: 341-356).

In *Encounters in the Virtual Feminist Museum*, Griselda Pollock notes that:

vast areas of social life, and huge numbers of people hardly exist, according to the archive. The archive is overdetermined by facts of class, race, gender, sexuality and above all power (Pollock, 2007:12).

The archives reflect 'that which is considered *worth* storing and remembering' (ibid, my italics), and therefore 'the archive is also...a site of struggle for legitimacy' (Thomas, 2014:50). Writing about the post-apartheid context, Munro comments that Muholi's context is an 'emphatically black sisterhood', and that their work is 'very much a riposte to the rest of the gay "community" in South Africa, whose constitutional rights seem to have come at the expense of working class black lesbians' (2012:230).⁴⁷

Several theorists have usefully complicated the notion of visibility in the dangerously heteronormative South African context and pointed out that being visible might make one more susceptible to violence.⁴⁸ So, the following features of Muholi's work: its non-iconicity, its complexity and nuance, and its queering of the gaze; the *way in which* Muholi mediates this visibility in her documentation of queer people, is vital in safeguarding against their further victimisation. I now examine each of these features of Muholi's work in turn.

Gqola (2011:623) comments that black South African lesbians are hyper visible in the media, and that Muholi's work is much 'less about making them visible than it is about engaging with the regimes that have used their hypervisibility to violate them'. The majority of commentators on Muholi's work (see, for example, Salley, 2012; 2013; van der Vlies, 2012; Thomas, 2014) note that their images 'insist on the

⁴⁷ See Oswin, 2005; Stone and Washkansky, 2014; Visser, 2010.

⁴⁸ See for example Tucker (2009) *Queer Visibilities: Space, Identity, and Interaction in Cape Town*. Oxford: Wiley Blackwell and Currier (2012) *Out in Africa: LGBT Organising in Namibia and South Africa*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

particularity of the black lesbians they portray at the same time as they insist on their sameness – to other women, to other embodied subjects, to the human’ (Thomas, 2014:55). Their images tread a line between the general and the specific, that refuses to objectify those photographed.

van der Vlies (2012:146) expresses this slightly differently when he writes that there is

a productive tension between the singularity of the individual rendered other (though not to be objectified), and the type transformed into an allegorical figure (rather than an anthropological one), standing poignantly, but also defiantly, for those in the state of similar aftermaths.

Salley calls this tension between the indexical and the specific in Muholi’s images their ‘non-iconicity’; their capacity to be both intimate, and public (2013:113). This capturing of the ‘two photographic poles’ – the universal and the intimate – in one image, is something that Hayes identifying as a defining feature of HIV/AIDS photography, which might suggest a stylistic link between Muholi’s work and HIV/AIDS photography (2007:162).

Muholi’s images capture the complexity of black lesbian lives against the dominant media portrayal of them as reduced to hate crime victims (Thomas, 2014:36). In particular, they both assert the normalcy of black lesbian sexuality, while also exploring its contours; capturing what Thomas refers to as the ‘complexity of the embodied experience’ (Thomas, 2014:43). Their images both ‘normalise(s) lesbians *as women*’ (my italics, Gqola, 2011:626), and ‘talk(s) about private intimacies that make LGBTQI3 life intelligible’ (Van der Wal, 2016:13). Gqola argues, for example, that Muholi’s *Period* series,⁴⁹ draws a parallel between the blood spilled in the violence of ‘corrective rapes’ and other hate crimes against black lesbians, and the very same blood that makes these lesbians women, and (potentially) child bearers/mothers (2011:625), thus introducing ‘a new language to articulate Black lesbian sexuality creatively and politically at the same time’ (2011:628).

⁴⁹ The *Period* series (2006) was extended and later came to be called *Isilumo siyaluma* (2011), which roughly translates (from Zulu) as *Period Pains*.

Muholi simultaneously protests the violence against black lesbians, and rejects it as an all-defining characteristic, by allowing us access into the private, every day embodied and sexual lives of black lesbians (Salley, 2012:68; Lewis, 2005:17; Munro, 2012: xxxii). Thomas (2014) writes evocatively about the way in which Muholi's *Faces and Phases* project holds both mourning and celebration together. This capacity of photography to capture complexity is something that Robbins (2014:16) identifies as a feature of anti-apartheid photographs which represented both the 'horrors of systematic oppression' with the 'joy of solidarity in resistance'. Several of the *Faces and Phases* portraits depict black lesbians who are now dead. Their inclusion, alongside portraits of the living, serves the dual purpose of honouring the subjectivity of the dead and expressing solidarity with them, while unsettling our engagement with the living, by reminding us of their precarity (Thomas, 2014:52).

Thus far, I have looked at three components of Muholi's work that constitute its visual activism: its documenting role; its 'non-iconicity', the line it treads between the general and the specific; and its capacity for complexity and nuance, exemplified by both the mourning and celebration in *Faces and Phases* (Thomas, 2014) and the juxtaposition of menstruation with hate crimes in the *Period* series (Gqola, 2011). The fourth component of Muholi's work that resists and reworks convention is its queering of the gaze.

Matebeni (2013:404) notes that Muholi's first published photographic collection *Only Half the Picture* (Muholi, 2006) asked 'What do we see when we look at ourselves?' This question is significant for two reasons; firstly, it positions black lesbians as the imagined consumers of Muholi's images (see Lewis, 2005), not just their subjects. Secondly, it asks this audience to reflect on the ways in which black lesbians have been objectified historically (ibid). In other words, it is addressing the image to an imagined black lesbian audience, but it is also provoking a critical or political response from that audience, not allowing them to merely passively consume the image.

In Muholi's image *Caitlin and I* (2009), in which two naked black and white bodies, the photographer and one of their partners, rest on a white ruffled sheet, back to back and on top of each other, in what appears to be a post-coital moment. The photograph appears to represent a moment of erotic intimacy, but the subjects' gaze does not invite the viewer to share this moment (Matebeni, 2013a:407). Many of Muholi's portraits appear self-sufficient; they are capturing an interaction between Muholi and their intimates. At some level, they do not seek an audience beyond this (van der Vlies, 2012; Salley, 2013; Baderoon, 2014). van der Vlies suggests that Muholi's 'images are...self-consciously affirmative records for queer people themselves' (2012:142). Utilising a 'self-sufficient economy of desire' that is a recognised trope in lesbian visual culture (Jenzen, 2013), Muholi's images reject the traditional male gaze. They challenge 'the normative heterosexualisation of erotic desire' (Matebeni, 2013a:414), while allowing the lesbian participants to be the subject of their own gaze (van der Vlies, 2012:147).

A final component of Muholi's work discussed in the literature is its affect; its power to move (Thomas, 2014; Gqola, 2011; van der Vlies, 2013; Bissonauth, 2014; Strauss, 2014). Bissonauth (2014), drawing on the photographic theory of Ariella Azoulay,⁵⁰ sees Muholi as playing an intermediary role between her photographic participants and their audience, which allows the audience to fully *see* their participants, and in doing so, allows the audience to play a part in the political restoration of these participants. Strauss (2014), sees affect operating slightly differently in Muholi's work. She explores the way in which art can give form to individual emotions that lie just on the edge of semantic availability, and in giving them form, translate them into something shared. This articulation of emotion, in its translation from individual to collective, is diffused and transmutes from a negative

⁵⁰ In her 2008 book, *The Civil Contract of Photography*, Azoulay writes, that in every photograph 'there is something that extends beyond the photographer's action...Every photograph of others bears the traces of the meeting between the photographed persons and the photographer' (2008:11). For Azoulay, photography is 'a privileged site for the generation of a civil discourse' (2012:10). She writes that photography has created 'a space of political relations that are not mediated exclusively by the ruling power of the state and are not completely subject to the national logic that still overshadows the political arena' (2008:12). For Azoulay, the interactions present in photography between the photographer, the photographed person, and the spectators create their own civil contract.

individual feeling, to a positive collective solidarity. So Muholi's work 'offers a new archive of affect and affiliation' (van der Vlies, 2013: 111).

The elements of Muholi's work described so far (its documentation, non-iconicity, nuance, queering the gaze, and affect) are all read from the photographic image. While they are very important components of their activism, and essential to their decolonial project, what they fail to capture the activism beyond and outside of their images. This limitation allows Bryan-Wilson et al (2016:6) to comment that Muholi's work is 'less immediately readable as "activism" in a narrow sense' than another piece (see page 20), because it is only focusing on a single element of their work. Ironically, what is emerging as visual activism in contemporary Western Europe and the United States, privileges the analysis of political context over aesthetics, thus presenting an almost dichotomous model to the analysis of Muholi's work. In the following section I explore the emerging use of visual activism as a term in contemporary Western Europe and the United States.

2.4 Visual activism in other contexts

Visual activism is a convenient term to describe a form of activism, based broadly in visual culture, that has emerged post the financial and economic crash of 2008, for example, the burst of graffiti art that appeared in Cairo during the 'Arab Spring' (Khatib, 2013:153), or the now famous image of a ballerina on the Wall Street bull statue, that an *Adbusters* poster used to call for the occupation of Wall Street (McKee, 2016:87). This usage coincides with the emergence of what Weibel (2015: 23) refers to as 'a new activism among "critical citizens"'⁵¹. These citizens are frustrated with the limits of the formal institutions of both art and politics, and their implication in the corruption of global neo-liberal capitalism. They are using visual and social media tools to enact their 'performative democracy'.⁵² The resulting

⁵¹ This term comes from Pippa Norris' 1999 book *Critical Citizens: Global Support for Democratic Government* and refers to citizens 'who adhere strongly to democratic values but who find the existing structures of representative government...to be wanting' (Norris, 1999:2).

⁵² This is a term used by Elzbieta Matynia in 2009 in her book *Performative Democracy*, to describe the enacting of democracy by citizens. Matynia work is rooted in Poland, but she also addresses the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) in South Africa in this book.

activist art is increasingly acknowledged as an important presence within politics (Bradley, 2007; Mason, 2012; Kellner, 2013; Weibel, 2015; Mirzoeff, 2015; McKee, 2016; Sholette, 2017).

Outside the substantial volume of work on Zanele Muholi, there is very little literature that specifically uses the term visual activism. However, there are two recent texts that attempt to 'isolate and analyse "visual activism" as a field of study and practice' (Jackson, 2016:173). The first, is a special issue of the *Journal of Visual Culture* (Bryan-Wilson et al, 2016), which came out of the International Association of Visual Culture conference in San Francisco in 2014. The second is Mirzoeff's (2015) *How to See the World*, where he conceptualises visual activism as the use of visual culture 'to create new self-images, new ways to see and be seen, and new ways to see the world' (2015:297).

Mirzoeff (2015:297) argues that visual activism is a new form of self-representation as direct action. We now have the digital production tools required, not just to critique media and cultural production, but to create it, and disseminate it, ourselves. This idea connects to a growing body of literature on the link between selfies and activism (Fink and Miller, 2014; Murray, 2015; Senft and Baym, 2015; Sheehan, 2015; Shipley, 2015). Like this literature, Mirzoeff's conception of visual activism is closely reliant on the opportunities that social media technologies offer for 'spreadable imagery' (Reestorff, 2014; Jenkins et al, 2013; Mirzoeff, 2015, 2017). What Mirzoeff's (2015, 2017) reading of visual activism also does is democratise its use by locating its activism within social movements, rather than the art world. Visual activism becomes a process of intervention, or a mode of operating, now central to the toolkit of *all* activists.

Rather than welcoming what Mirzoeff sees as the democratising move from art activism to visual activism, a number of the articles in Bryan-Wilson et al's (2016) special issue, reflect a concern that the term threatens to depoliticise culture by separating the visual from the activism itself (Bryan-Wilson et al, 2016; Demos, 2016; Jackson, 2016). Demos' article in this special issue (2016:85-102) talks about

artist group Labofii's action *Put the Fun Between Your Legs* action in Copenhagen in 2009 (2016:86). He notes that Labofii refer to their work not as 'visual activism' but 'rebel creativity', as they are wary of the 'iconophilia, the worship of pictures' implied in the term visual activism. Much of his argument seems to echo those rehearsed in the debates about art activism (see Section 2.5) – a concern that ethics may be eclipsed by aesthetics, particularly once a 'visual' element of an activist intervention becomes a 'migrant image' (one that is separated from its original context) and enters an exhibition space (inevitably compromised by consumer capital). However, he also concedes with reference to the photographs of eco-activist Banerjee, that at times the capacity for a visual image to move between and 'intervene in' a number of different institutional contexts, is what allows for it to 'generate political drive' (Demos, 2016: 96). Despite this example, ultimately Demos' argues (with Labofii) for a move away from art institutions, because of their complicity with capital (2016:97). He notes this position as marking a break from his earlier work (2013:93) where argues 'against the caricature of art institutions as mere commercial enterprises'. On the one hand, Demos's article reflects a discomfort with contemporary art institutions as sites of activism, and an implicit sense that 'real' activism (even when practiced by artists) is expressed as public protest. On the other hand, it gestures to something more complicated; to there being both different *forms* of visual activism, and also different possible *sites*.

Here, Bryan-Wilson et al's (2016) article, in the same special issue, is useful because it identifies different 'modalities' of visual activism. One is exemplified by the TEPCO protest in which the performance piece or artwork is publicly sited,⁵³ linked to anti-capitalist protest, a time-bound or 'ephemeral intervention' (Murphy and O'Driscoll, 2015:329), and is targeting a specific event (the radiation leak). This action could also be seen as a documentation of injustice, a form of visual activism perhaps best captured by the work of the NGO B'Tselem in the Occupied Palestinian Territories and their 'Shooting Back' project (Gregory, 2012a, 2012b, 2012c;

⁵³ Of course, this is complicated by the fact that the TEPCO protest piece was broadcast online and has subsequently been shown in a gallery space.

McLagan, 2005, 2006, 2007; Ginsburg, 2018).⁵⁴ Another exemplified by Muholi's work, which 'traffics in the politics of intimacy and the activism of affective and interpersonal exchange' (Bryan-Wilson et al, 2016: 6). Muholi's work is squarely designed for the high-end art market, and as a result of this, has a complex, but not oppositional relationship to capital, and is linked to slow, broad social change. Bryan-Wilson et al's mention of the politics of 'interpersonal exchange' may be an acknowledgement of the importance of work beyond the image to Muholi's practice.

In Western Europe and the United States, the dominant contemporary conception of what constitutes visual activism is closest to Bryan-Wilson et al's example of the TEPCO intervention, and linked to protest events, where a visual element either supports or documents the protest. Examples of this position include Mirzoeff's (2015) writing on the Occupy Movement, Demos's (2016) exploration of Labofii's *Bike Bloc* intervention at the United Nations Climate Change conference in Copenhagen in 2009, and the Victoria and Albert Museum's (2015) *Disobedient Objects* exhibition.⁵⁵

These two 'modalities' of visual activism appear dichotomous but considering them together gives a much better sense of the possibilities of visual activism and offers a much clearer understanding of its practice.

The origins of visual activism in Western Europe and the United States would appear to lie in the feminist and queer art activism of the 1970s and 1990s respectively. Both these sets of practices emerged in response to social movements, and not from within the arts (Kelley, 1995:224; Felshin,1995; Cvetkovich, 2003; Crimp, 2004; Lord and Meyer, 2013; Jones and Silver, 2016). The much more developed literature on art activism provides a more comprehensive framing within which to link and contextualise the two seemingly dichotomous modalities of visual activism that I have explored so far.

⁵⁴ This modality of visual activism is not necessarily time bound.

⁵⁵ See <http://www.vam.ac.uk/content/exhibitions/disobedient-objects/disobedient-objects-about-the-exhibition/>

2.5 Art Activism

It is impossible to locate the exact genesis of contemporary art activism. Lippard (1984:344) jokes that the Trojan Horse may have been the first activist artwork. She writes, in an article that still feels remarkably contemporary, ‘based in subversion on the one hand, and empowerment on the other, activist art operates both within and beyond the beleaguered fortress that is high culture or the “art world”’ (Lippard, 1984:344). Some link waves of art activism to the development of particular technologies – to the printing press (Naidus, 2009:11), to the growth of mass media, television and commercial advertising (Felshin, 1995:15), and to the internet (Weibel, 2015:55). Certainly, art has long been used to both antagonise and resist power.

There are clearly numerous examples of what might be termed art activism throughout history - Courbet and Morris, for example, are both suggested as artists whose practice was strongly influenced by their politics (Kester, 2011:5; Bradley and Esche, 2008:12). Felshin (1995) situates contemporary practice within a trajectory that begins with the feminist art of the 1970s (itself influenced by the happenings of the 1950s, in particular Kaprow’s performance work)⁵⁶ and runs through the work produced in the 1980s and 90s in response to the AIDS epidemic.

Much of the writing on art activism is strongly influenced by the ideas of Raymond Williams, JL Austin, and Guy Debord. Williams’s notion of ‘structures of feeling’ (1977:132), is often referenced as the basis for understandings of the affective power of art. It is the capacity for cultural forms to distil the shared emotions of a specific context (Williams’s ‘structures of feeling’ (ibid)) that explain their capacity to activate social and political change. Austin’s (1962) writing outlines ‘speech acts’ as not just describing reality but acting on it. Through performativity, discourse produces

⁵⁶ Kaprow, whose “Happenings” are seen by many as one of the precursors to contemporary activist art, was influenced by the work of the American philosopher John Dewey (1949). Dewey, in *Art and Experience*, argued that Western society had separated art objects from everyday life. A key motivating factor behind Kaprow’s work, was the desire to find ways to link his art to everyday life (Kaprow, 2003: xii).

that which it names (Butler, 1993:17). Austin's work forms the basis of writing on performativity (Butler, 1990; Jones, 2012; Munoz, 2009). Performativity is pertinent to visual activism, and particularly to queer visual activism, because it is through iterative performances that we construct both our discursive and material realities. It is also these iterative performances that structure gender (Butler: 1990, 1993). Debord's (1967) writing and practice (as mentioned earlier) critiqued the elision of culture with consumerism, and suggested tactics such as detournement (hijacking or remixing) as a way of subverting, or making apparent, this elision. These tactics have been taken up, and extended, by art activists.

Without trying to provide an exhaustive history or overview of art activism it is possible to sketch out both the broad areas of practice that constitute the field, and to identify some of the key debates that influence the contemporary landscape. Art activism can be broadly divided into three types of practice, the boundaries of which are by no means fixed: process, product, and protest. All three areas of practice comprise various institutions, all of which are sites of contestation in which there is potential for change.

Process-driven art activism includes community-based art (Clover and Stalker, 2007; Cleveland, 2008; Naidus, 2009; Crehan, 2011; Grosvenor and Macnab, 2015) and the work of participatory activist researchers (Pink, 2007; Mitchell, 2011; Wilson and Milne, 2015; Gubrium et al, 2015; Mannay, 2016) who use visual and creative methods in their work. The focus of this practice is often on using art to empower or engage with participants and is heavily influenced by the work of Freire (1968) and Boal (1974). Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* outlines a philosophy of education that emphasises the political nature of education, and its role in facilitating critical thought, and therefore, ultimately, social transformation. Boal's work, building on Freire's ideas, developed a form of theatre – *Theatre of the Oppressed* – that activates an audience (its 'spect-actors') to use theatre to reflect on and analyse their own lives, as a first step towards creating change.

Methodologies such as photovoice (Wang, 2006; Sutton-Brown, 2014) and digital storytelling (Lewin, 2011; Worcester, 2012; Lambert, 2013; Anderson and Mack, 2017) are part of this field of practice. Much 'communication for social change' work also fits into this field, in that it is about using creative practices to surface and make apparent social or political issues, and then to advocate for the necessary related changes (Servaes et al, 1996; Gumucio Dagron and Tufte, 2006). The primary academic disciplines addressing this practice are visual sociology, visual anthropology, development studies, and education. Kester (2011:9) points out that community art and collaborative work utilising participatory methodologies have become increasingly legitimate in the mainstream art world.

Product-driven activist art is geared towards the creation of objects or events for display in galleries and museums and includes 'process as product'. This category of activist art is complicated by numerous 'turns' – participatory, social, ethical, performative, which have often resisted both the creation of art objects, and the locating of art within gallery spaces (Thompson, 2015; Sholette, 2017; Bourriard, 1998; Bishop, 2012; Harvie, 2013; Jackson, 2011). Writing and practice in this area of art activism often references Debord's (1967) arguments in *Society of the Spectacle* in which he critiques the alienating and divisive effects of capitalism, and the extent to which the market monopolises our image world (Debord, 1995). As Bishop explains with reference to participatory art practice, 'For many artists and curators on the left, Debord's critique strikes to the heart of why participation is important as a project: it rehumanises a society rendered numb and fragmented by the repressive instrumentality of capitalist production' (Bishop, 2012:11). The discussion of this practice is primarily located within visual culture, art history, museum studies, and curatorial practice. The contemporary South African visual activism that I focus on in Chapters Four, Five, and Six, on the surface fits most coherently into this field of practice, although (as I will argue in these chapters) it often works across all three areas of practice, and is closely imbricated in a social practice more emblematic of process-driven art activism.

Protest-based activist art is that which constitutes or supports ephemeral protest events, and generally takes place in public spaces (see Weibel, 2015; Mirzoeff, 2015; Demos, 2016). This would include, for example, banners and posters produced for protests, political street art, and graffiti. Much of this literature is framed as protest aesthetics, and is influenced by Hakim Bey's (1991) *Temporary Autonomous Zone*, Bakhtin's work on the carnivalesque, both of which address temporary spaces that exist outside of formal structures of control, and Ranciere's (2004) concept of the distribution of the sensible ('partage du sensible'), which describes with the way in which politics becomes sensible (or available to our senses) through medial forms; because these forms make concrete the political, they are fundamental both to its constitution and its distribution. This field has grown significantly in response to the 'Arab Spring', the 'Movement of the Squares', and the Occupy Movement. As Charnley (2017:5) observes 'Activist art is increasingly acknowledged as an important presence within politics, especially since the global insurrections of 2010/11'. Writing on protest-based activist art is predominantly found in media studies, political science, and visual culture (Khatib, 2013; McKee, 2016; Thomas, 2017). The way in which the term visual activism is being developed outside of the South African context is most closely connected to this field of practice.

Having broadly divided the field of art activism into three parts, and acknowledged that these may overlap, I now turn to some of the key historical developments and debates that characterise the contemporary context of art activism, across all three categories of practice. Art activism has been concerned with building other worlds (either at a local or global level) and critiquing our existing ones (both the real world, and the art world). From the conceptual art of the 1960s, to the art of the second wave feminists in the 1970s, through to the activist collectives of the 1980s and 90s, there was a move to dematerialise art, as a resistance to its increasing commodification, and to the cultural elitism of the art world (Lippard, 1973; Felshin, 1995; Lacy, 2010; Reckitt, 2013). Lacy referred to activist art, concerned with creating new relations and repairing social bonds, as 'new genre public art' (1995). 'Public' because it aimed to engage with 'broad, layered, or atypical audiences'

(Lacy, 1995:13), and 'new genre' because its focus was on social change and interaction, rather than what Kwon (2002) calls 'heavy metal' (sculpture or installation in public spaces), and it because it used both traditional and non-traditional media (Lacy, 1995:19).

Ranciere's work (2004), together with others who revisit the relationship between politics and aesthetics (Badiou, 2005; Duncombe, 2007; Grindon, 2008; Bennett, 2012) through the notion of 'aisthesis' (perception via the senses) situates aesthetics not as being about the judgement of art, but rather 'the site for the systematic ordering of sense experience...which in turn establishes the political function of aesthetics' (Bennett, 2012:2). Bennett, commenting on visual responses to 9/11 writes that 'art (the critical, self-conscious manipulation of media) has the capacity to explore the nature of the event's perception or impression and hence to participate in its social and political configuration. In this sense, the aesthetic is not art's exclusive province but a method of engagement in which art specialises' (Bennett, 2012:6). These theoretical works, together with the central activating role played by visual imagery in the Arab Spring (Khatib, 2013), the Occupy Movement (McKee, 2016) and Gezi Park (McGarry et al, 2019) have repositioned art as a social practice key to our engagement with politics.

Ranciere's work contains an explanation of why art is crucial to activism, but it also, importantly, explains the need for them to remain separate, as Lippard observes: 'there is a tipping point at which art topples over into the real world and loses its power to surprise and instigate' (Lippard, 2017: xix). It is the tension between art and activism that makes art activism æffective.⁵⁷ Art can support but not substitute for politics (Bishop, 2012:283).

With the increasing importance of art within politics, and politics within art, it has been suggested that the separation between art and life is finally void (Sholette, 2017: 233); that political artists have left the art world behind (Thompson, 2015:80). Some see artists as the central organisers of a new politics. McKee (2016:9) goes so

⁵⁷ Duncombe (2016), writing about activist art, combines effective and affective to give us æffective.

far as to suggest *Occupy Wall Street* as an art work. He points out that art and artists were central to the Occupy movement, both as initiators and organisers (ibid). This potentially opens up questions both about the role of art and artists, and also their geographical and institutional siting.

Felshin, in 1995, described art activists as having one foot in the art world, and one in the world of political activism. This still holds true to some extent but, particularly in the former West, there has been a move away from formal art institutions towards 'the street', which is seen as more authentic site (Thompson, 2015:80). With this move, several critics caution against abandoning art institutions, recognising that they remain sites of power. Demos (2013:93) cites Sholette's (2008) writing as overly critical of 'art institutions as a mere commercial enterprise', before moving on in his own later writing (Demos, 2016:97) to similarly argue for the importance of developing spaces outside of the institutions of the art world. Sholette's (2017) recent writing, with that of other critics, among them Jackson (2011) and Bishop (2012), suggests that maintaining an investment in the art world, and in its distinction from the 'real world' is both important and necessary. Jackson expresses frustration with art that derives its credibility from its degree of anti-institutionality (2011:14), because of her interest in sustainability. What the debates about the place of art indicate, is that with changing conceptions of both art and activism, has come an uncertainty about the boundaries of both.

Along with the move to dematerialise art, we can identify the emergence of three broad, often overlapping, approaches to art practice: the social, the tactical, and the critical. 'Social' art practices go by a number of different names. What Thompson (2015) calls 'social aesthetics', Bishop (2006a) refers to as 'participatory' art; art that is both artistically and politically opposed to the alienating and socially divisive effects of capitalism (Bishop, 2012:35). She writes that:

Participatory art in the strictest sense forecloses the traditional idea of spectatorship and suggests a new understanding of art without audiences, one in which everyone is a producer...the activation of the audience is positioned against its mythic counterpart, passive spectatorial consumption.

Kester refers to 'dialogical' art (Kester, 2004, 2011), in which he identifies the primary motivator as being the facilitation of dialogue or social interaction, with the aim being to create new knowledge or understanding from this interaction. Bourriard (1998) refers to 'relational' art, where the role of the artist is to facilitate interactions between people.

One of the central debates about participatory and social art concerns the tension between ethics and aesthetics, and related to this, between individual and community. Bishop's (2006b) exchange with Kester (2006) in *Artforum* best captures some of the contours of these debates. Bishop argues that with art's "social turn" has come a "ethical turn" in art criticism. She challenges what she sees as the tyranny of participatory work as a form, and in particular its resistance to critical appraisal with what she sees as the privileging of ethics over aesthetics, and collective over individual authorship. Bishop argues that what she terms an 'ethics of authorial renunciation' makes fine art inseparable from the community arts, privileging relationships with participants above aesthetic considerations and creative mastery. Kester (2006) responds that Bishop's critique homogenises what is a diverse field of practice, is indicative of a personal aesthetic preference for work that addresses the political indirectly. He suggests that her position has more to do with policing the boundaries of art, and protecting its mythical status, and therefore her own position as an art critic.

Bishop also points out like others (McRobbie, 2008; Harvie, 2013), that participatory art forms are not exempt from the pressures of neo-liberal capital, and like other art forms, have been instrumentalised both by the state and the market, and that the rise in participatory art has coincided with the dismantling of the welfare state. Sholette (2017) has observed that the art market has not just survived the recent global economic crises but flourished. Sholette (2017:233) comments that 'if art has finally merged with life...it has done so not at a moment of triumphant communal utopia but at a time when life, at least for the 99% sucks.' Sholette's (2011) influential analysis of the art world *Dark Matter*, suggests that the art world depends on an underclass of failed artists for its survival. He attributes much of the involvement of

artists in contemporary social and political movements to their politicisation through their exposure to the vast inequities of the art world,⁵⁸ and this as a reflection of the dynamics of the 'real world'. In many ways, his analysis affirms Fraser's (2005) insistence that we can't separate art from the rest of the economy. Sholette (2017) refers to contemporary art, which has been exposed for its imbrication with capital as 'bare art'.⁵⁹

Alongside these social practices, and often entwined with them (in, for example, Lacy's work – see Kelley, 1995) were tactical media practices (Garcia and Lovink, 1997; Lovink, 2002, Boler, 2008: 369, Raley, 2009). Tactical media practice is the agile, strategic and subversive use of media technologies to articulate a political message. Later, came Tactical Urbanism, short term projects in urban areas aimed at improving the lives of residents, such as the creation of guerrilla community gardens (Lind, 2004; Lydon and Garcia, 2015; Sholette, 2017).

At the same time, beginning in the late 1960s artists such as Martha Rosler, Adrian Piper, Mierle Laderman Ukeles and Hans Haacke critiqued the institutions of the art world. These critiques, taken up by artists such as Fred Wilson, Andrea Fraser, and Group Material; and in pieces such as KemangWaLehulere's piece (2015) 'History Will Break Your Heart' (Gamdeze, 2016) and Richard Bell's (2015) 'Larry' (Mauder, 2015), foregrounded the art world's complicity in neoliberalism, and in the maintenance of sexual, racial and class hierarchies (Fraser, 2005; Raunig and Ray, 2009; Alberro and Stimson, 2011; Sholette, 2017:42). These various developments in artistic practice have all contributed to a paradigm shift in art production (Kester, 2011:9).

With the blurring of lines between the art world⁶⁰ and wider society that has accompanied these changes in art practice, and the utilising of visual and social

⁵⁸ This insight has been credited to Carol Duncan's influence on Sholette's thinking (2017:9)

⁵⁹ Sholette is drawing on Agamben's concept of 'bare life', in which life constitutes survival not quality.

⁶⁰ My use of 'art world' here follows that of Sholette (2007: 429; 2017:28), who defines the art world as 'the integrated, trans-national economy of auction houses, dealers, collectors, international biennials, and trade publications that, together with curators, artists and critics, reproduce the market, as well as the discourse that influences the appreciation and demand for highly valuable artworks'(2007: 429).

media platforms in political organising, there have been debates about the place of art (both literal and metaphorical), tension between ethics and aesthetics, tactics and strategies, between individual and community, and the virtual collapse of the distinction between culture and consumerism. There has also been a revisiting of the relationship between politics and aesthetics (Ranciere, 2004; Badiou, 2005; Duncombe, 2007; Grindon, 2008; Bennett, 2012).

Conclusion

This chapter situated visual activism within a longer, more developed history of art activism. Although I see visual activism as emerging from art activism, perhaps what sets it apart from art activism is that while it is using the methods of artistic practice, and sometimes the institutions of the art world, it is grounded in, or emerging from, the social space. This conception of visual activism refuses a false dichotomy between ‘the street’ and ‘the art institution’ and recognises them both as appropriate sites of activism. As a result, it is a framing that can hold both the emerging understanding of visual activism in the West, and the existing understanding of visual activism in the South African context. Although Thompson (2015) observes radical artists in the West gravitating away from art institutions, this is not the case at all in the South African context, as I will show in the body of this thesis.

The term *visual activism* (as opposed to *art activism*) is useful because it encourages us to think beyond both the image and the art institution, to the social context, production and reception of that image. It is an invitation to explore the connections between the visual and the social and across protest, process and product, and in so doing, to challenge existing preconceptions about both the nature and siting of activism. Queer visual activism in South Africa, is a very specific, local form of visual activism that has developed in queer communities in South Africa, largely inspired by the ground-breaking work of photographer Zanele Muholi. It mobilises the visual image to promote, through visibility, the acceptance and rights of LGBTQI people. It

The extent to which the ‘art world’ exists as a separate sphere is contested. McKee (2016:11), for example, uses the phrase ‘art system’ to denote a less cohesive, self-enclosed universe.

is a strategy of both resistance and solidarity. Queer visual activists engage (to varying degrees) with the art market to showcase and sustain their work.

3. Methodology

Introduction

As articulated in the introduction, this thesis seeks to open a space of inquiry into how queer visual artists and activists in South Africa are using their practice to counter and dismantle institutional racism, sexism and homophobia. In addition to identifying who some of the significant queer visual activists are, my thesis seeks to examine how queer visual activism is understood in contemporary South Africa and how this differs from or is similar to other contexts. My methodology and methods were tailored to assist in answering these questions (Mason, 2007:27). As a result, my sample size was relatively small (16 people), and I relied on in-depth interviews with my participants of 90-120 minutes (see semi-structured interview schedule on p.192, Appendix 4). Interviews were supported by participant observation at 12 events/exhibitions, context immersion, and visual analysis of art practice (see p.190, Appendix 3).

My methodological approach sits somewhere between the social sciences and the humanities. This reflects the interdisciplinarity of the work and the fact that much of what was driving my interest in exploring the subject matter, was a perceived gap in the existing literature. Rose (2016) structures the life cycle of an image into four sites – the site of production, the image itself, the site of audiencing and the site of circulation. Most of the literature on queer visual activism in South Africa focuses on the image itself. Although exploring the images of individual artists, I was primarily interested in their activism beyond the image itself, in particular the site of production and in it, their relationship with the communities that they represent. My methodology reflects an iterative journey that uses particular images and bodies of work as an entry point to expose the process of their production, and the networks of relationship that are developed and sustained through this process.

My thematic analysis enabled me to explore general trends across my data, and a social science lens underscored my interest in understanding the political economy of queer visual activism. My in-depth interviews, in particular the discussions about

particular artworks or bodies of work, were more productive for understanding the specificity of a particular individual's work and how they conceptualised their contribution to the field of queer visual activism.

The previous two chapters introduced the context of my study, and the literature that underpins it. This chapter outlines the methodology underlying my work, as well the methods used both in data collection, and analysis. The first part of the chapter introduces my methodological approach, which I describe as inter- and trans-disciplinary, queer and feminist, and driven by a decolonial and participatory ethic. For me, these are all interrelated, which I will explain in more detail in Section 3.1. My research approach is qualitative and underpinned by a 'subtle' or critical realism (Hammersley, 1992; Robson, 2002; Ritchie et al, 2013), an ontological position that sees reality as existing 'independently of those who observe it but...only accessible through the perceptions and interpretations of individuals' (Ritchie et al, 2013: 21). This critical realism is reflected both in my data collection and my data analysis, which is thematic, with elements of both inductive⁶¹ and theory-driven analysis. I explain this in more detail in Section 3.5. My epistemological approach is a mixed-methods one, with elements of ethnography and structured by moving iteratively between data and theory (Fetterman, 2010; Creswell, 2013). The second part of this chapter looks in detail at my methods. I chose a multi-methods approach to be able to offer a complex, nuanced account of my subject matter (Flick, 2002:226; Denzin and Lincoln, 2008:5) bringing together participant observation, semi-structured in-depth interviews, and visual analysis.

My primary data sources comprised interviews, artwork, and 'the field' – two 3-month periods of time in South Africa (Sept-Dec 2015, Sept-Dec 2016) during which I conducted interviews, attended exhibitions and debates, talked with friends and relatives, and listened to and read local media. I paid close attention to informal discussions and interactions during my fieldwork and kept a research diary which helped me record and process my thoughts. The following section gives more detail

⁶¹ Or a style of thematic analysis that Braun and Clarke would characterise as 'grounded theory lite', as opposed to full fat (Braun and Clarke, 2006:8).

about my methodological approach, before moving on to a detailed explanation of my research design.

3.1 Research Approach

My methodological approach is queer and feminist and driven by a decolonial and participatory ethic and my work is necessarily trans- and inter-disciplinary. I used a mixed-method approach based on employing what I found useful from a toolbox of methods I have tried and tested over many years of participatory research. This is not an uncommon approach in cultural studies (Pickering, 2008). Elements of my research were ethnographic, an approach that Skeggs notes is particularly useful for exploring intersectional oppressions, and one that has shifted from being a colonial tool, to being a liberatory strategy (Skeggs, 2001:430). However, Skeggs cautions that this shift is in the *deployment* of the methodology rather than the methodology itself⁶² (ibid). Haraway writes about an 'ethnographic attitude' which concerns remaining mindful and accountable (1997). Similarly, Phelan talks of an ethics of witnessing that is responsible both *to* and *for* (1998). All of these scholars point to the fact that it is the application of a methodology that determines its character. In this section I take each element of my methodological approach (feminist, queer, decolonial and participatory) and describe what they mean in practice.

Feminist, queer, participatory and decolonial researchers have much in common in recognising 'knowledge production as the scene of political struggle' (Wiegman 2012, 71). Feminist and queer scholars have argued for the importance of making visible and interrogating one's own positionality as a researcher rather than hiding behind the idea of a 'neutral' gaze (Haraway, 1988; Harding, 1991; Bhavnani, 1993; Rose, 1997; hooks, 2014; Haritaworn, 2017) Queer researchers have emphasised the importance of destabilising normative or hegemonic knowledge (Browne and Nash, 2010:7). Participatory researchers have challenged the hierarchies of knowledge production by positioning the research process as one within which knowledge is co-constructed by both researchers and participants, thus challenging

⁶² I regard ethnography both as a methodology and a method, see Prasad (1997).

the notion of the researcher as ‘expert’ (Cornwall and Jewkes, 1995; Reason, 2011). Decolonising or anti-racist research requires that one pay close attention to who is represented and how they are represented (Bhatia, 2018).

In my own research, as a commitment to decolonising knowledge, I tried as much as possible to pay specific attention to literature emerging from, or situated in, the South African context. Abu-Lughod (2008) makes a convincing case for the importance of ‘situated knowledge’, what she terms ‘ethnographies of the particular’. Additionally, I tried to balance the racial demographics within my thesis, as well as being careful to interview a diverse cross-section of men, women, and non-cisgender artists.

Studying people is always complicated and exploring a subject area with so many multiple, intersecting and complex histories of privilege and discrimination has not been easy. As a white, middle class Southern African with any critical awareness, one has to be astutely aware of the extent to which one’s own positionality is necessarily ‘entangled with symbolic, structural and material violences’ (Judge, 2018:3). Chapter Four addresses the term queer and how it has been understood and lived in the South African context in more detail, but for my purposes here, in describing myself as a queer researcher, I am marking a political intention to think (and write) against hegemonic whiteness and heteropatriarchy⁶³ (McLean, 2017; Judge, 2018).

At the time that I was conducting my fieldwork, there was a strong political position that black South Africans should not be giving their scarce time and resources to historically privileged white researchers to enable them to profit from their experiences and attain university degrees. Whatever one would like to think about one’s own exceptionalism and race politics, the historical contexts that create this political position cannot be denied and should be respected. Of course, proving one’s political credentials in such circumstances is not always possible (or

⁶³ I understand ‘whiteness’ as a world view that supports white supremacy (Steyn, 2001).

desirable). In several cases, after a few tentative attempts to interview people that I felt were key figures in contemporary queer visual activism in South Africa, I gave up. Not because I lacked tenacity, or research ambition, but because in this instance, given what I had heard in the field, I felt it was the most ethical course of action. Whether or not this was the case, or I should have been more persistent, I don't know, but I still feel strongly that, given the circumstances, acting respectfully, with an awareness of my inescapable whiteness, was the most ethical course of action.

Tuhiwai Smith (1999) has written eloquently about the mutual imbrication of Western Science and research with the history of colonialism and racism, and the implication of this for research. She argues

The term 'research' is inextricably linked to European imperialism and colonialism...The word itself is probably one of the dirtiest words in the indigenous world's vocabulary...It is implicated in the worst excesses of colonialism (Tuhiwai Smith, 1999:1)

An awareness of the history of the relationship between knowledge and power, as well as one's own implication in this history, is essential for what the Canadian feminist Philosopher, Lorraine Code, calls 'knowing well' (1995:14). A researcher committed to 'knowing well' understands the weight of social and political responsibility attached to constructing knowledge (Doucet and Mauthner, 2002:1). This relates both to a decolonial ethic (Abu-Lughod, 2008), and a feminist one (Harding, 1987, 1993), and for me, underlies the importance of a participatory approach to research. In my fieldwork I placed an emphasis on collaboration, rather than the separation, between 'researcher' and 'subject', in keeping with a participatory ethic that is cognisant of the positionalities of those involved and aspires to be non-hierarchical in its approach (Reason, 2011:99). Queer methodologies have also foregrounded the importance of relationships in the research process, and related to this, the ethical imperative for researcher accountability (Detamore, 2010; Doucet and Mauthner, 2002). My decision to use participatory analysis was based on a commitment to this ethic, and a belief that it makes for more valid knowledge.

Of course, participation in the context of writing a doctoral thesis is limited by the nature of the rules of the academy (Holland-Muter, 2018). One symptom of having been a participatory facilitator and communicator for many years, and learning to de-centre myself in research contexts, was confronting deep-seated reluctance to claim the responsibility for my own ideas necessary for writing a thesis. This is something I still struggle with. At times it appeared to be an analytical laziness or a lack of confidence, but I realised after encountering an almost physical resistance to the process of writing a single-authored dissertation of this style, that it was more complicated than this. I have come to understand it as an ingrained behaviour that was initially learned as a resistance to hierarchies of knowledge production (and one that needs to be unlearned in order to produce this kind of work).

One somewhat unexpected outcome of explicitly adopting a queer (non-normative) methodological lens, was an early realisation of the extent to which Zanele Muholi's work has come to dominate and define the field of queer visual activism (particularly in South Africa, but to some extent globally). 'Visual activism' is strongly associated with Zanele Muholi (who uses this term to describe their work). It is a term that some regard as Muholi's intellectual property. So, to claim the label 'visual activist' can be seen at worst as trespassing, and at best (given their success) as arrogant or presumptuous. This necessitated a (queer) commitment on my part to look beyond Muholi's work, to find other examples of visual activism.⁶⁴

3.2 Research Design

My primary data collection was structured around three key events. The first was my participatory research with an artist/activist collective brought together through a project 'visual acts' (VA). I used this interaction as a pilot for my fieldwork period (in 2015). It was my first foray into 'the thick of it', where I began trying to understand the queer subcultures I would be studying, and also the initial recruiting ground for my study (see my discussion on sampling later in this chapter). The second was my fieldwork in South Africa, during which I conducted in-depth interviews, and was

⁶⁴ I should add that Muholi encouraged me to pursue this course.

‘immersed’ in the context of my study as a participant observer, treating this cultural setting as a data source (Atkinson et al, 2001:4-5). The third was a member checking/participatory analysis period in South Africa during which I conducted additional interviews,⁶⁵ collaborative analysis, and member checking. Member checking is a process between data collection and data analysis where a researcher checks transcripts or early analysis with participants, to ensure that their interpretation of the data resonates with participants’ experiences (Merriam, 1998; Curtin & Fossey 2007, 92; Doyle, 2007). In 2016, as part of this process, I shared my initial Thematic map (figure 1.5) with my participants. Participants had minor comments on this but were broadly supportive of my early findings.

As already indicated, my research design was structured around three key events – a pilot project in Berlin (see Section 3.3.2), my three-month fieldwork period in South Africa (2015) during which I collected the majority of my primary data, and a member checking/participatory analysis period in South Africa (2016). The majority of my primary data was thus collected over the 18-month period from July 2015 to December 2016. My choice of methods was determined by my research approach (Harding, 1987) and research questions (Mason, 2007). This section gives an overview of my research design, before looking at the methods I chose to employ for sampling and data collection.

The figure 1.1 below illustrates the timings of significant stages in the research.

Research stages - overview

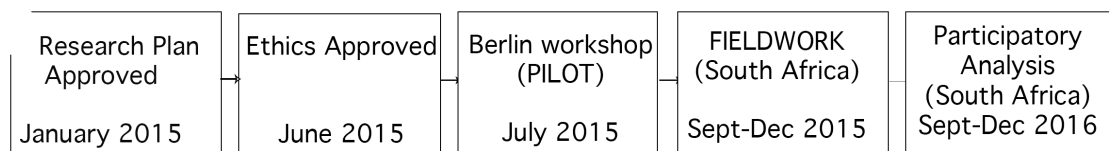


FIGURE 1.1

⁶⁵ ‘Pick up’ interviews were with people who I had been unable to interview in 2015 because of their availability.

3.3 Data Collection

I collected three types of primary data – observational data (captured in field notes), interview data (captured on an audio recorder and then transcribed), and documentation of art practice. This section looks at each of the techniques used in turn in order to provide a more detailed understanding of how they were applied in my study.

3.3.1 Sampling

My research relied on both purposive and qongqothwane sampling for the selection of participants. This section describes each of these methods and the particular inclusions and exclusions of my study, as well as some of the potential weaknesses of this sampling choice. My sample was geographically constrained by my fieldwork sites – Cape Town, Johannesburg, and Pretoria.

3.3.1.1 Purposive Sampling

Qualitative research uses non-probability methods to select a study sample, in other words the sample is not chosen at random. This is because the sample is selected on the basis of particular characteristics (Ritchie et al, 2013: 113). Ritchie et al (ibid) identify two principal aims of purposive sampling – the first, that the sample is relevant to the study; and the second that it contains enough diversity for the researcher to fully explore that which is being studied.

In my case, I was looking for participants who either regarded themselves as queer visual activists or were considered by others to be queer visual activists. My sampling process was complicated by the fact that during the course of my research, it became clear that, ‘visual activist’ was a role, or label, that participants might occupy temporarily, depending on a range of factors including the current political climate, the type of work they were producing at that time, their personal politics, even their confidence in their work. For some ‘visual activist’ felt too grand, and they were more comfortable being called either artists or agitators. This meant that I relied on a variety of factors to assess whether or not someone might fit the criteria of my

study – their own self-identification, their identification by others, or my knowledge of their visual production. Because my criteria for selection was not straightforward, I also relied on qongqothwane sampling.⁶⁶

3.3.1.2 Qongqothwane Sampling

Qongqothwane sampling is a term used to describe asking those you have already interviewed to identify others that they know who fit the research criteria. It relies on the object of study being social, and something that participants share (van Zyl, 2105). It is a method often employed to reach ‘hard to reach’ individuals or groups, and as a result has been used extensively in research on sexuality (Browne, 2005:48). One of the motivations for my involvement in the ‘Visual Acts’ workshop in Berlin (a workshop organized as part of a project on ‘Gender, violence and visual activism’ that I attended as a pilot study for my South African fieldwork, see Section 3.3.2), was to recruit some of the participants there to be involved in my study, and to help me find other participants. I knew that two of them in particular were connected to queer organisations (Inkanyiso and Iranti.org) that are central to the production of queer visual activism in South Africa. Although queer visual activists are not a ‘sensitive’ population in the sense that they are, by definition, publicly ‘out’ or visible as queer, this visibility is often restricted to those within their subculture. Beyond the Berlin workshop, I used personal networks and friendships to access potential participants, and these contacts in turn led to others. My existing contacts when I began my doctoral research became both ‘guides’ and ‘gatekeeper’, in that they both facilitated introductions to other participants and vouched for my credibility (Ritchie et al, 2013: 258).

3.3.2 Research Pilot

The ‘visual acts’ workshop in Berlin was the second of three workshops organized as part of the ‘Gender, violence and visual activism’ project initiated by Kylie Thomas. The primary focus of the project was on visual activism and the ways in which

⁶⁶ Outside of South Africa this method is known as ‘snowball sampling’ (Faugier and Sargeant, 1997; Browne, 2005; Noy, 2008). Mikki van Zyl (2015) renamed this ‘qongqothwane sampling’ after the dung beetle, which rolls dung into balls van Zyl (ibid) pointed out that as snow is not a weather feature in South Africa, ‘snowball sampling’ did not make sense in this context.

activist strategies that employ images might challenge normative and symbolic forms of violence. Although the workshop was not explicitly about queer visual activism, it was organised with the Institute for Queer Theory in Berlin, so many of the participants were queer-identified. Some of the South African participants (Collen Mfazwe and Kelebogile Ntladi) were queer visual activists and affiliated with both Inkanyiso and Iranti.org (both prominent queer activist organisations in South Africa, known for their visual work). I was invited to be part of the 'visual acts' group by Kylie Thomas. Kylie is an artist, writer and academic, until recently based at Stellenbosch University.⁶⁷ The first was held in Cape Town from November 23-27, 2014 in Kalk Bay, Cape Town. Its focus was on questions of violence and the ways in which violence is enacted, experienced, conceptualised and resisted in different locations and contexts. Eight of the participants of the first workshop also attended the second workshop. The third workshop did not take place. The second workshop, which I attended as part of this research, was held in Berlin from 11-18th July 2015.

My interest in this workshop was twofold, I was interested in using it as a pilot study, particularly in terms of refining my methods, and I was also interested in recruiting some of the workshop participants both to be part of study, and to help identify other potential research participants. Several of those attending the workshop were South African queer visual activists and were connected to other visual activist individuals and organisations in South Africa.

I was a participant observer at the workshop and conducted short (10-30 minutes) semi-structured video interviews with 12 of the 20 participants (21 in total, myself included). I asked interviewees to describe their practice, to reflect on what queer meant to them, and to explain their understandings of queer visual activism.

⁶⁷ Thomas left the University of Stellenbosch at the end of 2015, after repeated harassment and physical threats from the Afrikaner right wing for her central involvement in organising anti-institutional racism protests at the University, part of which involved the production of the film *Luister* (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sF3rTBQTQk4>) which showed students of colour talking about their experiences of studying at Stellenbosch. The film went viral and was picked up by national and international media. Thomas was accused by the right wing of instituting an 'ethnic cleansing campaign' against Afrikaners (see <https://www.censorbugbear.org/farmitracker/reports/view/3966>)

The pilot highlighted three key methodological learning points that I took into my fieldwork. Firstly, the importance of intersectionality (Hill-Collins and Bilge, 2016). Specifically, that queer solidarity cannot be assumed across race lines.⁶⁸ The second, that filming interviews is not necessarily desirable, and enthusiasm about being filmed is highly variable. And finally, that finding participants that explicitly identified with the label ‘queer visual activist’ was not going to be a straightforward task.

3.3.3 Fieldwork

My core fieldwork took place from September to December 2015, with a further 3-month period in 2016, which I used for participatory analysis and member checking. Mason (2007:52) identifies six categories of potential data sources for research – people, institutions events, texts, objects, and environment. Figure 1.2 below outlines a mapping of my research field structured around these categories. In the section that follows I describe the methods I used to access and collect data from these sources.

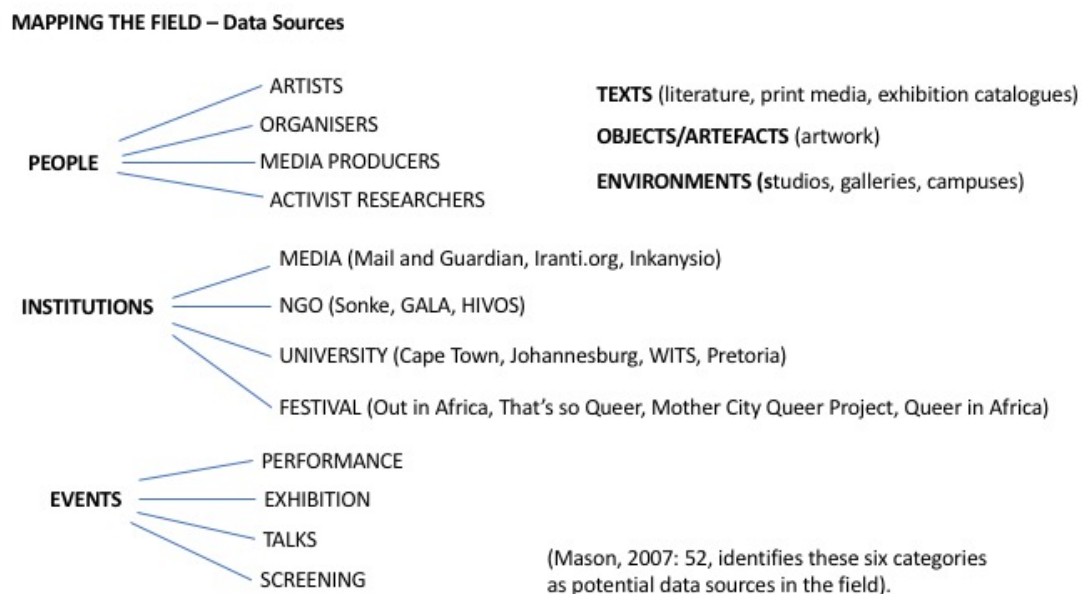


FIGURE 1.2

⁶⁸ The workshop was fraught with racial tensions – primarily expressed by the participants who were European queer people of colour. For ethical reason, I do not wish to explore these tensions here.

3.3.3.1 Participant observation

Observation is regarded as the core feature of an ethnographic approach (Atkinson et al, 2001:5). Participant observation involves establishing a place in a particular setting in order to experience and explore the social life of that setting (Emerson et al, 2001:352), and ‘develop a holistic understanding of the phenomena under study that is as objective and accurate as possible given the limitations of the method’ (DeWalt and DeWalt, 2002:92). As well as facilitating an understanding of the complexity of the field, participant observation helped me ‘develop more concrete research questions and lines of vision’ (Ritchie et al, 2013:248). It allowed me to map out the field of queer visual activism in South Africa, to get a detailed understanding of the context within which my research participants were working, and to trace the connections and networks between different actors and different contexts (Ritchie et al, 2013:250). This was vital to my study, because I was interested in the relationship between visual artworks and the social contexts of their production.

3.3.3.2 In-depth semi-structured Interviews

The interview is a method used in most forms of inter-personal research (Fontana and Frey, 2008; Gubrium and Holstein, 2012). I used semi-structured face-to-face interviews, which were based on a standardised, prepared interview schedule (see Appendix), but with some open-ended questions, and ‘space’ to follow a particular line of inquiry that was not necessarily planned for (Mason, 2007:62). In a few cases interviews were done via Skype (see Appendix for a table detailing interview activity).

All interviewees received a participant information sheet, and consent form, prior to the interview (see appendix). I ran through both the participant information sheet and consent form verbally prior to formally commencing the interview. Interviewees were given the option of withdrawing from the project at any stage, should they wish to do so.

As indicated in my research approach (Section 3.1), I regarded my interviewees as active research participants, or co-producers of the interview ‘event’ not passive

subjects (Berg, 2009; Fontana and Frey, 2008; Gubrium and Holstein, 2012). My interviews averaged 1 hour and 25 minutes. I used a 'reflexive dyadic' conversational style (Ellis and Berger, 2002), and I saw the interview process as a site for mutual learning and experience sharing, what Crick (1992:147) characterises as 'mutual exploitation'. One interviewee, for example, commented on the fact that it was useful to have a space in which to reflect on and actively theorise her artistic practice (Mampane, Selogadi [Performance Artist, Academic, Activist] Interview, Pretoria, November 2015). Another, commented that he had not thought of his work in the way that I responded to it, and could I please write up my insights, so he could quote me (Hamblin, Robert. [Photographer, Artist, Activist] Interview in Cape Town, November 2016).

I recorded all of my interviews with a digital voice recorder. I then transcribed the interviews from the resulting audio file. Participants were offered copies of their interview transcripts. Participants chose interview venues, these ranged from offices to cafes to the homes of interviewees. As noted in Section 3.3.2, my pilot interviews were conducted as video interviews which I recorded using a digital SLR and microphone. Three of my 2015 fieldwork interviewees were happy to be filmed. In all three cases I began the interview process off camera, just using my audio recording device. After mutually agreeing to capture some of the interview on camera, we then conducted a filmed interview. In all cases the questions discussed on camera had been rehearsed in the audio interview.⁶⁹

3.3.3.3 Visual Analysis

As indicated in Chapters One and Two, one of the significant gaps in the literature on visual activism is the lack of attention to the social context of image production, something this thesis tries to address. Bishop argues that we need to find 'new ways of analysing art that are no longer linked solely to visuality, even though *form* remains a crucial vessel for communicating meaning' (2012:7). Whilst I strongly agree with this argument, I am also interested in the art itself, and more importantly I

⁶⁹ At the time of my first fieldwork expedition (2015), I was still planning to do a practice-based PhD, and I imagined that a part of my research output would be a film, including some of my interviews from the field.

wanted, where possible, to involve my research participants in my selection of their artwork, and to talk to them about the intent behind it, and its production. I asked interview participants to describe their practice, and in some cases, in particular when I did not have immediate access to their artwork (either because of the interview venue, or because they were performance artists and could therefore not readily 'show' their work in the interview context) to describe a particular piece. So, the selection of artwork and the preliminary visual description and analysis became part of the structure of my interviews. This bore many similarities to a photo-elicitation process, where the research uses photographs to encourage participants to talk about a particular issue (Collier, 1957; Harper 2002:13; Banks 2007:65).

3.4 Data transcription, coding and analysis

This section describes the processes involved in how my 'data' was organised, prepared for analysis, and then analysed. I focus primarily on my interview data here, although as I will explain (in Section 3.4.2), I developed my analysis through an iterative process that drew on my fieldwork (and fieldnotes), literature review, and interview data.

3.4.1 Transcription

Some regard transcription as 'a key phase of data analysis within interpretative qualitative methodology' (Bird 2005, 227). Due initially to financial constraints, with the exception of one transcript, I did all the transcribing of my interviews myself in NVivo. Despite my early reluctance to transcribe all my interviews (based on time constraints), I was very pleased that I had done so, as it facilitated an essential familiarisation process (Braun and Clark, 2006). I transcribed 26 interviews in total; the shortest 35 minutes long, the longest 2 hours and 30 minutes; averaging 1 hour and 25 minutes. I found the process of converting audio interviews to text, and 'flattening' their affect, useful in beginning to allow the necessary distance from them needed for analysis. However, after coding my material and developing themes, I then uploaded all my interview recordings to an ipod, so I could listen to the original interviews again (and again) with my themes in mind.

3.4.2 Coding and Analysis

Figure 1.3 (below) shows how I conceptualise my analysis process, as an iterative development of themes through four sources of data: my literature, interviews, observation and artwork.

Iterative Thematic Analysis

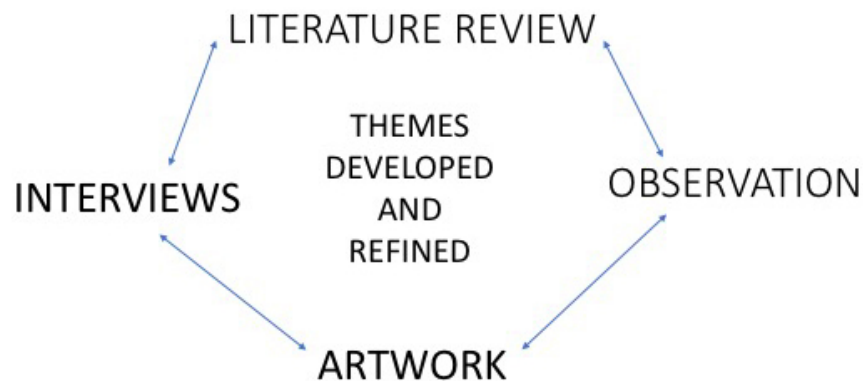


FIGURE 1.3

Although I tried to approach fieldwork with a grounded theory head on, by which I mean without preconceived concepts or hypotheses (Charmaz, 2004:501), I came to it with some embryonic ideas both from my literature review and my pilot study about some of the themes I would be looking at. In other words, my analysis was not purely inductive (O’Leary, 2005:197). I began my fieldwork in 2015 with what Charmaz (2004: 497) calls ‘points of departure’ – some general concepts and interests. However, I had a commitment to following leads rather than attempting to force any theoretical framework on my data (Charmaz, 2004:501). The following diagram (Figure 1.4) gives an indication of the process through which I developed my analytical themes. It is important to note that this process was not as linear as the diagram indicates it to be.

Development of Themes

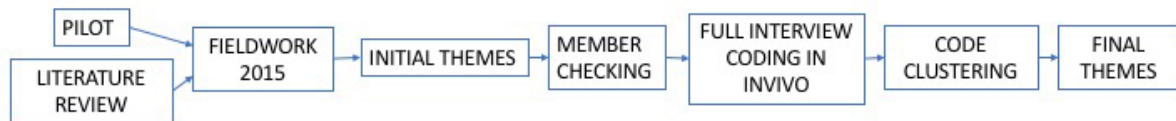


FIGURE 1.4

Lessons learned from my pilot study (see Section 3.3.2) and my literature review, helped prepare me for my first fieldwork trip in 2015. During this fieldwork period, I developed my first tentative themes (see Figure 1.5 below). These themes were not based a systematic coding of interview material, but rather on my ‘reading’ of the field and what had broadly emerged as significant, from the literature, my interviews, observation and visual analysis.

Early Themes

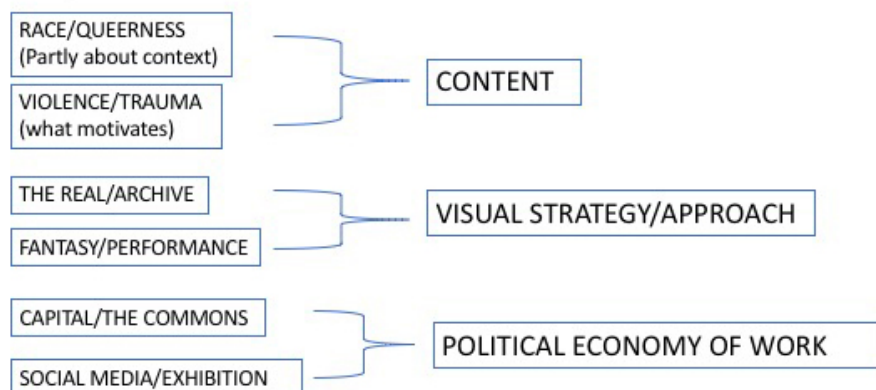


FIGURE 1.5

Doucet and Mauthner (2002:7) argue that it is at the data analysis stage where ‘the power and privilege of the researcher are particularly pronounced and where the ethics of our research practice are particularly acute because of the largely invisible nature of the interpretive process.’ With this in mind, I used my second ‘fieldwork’ trip to South Africa in 2016, to explore my initial data, themes and findings with research participants, and develop ideas in mutual discussion with them. In this way, I ensured that their ideas were included in the analysis phase of my project, and that my own ideas and interpretation were checked. Creswell (2009:191) argues that

member checking is best done with 'polished', interpreted pieces such as themes and patterns emerging from the data rather than the actual transcripts. I did find this generally to be the case, although I thought it also ethically important to check individuals interview transcripts with them, where possible. In 2016, I carried out nine member-checking, or participatory analysis sessions with participants that I had interviewed previously in 2015. This involved discussing emergent themes with participants, as well as my reading of their work connected to these themes. I also did three further interviews with participants I had been unable to interview in 2015. In total I conducted 30 interviews, with 21 people (3 of whom were from one organisation - iranti.org), and 10 member-checking/analysis sessions

After my second trip to South Africa, I began a detailed coding of all my interview material/member checking material. I transcribed all my interviews in NVivo, and then began a thematic coding process, which was done also in NVivo, and mostly on a paragraph by paragraph basis (see Appendix 1). Charmaz (2004:506) comments that coding allows one to review your material in new ways that might differ both from your participants' interpretation and your own interpretation of the material. The coding process allowed a close (re)familiarisation with my interview material. Looking at this material in new ways also further substantiated some of the themes and that I had identified as significant, and clearly indicated where I did not have enough data to support others. Violence, for example, was an obvious theme (see Chapter One for the context regarding this). It was mentioned by most of those I interviewed as one of the key motivators behind their work, however beyond this, it was not a substantial feature of my interviews and, from my literature review, I knew that there were many excellent existing studies that examine the intersections between queer lives and violence in South Africa (e.g. Gunkel, 2010; Holland-Muter, 2012; Judge, 2018), and others that use visual activism as a way into this discussion (e.g. Gunkel, 2010, Munro; 2012).

My coding process generated 286 codes, which I then clustered into themes. I then cross-referenced these themes with my initial set of themes (Figure 1.5). The resulting themes formed the initial basis of my three analysis chapters. I felt

somewhat ambivalent about this coding process, as it was partly a result of working across disciplines. It was useful in familiarising myself with the material and checking my tacit knowledge against a more systematic process, but my analysis was structured by a desire to balance analytical themes, context and artists.

Conclusion

This chapter outlined the methodology underlying my work, as well as the methods used both in data collection, and analysis. The first part of the chapter outlined my methodological approach, which is queer and feminist, and driven by a decolonial and participatory ethic. The second part of this chapter detailed my methods – fieldwork, participant observation, semi-structured in-depth interviews, and visual analysis.

Two key methodological challenges for me were selecting an appropriate sample and analysing my data. In selecting a sample I was restricted by the fact that I was looking for people who either self-identified, or were identified by others as ‘visual activists’ prior to having defined what ‘visual activism’ was. Several informants, for example, mentioned Athi-Patra Ruga alongside Zanele Muholi as a ‘key’ South Africa queer visual activist. Ruga’s work was considered groundbreaking because of the *content* of his images and performance and his visibility/high profile in the fine art world. Muholi’s work was considered to be exemplary *both* in terms of its content and their production process. Ruga himself, in 2015, did not regard his work as visual activism. Initially, therefore, I was unsure of whether or not to include Ruga in my study – particularly as I was interested in work that combined a visual output with an ‘activist’ process (exemplified by Muholi). I decided, during my fieldwork, when in doubt I would suspend my disbelief until I knew better (this was partly motivated by my commitment to participatory research in which researchers rely on an ethic of knowledge co-construction with their participants). In terms of sampling this meant erring towards inclusion when someone was suggested as a potential interviewee. It did however, at least initially, risk an over reliance my participants to define the scope of my sample.

This risk was echoed in my analysis. Because I was asking ‘in what way can this this work be considered to be activist?’ rather than ‘does this work constitute activism?’, I had some concerns throughout about my criticality. Also, although my ethnographic approach was crucial to unearthing the social practices in which the artworks I analyse are embedded, it meant I was approaching this work through the artists themselves, rather than through my own encounter with their work. This risked an over reliance on artists explanations of their artwork and practice, rather than my own analysis of it. In several cases I did not, for example, see the performances that I refer to in this thesis. While this was a concern, it was mediated by my desire to focus less on the artworks themselves and more on the social practices and context in which they sit.

Despite these concerns, the advantage of my methodological approach, and the prioritising of ethnography over visual analysis, was that it ultimately allowed me a much more nuanced understanding of the workings of queer visual activism. My research takes as given that visual images make an epistemological intervention, and asks ‘beyond this intervention what else can we learn’?

4. Queer, Over the Rainbow

Introduction

This chapter explores the diverse ways in which queer visual activists in South Africa choose to articulate their gender and sexual identity, and what motivates these choices. It also makes evident some of the material and symbolic realities that these activists are responding to in their work. It does so through an analysis of interview material and three artworks, by three different artists, all of whom grapple with the links between LGBTQI/queer politics and a post-rainbow South Africa. The artists – Selogadi Mampane, Athi Patra-Ruga and Dean Hutton – use their practice to navigate a particular de-colonial moment (Heleta, 2016; Scott, 2017:47; Thomas, 2018b); and a frustration with the lack of progress since the end of apartheid in 1994, particularly in relation to the high levels of both gender-based violence and residual racism in South Africa. I chose these three artists because they best exemplify three particular approaches that I observed as common to a number of my respondents.

The thesis introduction outlined the extent to which sexual identity politics in South Africa were imbricated both in the fantasy of the rainbow nation, and the complexities of global racism. Historically, the recognition of sexuality as a discrete domain of experience emerged as it became an object of regulation (Foucault, 1998; Wierenga and Sivori, 2013). In this context sexual identity categories are fraught with political tensions. Dominant discourses posit homosexuality as unAfrican and Africa as homophobic (Ekine, 2013: 78). Both these narratives are heavily contested, with activists and scholars pointing out that it may be homophobia, rather than homosexuality that is a ‘Western import’ (Murray and Roscoe, 1998; Epprecht, 2008).

There have been extensive debates within sexualities literature both about the existence of ‘indigenous’ homosexualities and on the politics of naming in ‘non-Western’ contexts. A number of studies have been done in Africa, and in South Africa specifically, that explore ‘indigenous’ same-sex sexualities (for example Reid, 2013; Morgan and Wieringa, 2005), partly in response to those that argue that

homosexuality is 'unAfrican' (see Hoad, 2007: xi; Ekine, 2013). The use of the terms LGB and T have been problematised as terms associated with the 'Gay International' (Massad, 2002), which Hoad argues has been 'dedicated to finding and making "homosexuals" in parts of the world that have not seen public articulations of such persons' (Hoad, 2007: xiii). These terms are therefore seen by some as an imperialist imposition (Ekine and Abbas, 2013). What is clear, is that the local (South African) politics of gender and sexuality are intimately caught up in the complex global politics of racism and (post)colonialism (Hoad, 2007; Gunkel, 2010:28).

Queer as a term of self-identification, and as a critical practice has not been widely used in South Africa (Gunkel 2010; Matebeni, 2014) but recent projects, events, and publications suggest that this is beginning to change (see Ekine and Abbas, 2013; Matebeni, 2014; Nyanzi, 2014; Stielau, 2016; Oliveira et al, 2016; Sandfort et al, 2016; Nell and Shapiro, 2011; DeLarch, 2014; Marnell and Khan, 2016). As with the terms LGB and T, its use is contested. This is perhaps best exemplified by a debate between two leading scholars of African sexualities – William Spurlin and Marc Epprecht. Epprecht (2008) regards queer theory as too imbricated in Western theoretical frameworks and empirical evidence to be of use in the African context. Spurlin (2010), conversely, argues for the need to use post-colonial theory to decolonise queer theory.

Those I interviewed demonstrated a rich diversity of strategies of identification, with some choosing, for example, to identify as black lesbians because the specificity of this identification resonates with their experience. Others prefer to identify as 'queer' because of the transformative political frame it offers (Ekine and Abbas, 2013). I combine a focus on interviews conducted during the course of the field work I undertook in 2015 and 2016 with queer visual activists in South Africa (see Chapter 3), with close readings of some of their work. Chapter One explained the 'rainbow nation' as a founding national myth of the 'new South Africa'⁷⁰in 1994, and traced the 'death' of this myth since then. It also outlined the close connection between LGBTQII identity in South Africa and the notion of rainbowism. I argued that the

⁷⁰ The common term for early post-apartheid South Africa

rainbow was not just about racial diversity and non-racialism, but also about gender and sexuality (Reid, 2010; Munro, 2012), and that this connection between rainbowism and sexual and gender diversity was actively encouraged by LGBTQII activists in their attempts to usher in important post-apartheid legal reforms (Judge et al, 2008; Tucker, 2010).⁷¹ So, the history of LGBTQII politics is closely linked to the fate of rainbowism.

4.1 Children of the Rainbow Shed Tears

The performance artist Selogadi Mampane grapples with many of these themes in her work. Mampane is a black feminist performance artist and academic from Pretoria. While interning at *iranti.org*,⁷² a Johannesburg based queer human rights visual media organization, Selogadi began developing her own performance pieces, partly in response to what she learnt about the extent of gender-based violence while documenting hate crimes at *iranti*. Mampane first performed her piece *Kromotherapy* at the *That's so Queer* festival guest curated by Pereira at the University of Johannesburg in 2013.

Mampane also competed in the 2015 Ms Leather, a leather subculture fetish convention (see <http://www.sal.qw.co.za>), at which she was awarded Ms Leather South Africa. Also in 2015, she was first runner up in the International Ms Leather in San Jose, California the same year. Mampane was the first black woman to win a gay leather title in South Africa and the first African to compete in the International Ms Leather event (Igual, 2015). Her involvement in Ms Leather is motivated by a desire to challenge the sexual conservatism of South African society (Mampane, Selogadi [Performance Artist, Academic, Activist] Interview, Pretoria, November 2015), but it is also highly unusual given the predominantly white demographic of the

⁷¹ Selected relevant legislation - 1994 Interim Constitution introduced which recognises sexual orientation as a human right; 1996 Constitution passed and LGBTI people allowed to serve openly in South African Defence Force; 2002 Same sex couples afforded same adoption rights as heterosexual couples, same sex marriage legalised (Baderoon, 2014:341-354).

⁷² *Iranti.org* was co-founded by trans activist and photographer Jabu Chen Pereira and Kenyan visual activist Neo Musangi (see www.iranti.org.za for more information).

leather community, suggesting that her involvement is challenging both racial and sexual norms.



Figure 2.1 Mampane, Selogadi. 2013. *Chromotherapy*, 10th September 2013, from *Critically Queer* Exhibition, FADA Gallery, University of Johannesburg, Bunting Campus. Still from a performance. Photo: Collen Mfazwe.

Mampane's second performance piece *Children of the Rainbow Shed Tears*, grew out of *Chromotherapy* and explicitly links the socio-economic disappointment evident among many South Africans over 20 years into the post-apartheid period, with a disappointment in LGBTQI politics. Here she describes this piece, and in doing so identifies the rainbow of the national myth with the rainbow of the LGBTQI flag:

Children of the Rainbow Shed Tears looks at how in South Africa, black people, and women, and sexual minorities were promised a democratic environment, a space to live and express themselves, free from the structures of historical racism, and free from the structures of other kinds of oppression – like poverty, for example, and how that promise, how it hasn't been realised...and how the LGBTQI movement at many times does not reflect lesbians, doesn't reflect black people, doesn't reflect the poor, people with disabilities. It's a kind of response to the frustration of feeling left out of a movement that was supposed to be for people who were different, who exist outside of the norm. This piece is almost a call to arms for other LGBTQI people to say that the rainbow that we see in this LGBTQI flag, in this gay flag, doesn't reflect us, and what are we going to do about that? (Mampane, Selogadi [Performance Artist, Academic, Activist] Interview, Pretoria, November 2015).

Mampane suggests that the assumed cohesion around sexual orientation and gender expression in South Africa is a shallow form of solidarity because it fails to recognise the other, significant identities that she occupies. Mampane here echoes the *One in Nine* campaigners who disrupted Johannesburg Pride in 2012 (see Chapter One) and much of the South African literature that recognises that the legislative freedoms won post-1994 with regards to gender and sexuality, have primarily advantaged the already-privileged sectors of South African society, in particular white, affluent, cis-gendered gay men (Oswin, 2007; Tucker, 2009; Livermon, 2012; Munro, 2012; Visser, 2013; Stone and Washkansky, 2014; Davids and Matebeni, 2017).

Although Mampane clearly links rainbowism with LGBTQI politics, and highlights their shared failures, her response to these is not to identify as queer rather than as a lesbian, because she sees similar potential problems within queer politics. Unlike many of my respondents who embrace a queer identity to signify a progressive politics that is anti-racist, and feminist, Mampane is critical of queer politics which she sees as allowing space for both racism and lesbophobia, and as threatening to erase her own lesbian identity. This position echoes some of the key tensions articulated in the queer literature in the United States. Cohen (2013:77), for example, comments on the failure of queer politics to include diverse race and class

subjectivities, as do others (e.g. Anzaldúa, 1991; Muñoz, 1999, 2009; Johnson, 2001; Ferguson, 2004).

Mampane's position is indicative of the complexity of identity politics, particularly in relation to sexuality, which has been one of the principal sites of contestation in post-apartheid South Africa (Posel, 2005). Collen Mfazwe, a young photographer from the East Rand in Gauteng, is the only other of my respondents that is also uncomfortable identifying as queer. Like Mampane, she identifies as a black lesbian:

to be queer is, ach, I don't think me and that word are really close, it's just a distant word... I don't have a problem with it, but queer is queer to me. That's it (Mfazwe, Collen [Artist, Photographer, Activist] Interview, Johannesburg, November 2015).⁷³

'Queer' for Mfazwe is an abstraction, something associated with academia, but not her reality. This feeling, however, is not shared by many of those I interviewed whose adoption of a queer identity emerges as a reaction to the contemporary socio-political realities described in Chapter One: specifically, the death of rainbowism; an association of LGBTQII identity categories with both rainbowism and neo-colonialism (Massad, 2002; Hoad, 2009; Ekine and Abbas, 2013). I argue that given the death of rainbowism as a structuring national myth, an identification with queer is being turned to by many of the visual activists and artists whose work I engage with in this study as one that provides an alternative symbolic architecture of hope (to rainbowism). This idea draws on Muñoz's (1999: 1) articulation of queerness as 'a structuring and educated mode of desiring that allows us to see and feel beyond the quagmire of the present'. Broadly speaking, for white South Africans, the turning to 'queer' rather than LGBTQI, is about a grappling with privilege, and for black South Africans, about a claiming of power; for both, it is an identity that offers political agency.

⁷³ Collen began to identify as transgender in 2018.

4.2 Queer and Now

Zethu Matebeni, a filmmaker, curator, activist and academic, who wrote her (2011) doctoral thesis on black lesbian identity in Johannesburg, argues for the importance of claiming *both* a black lesbian and queer subjectivity:

The place I start from is that black lesbians are queer, and black lesbians have always been queering. Whether it's LGBTQI issues, or queer issues themselves. My version of queer in South African is a developing version, because I don't know what that really means for me, in this continent. I use it a lot because I think. I think I'm using it because I need to figure it out, and I'm still figuring it out, um, I use it I guess for now, in the North America sense,⁷⁴ and I use it also so that I can make claims about blackness...(Matebeni, Zethu [Filmmaker, Curator, Activist, Academic] Interview, Cape Town, November 2016).

Matebeni's comments here are important for two reasons – firstly, she hints at the fact that her version of queer is in flux, that its current formation is temporal and contingent. Secondly, that in the current context, she is using queerness to stake a claim on blackness (making space for queerness within blackness), and blackness to stake a claim on queerness (making space for blackness within queerness). This is a correction of much of the history of queer politics, which has been race blind. And, in the claiming of an African queerness, it is also about resisting 'conceding queer theory to whiteness' (Barnard: 2004:6).⁷⁵ Halberstam's introduction to Matebeni's (2013) *Reclaiming Afrikan* book further underscores this, in suggesting a queerness that is allied with the Queer of Colour critiques in Europe and America, and critical of colonial impositions:

The criticality of queerness in the context of Black South Africa, indeed, depends absolutely upon its refutation of a temporality that places Euro-American sexual politics in the centre of modernity; and it locates queerness, here and now as simultaneously a postcolonial critique of normative historiographies of queer worlds

⁷⁴ The North American sense that Matebeni is referring to is both the versions of queer that circulate in queer theory circles (Butler, Sedgwick, Halberstam, Munoz etc) and then a separate (but related) set of thinkers who have engaged with both racism and queerness in the United States like Audre Lorde, bell hooks, Cathy Cohen.

⁷⁵ This is also a rejection of Epprecht's (2008) argument that queer should not be used outside of the Euro-American context.

and a futuristic summons for a new world-making endeavour that joins queer of colour critique in the US to critical queerness in South Africa. (Halberstam, 2014:12)

Halberstam is commenting here on the fact that contemporary black South African queerness productively decentres a Euro-American queerness. Halberstam also links this 'critical queerness' to futurity, something that emerged as a central theme in my fieldwork. Part of what is driving this, is the desire for change, what Muñoz calls 'the rejection of a here and now' (2009:1). The artist Athi-Patra Ruga views an identification with queer politics as a welcome alternative to a gay identity, which he sees as empty of politics and blind to structural inequities. For Ruga, the failures of the rainbow narrative suggest the need for a change in political culture, one that he sees embodied in an identification with queerness. Here he describes what he calls the 'decimation' of the rainbow myth:

I think that as I grew up with many things that happened, like Nwabisa Ngcukana⁷⁶ in 2008, also the xenophobic attacks that happened in 2008⁷⁷, moving on to the rape trial that happened in 2005/6⁷⁸, seeing how this rainbow, or this rainbow narrative, or this pride, that we had with our constitution and the way that a whole generation was raised, you know, to believe in the constitution, to believe in the arm of the law, to believe all these things, has somehow in the last 22 years decimated (Ruga, Athi-Patra [Artist] Interview, Cape Town, November 2016).

Ruga describes three events here – a specific case of sexual harassment, which came to represent the misogyny endemic in South African society (see Gunkel,

⁷⁶ Nwabisa Ngcukana (25) was the victim of what has become known as the 'miniskirt attack'. She was getting a taxi home on 17th February 2008, from the Noord Street taxi rank in Johannesburg, when she was stripped and assaulted by taxi drivers, who accused her of dressing indecently. <https://mg.co.za/article/2008-02-19-outrage-over-attack-on-miniskirtwearing-woman>. Ruga's avatar 'Beiruth' was created in reaction to this incident.

⁷⁷ A series of violent xenophobic attack across the country in May 2008 resulted in the death of 62 people, and the displacement of thousands from their homes.

⁷⁸ Former President Jacob Zuma was accused and was acquitted of the rape of 'Khwezi' in 2006 but is widely (particularly in feminist circles) believed to be guilty of this crime. Khwezi was offered asylum in Holland, after numerous incidents of threats and harassment, including her house being burnt down.

2010:6; Vincent, 2008); the first significant post-apartheid incident of xenophobia; and Zuma's rape trial, indicative of both sexism and political corruption.

Ruga's articulation of the erosion of the rainbow narrative is useful because his account brings to light that the problem with the rhetoric is not just about the colour blindness it sought to foster. Rather he is pointing to failures both of South African society – in relation to its xenophobia and sexism – and the state – in its inability to curb the violence against foreigners, and women, and the corruption of its leadership. All three events, for Ruga, undermine the myth of the rainbow. Ruga goes on to talk about his disidentification with a 'gay' identity:

queer for me is my friend, who was always teased for being intersex, although she was not, she just felt better in clothes that are like, for women, and because he was black and lived in the township, where I grew up as well, as a gay identifying guy. She became unemployable, she became easier to mutilate, she became easier to do a lot of things to, so she's at the bottom of the rung, so for me now queerness and gay culture...I'm not a friend of Dorothy's. I am not a friend of whoever. I am not into Will and Grace, or even that privileged way of looking at it (Ruga, Athi-Patra. [Artist, Tapestry-maker, Performer] Interview in Cape Town, November 2016).

Ruga rejects 'gay culture' because it does nothing to protect his friend, who is identified as intersex, black, and poor. Ruga here is touching on a theme that is present in the literature, and in several of the interviews I conducted with other artists, that the identity-based politics of LGBTQI and their associated emphasis on assimilation, does not adequately trouble existing social structures. As Gamson (1995: 400) has argued, 'the gay and lesbian civil rights strategy, for all its gains, does little to attack the political culture that itself makes the denial of and struggle for civil rights necessary and possible'. The need for change, for the challenging of the status quo that a queer politics promises is an urgent priority for many, given the lack of change evident so far in post-apartheid South Africa. Although some respondents were critical of an identification with queerness, others saw it as offering a more inclusive, critical framing than LGB or T, one less thoroughly shaped by class and race privilege.

For Kylie Thomas, one of my respondents, seeing queerly is also the only possible way to counter gender-based violence in South Africa in the long term. She argues that there are:

very fixed ideas about what constitutes masculinity and femininity, or men and women, and very essentialised ideas that are part of what is the cause of these forms of violence to my mind. And so, if you want to address that violence, you would also then necessarily want to undo those ideas or challenge them or deconstruct these essentialised notions of masculinity and femininity (Thomas, Kylie [Artist, Activist, Writer] Interview, Berlin, 2015).

Certainly, patriarchy remains powerful in South Africa, evidenced in the 'wave of violent misogyny' (Strauss, 2009:77) apparent during the Zuma rape trial (see Introduction). Several others of my respondents, like Thomas, see the remaking of normative reality, particularly in relation to gender expression, as an essential component of the battle against gender-based violence. Gunkel (2010:15), writing about homophobia, particularly against lesbians in the South African context, argues similarly that 'we cannot afford not to apply queer theory as a tool for analysis'. This is because queer theory facilitates 'the possibility of understanding gender differently, as already sexualised, racialised and localised' (ibid) where male and female, and heterosexuality and homosexuality are not posed as binary opposites.

Buyani Duma (who is one half of the queer performance duo, FAKA) is enthusiastically optimistic about the utility of queer politics. Duma regards the social conservatism around sexuality, as a key contributing factor to gender based violence.⁷⁹ Their work challenges both normative gender constructions (in emphasising their femininity) and sexuality (by being overtly sexual). Here he talks about FAKA's understanding of queer politics as one in which a commitment to intersectionality is integral:

⁷⁹ South Africa has extraordinarily high levels of gender-based violence, with more rapes committed per capita than any other country in the world (Anderson, 2000:789). Gqola's book *Rape* argues that rape works to keep patriarchy intact (2015:21) and that it is a national culture, not just a behaviour attributable to a small minority of men (ibid, 178).

it's never only about queer activism. It's not a single issue, because we do know that oftentimes, violence directed at queer people, comes from issues that arise from socio-political issues, that effect a lot of people, and other perceptions about femininity, patriarchy, misogyny. All these things that our society is battling with, like all those things. Actually like, groundwork for the violence or the discrimination that we've experienced as queer men. So, it has to be intersectional for us, it's as much about queerness as it is about blackness, as it is about poverty, as it is about misogyny, as it is about patriarchy, or anything that actually like wants to diminish your humanity (Duma, Buyani. [Artist, Performer] Interview, Johannesburg, November 2015).

This surfacing of and linking of different social oppressions is key to the understanding of queer identity and politics being operationalised by FAKA, and others. It is because the rainbow myth is seen to have damagingly homogenised social realities in South Africa, in favour of privileged sectors of society, that the queer politics being developed by activists, including my respondents is explicitly intersectional. Intersectionality has the capacity to 'dehomogenise positionalities' (Steyn and van Zyl, 2009:8). What this means is that it recognises the complex intersections of the different subject positions of, for example, nationality, class, race, gender and age, and the way in which individuals occupy *multiple* subject positions. These subject positions shape peoples' access to power, and their experience of both identity and oppression (Nash, 2008;12; Hill Collins and Bilge, 2016:2). In the South African context, the emphasis on shared nationality as a mechanism for post-apartheid nation-building eclipses very real differences of social class that exist (and are primarily articulated along the racial hierarchies consolidated through apartheid).

4.3 Over the Rainbow

In the previous sections, I have begun to open up the category of 'queer' through exploring my interviews with, and the artwork of my respondents. This section extends my analysis to the work of Athi-Patra Ruga, a queer performance artist, with a background in fashion design, who also creates tapestries, sculptures, staged photographs and video pieces. For Ruga, an identification with queer as a counterpoint to LGBTQII, allows a certain discursive and political tension that

facilitates critique. Ruga makes use of the term queer to describe his creative practice and draws on local and international permutations of queerness to produce something unique. I see his performance of *Over the Rainbow* as a hopeful marking and celebration of a new, queer era, but also one in which any imagined utopia being envisaged is deferred.

Much of Ruga's work revolves around the mythical Kingdom of Azania. Azania was the name given to South Africa by the Pan Africanist Congress in the 1960s, to invoke a future, post-apartheid nation. Ruga creates faux cultural artefacts from this imaginary nation (Corrigal, 2014:88). In 2016, Ruga was commissioned to produce a piece for the Performa Gala at the Altman Building, New York, on 1st November 2016. The piece was intended to launch Performa 17, and honour the writer and curator Okwui Enwezor (Bezuidenhout, 2016; Bongela, 2016a). His response, *Over the Rainbow* was at once a funeral march for the Rainbow Nation, a celebration of young queers, and an empathic rebuttal of the notion of queerness as unAfrican.

Ruga refers to his performance personas as avatars. *Over the Rainbow* marked the retiring of 'The Elder' and the entrance of 'The Versatile Queen Ivy'. 'The Elder' appears in this case to represent Mandela, and Ruga's Queen Ivy, can be seen to be representative of Ruga's new (emerging) body of work, *Queens in Exile* (a title taken from an essay by Sylvia Rivera, a transgender activist and drag queen who was involved in the Stonewall Riots), which honours significant black queers including the dancer Feral Benga, the South African activist Simon Nkoli, and Stonewall activist Sylvia Rivera. This work also links South African queerness to global queerness. Ruga explains here that he sees this work as an archival intervention that is restoring these black queer figures to their rightful place in history.

(IMAGE NOT COPYRIGHT CLEARED)

Figure 2.2 Ruga, Athi-Patra. 2016. 'Versatile Queen Ivy' in *Over the Rainbow* for Performa Gala 1st November 2016, Altman Building, New York. Still from a performance. Photo: Max/Lakner/BFA.com. Courtesy of Performa.

Nkoli's inclusion in Ruga's work is important. Nkoli was both a gay rights and anti-apartheid activist and, for many, representative of an intersectional politics that marks the origins of queer politics in South Africa (Batra, 2016; Davids and Matebeni, 2017). The refusal of GASA (Gay Association of South Africa) to back Nkoli when he was charged with treason by the apartheid government, on the grounds that they were an apolitical organisation, has been seen as indicative of the 'whiteness' of gay and lesbian politics in South Africa (Davids and Matebeni, 2017).

The ushering out of The Elder, suggests the end of Mandela's influence and the start of a new, queer era. The symbolic welcoming of a black queer female leader into Azania (a mythical place that Ruga has historically used to parody and critique the real South Africa) holds a particular significance in a country where the majority of the population were turned into 'surplus people'; first by colonialism, and then

apartheid (Baderoon, 2018: 2). Imported slaves and indigenous South Africans were transformed through forced labour and forced removal from their land into a disposable and surplus people. As a result, entire populations, historically marginalized by race and class are now constructed as an unnecessary burden on the state (Giroux, 2006; McKittrick, 2014; Gqola, 2015; Baderoon, 2018). *Over the Rainbow* is thus hinting at the idea that the majority of South Africans have been queered (or marginalised) by history. Given the heavily patriarchal and heteronormative context within which Ruga is working, the idea of a black queer female leader rescuing the nation is an audacious concept.

The artist's most recent work is heavily influenced by the student-led protests that took place at universities across South Africa in 2015-16 and that has come to be known as Fees Must Fall,⁸⁰ a movement Ruga describes as 'led by women; queers and women' (Ruga, Athi Patra-. [Artist, Tapestry-maker, Performer] Interview in Cape Town, November 2016; Stielau, 2016) and one that has both catalyzed, and emerged from Rainbowism's demise. 'Fallists demand both the decolonization of University education, and free University education (Magolego, 2016). As outlined in the Introduction, these demands are seen by many as indicative of a broader discontent with the extent of transformation in South Africa since 1994, and a loss of faith that a corrupt leadership will deliver this transformation (see Hain, 2016). As commented on in the Introduction, the 'Fallists' are not alone in breaking the social contract of 1994. Significant discontent has been expressed through protest (see Brown, 2015) by numerous others – the Treatment Action Campaign, Abahlali baseMjondolo, Section 27, the Social Justice Coalition, and the daily so-called 'social-delivery protests' to name a few, and the strike that led to the Marikana Massacre in August 2012. Most of my respondents though, were either directly involved in, or had a close proximity to Fees Must Fall. Ruga's inclusion of several 'born frees' in his performance (producer Angel Ho, rapper Dope St Jude, and jazz

⁸⁰ Fees Must Fall (#FMF) began in 2015, as a series of protests which came in the wake of the #RhodesMustFall (#RMF) movement. #RMF, was an on-going campaign against institutional racism, which successfully oversaw the removal of a prominent statue of Cecil John Rhodes from the University of Cape Town campus in April 2015, after weeks of protest.

singer Vuyo Sotashe) is significant, in that it positions him as an ally to the generation that “has broken the spell of the ‘New South Africa’” (Bongela, 2016a).⁸¹

Over the Rainbow comprised a procession, complete with brass band and choir ‘clad in ecclesiastical white robes and gold gloves’ (Bezuidenhout, 2016). The troupe walked down the street towards the venue singing and carrying one of Ruga’s tapestries displaying his avatar ‘The Versatile Queen Ivy’. After the speeches, Ruga himself appeared, as Queen Ivy, and declared ‘Makube Njalo!’ which means ‘Let It Be’ or ‘Amen.’ His choir then echoed ‘Makube Njalo!’ again and again. The phrase ‘Makube Njalo!’ was cut from the end of Nkosi Sikeleli (a song written as a hymn by Sontonga in 1897, that then became a symbol of defiance against the apartheid government) to make way for the transition into Die Stem (‘The Call’ - the old Afrikaans anthem of apartheid, initially adopted in 1957). Nkosi Sikeleli and Die Stem were combined together to form the national anthem of the ‘new South Africa’ officially adopted in 1997 (they are sung one after the other), marking the end of apartheid. The new ‘hybrid’ anthem is sung in the five most popular official languages of South Africa – Zulu, Xhosa, Sesotho, Afrikaans, and English. Ruga sees the combining of these two anthems, and specifically the removal of ‘Makube Njalo!’, as a bitter compromise (Bezuidenhout, 2016). The defiant song of freedom has been put together with the anthem that represented apartheid. In *Over the Rainbow* Ruga, in his gold satin inaugural robe is reclaiming the uncompromised version of South Africa’s national anthem.

The title of Ruga’s performance *Over the Rainbow* suggests an ambivalent celebration of the current era, perhaps a nod to the enormity of the task facing South Africans moving forward. In an interview Ruga described South Africa entering an

⁸¹ As explained in the Introduction, ‘born free’ is the name given to the generation of South Africans that did not grow up under apartheid. It is this generation that is spearheading the #FeesMustFall movement, that has rejected the ‘rainbow nation’ myth as a distraction from the lack of actual “societal transformation of a still racially segregated society.” (Uglevig, 2016)

‘Ocean of Redress’, the beginning of a process of penitence, that he feels has yet to happen. Here Ruga describes this ‘Ocean’:

we're kind of sick and tired of like speaking to white people about how they can stop racism as well. We're tired of speaking to patriarchy about how patriarchy can stop misogyny. So, for me I really believe that if someone like apologises (and this is something I learn from my relationship) if someone apologises, you can't just get forgiveness. There has to be this ocean, this body of water, this wading, that you have to do and that's in penitence, that is in redressing, and in South Africa we never did that, and that's why that we've got so many problems (Ruga, Athi-Patra [Artist] Interview, Cape Town, November 2016).

Here Ruga suggests that South Africa is beginning a new, substantive period of transition that beginning with a moment of reckoning. Ruga’s identification with a queerness is an active distancing from the mistakes associated with the politics represented by rainbowism and, related to this, the perceived whiteness of LGBTQII politics (Davids and Matebeni, 2017). Within this moment queer has become a shorthand not just for non-normative gender or sexuality, but also for a feminist, anti-racist, and class-aware politics; for (in the words of local vernacular) those who are ‘woke’ or who ‘get it’ and are making a commitment to social justice. This particular engendering of queer in the contemporary South African context, echoes some of the progressiveness of its early articulations in the 1990s elsewhere.

4.4 #FuckWhitePeople

This section looks at the work of artist Dean Hutton, a white, genderqueer⁸² artist, photographer and performer from Johannesburg. If Ruga’s work celebrates the arrival of a new era in South Africa, Hutton’s work asks us to imagine how we begin the task of moving forward, by first making visible, and then undoing the privilege that rainbowism supported for white people and for the small group of people of all races who constitute the super-rich minority. It is a task that Hutton argues must be

⁸² Hutton identifies as neither a woman, nor a man, i.e. outside of the gender binary. Demelza Bush, another gender queer South African, has written eloquently about her own understanding of this here <http://bhekisisa.org/article/2015-04-10-00-i-am-genderqueer-comfortable-with-my-identity-at-last>

tackled by all white South Africans, if they are to remain part of this new era. Prior to becoming a full-time artist, Hutton worked for the national weekly newspaper the *Mail and Guardian*, as a photojournalist. From 2016 to 2017, Hutton was based at Michaelis, the fine art school at the University of Cape Town, where they completed a master's degree. Hutton's controversial *#FuckWhitePeople* piece formed part of both their practical submission for their MA, and the broader project *Plan B, A Gathering of Strangers (or This is Not Working)*, 2017.

While Ruga uses the metaphor of an 'ocean of redress' to refer to the political moment in which my research is based, Hutton talks about a wound that must be cleaned before it can heal:

What happens when you clean a wound? It is raw, it is painful, it is ugly, but you have to do that in order to heal, else it's just going to rot. (Hutton, Dean [Photographer, Performer, Visual Artist] Interview, Cape Town, November 2016).

Like Ruga's metaphor, Hutton's suggests a moment of reckoning. I read their work as their way of navigating this historical moment, in a way that affords them political agency. Hutton's work encourages a connection between Muñoz's understanding of queerness, as 'a doing for and towards the future' (2009:1) and hooks (2000) notion of love. Hooks (2000) argues that we have tended to see love as a noun, and that this notion of romantic love is at best unhelpful, and at worst damaging. South Africans critique of 'rainbowism', with its romantic myth of happy diversity, buoyed along by the spirit of *Ubuntu*⁸³ whilst ignoring continuing injustices, echoes hooks' problematising of the promises offered by romantic love. She suggests that we would all love better if we used love rather as a verb (hooks, 2000: 4). Both Hutton and Ruga see their work as an act of love, not as in love the noun evoked by the myth of the rainbow nation, but as in love the verb, the everyday commitment to action (after hooks, 2000). Their work then, becomes an enactment of their queer politics (a doing for and towards the future).

⁸³ *Ubuntu* means humanness, but specifically that I am because you are, a sense of shared mutuality. The spirit of 'ubuntu' linked to the idea of the Rainbow nation, was part of the structuring myth of post-apartheid South African national identity.

Hutton's #FWP piece emerged in response to the events surrounding a photograph they took while documenting a #FMF event in February 2016 at Wits (University of the Witwatersrand) in which a student, Zama Mthunzi, was wearing a self-fashioned t-shirt which read 'Being black is shit' on the front, and 'Fuck white people' on the back. There were strong reactions both to Hutton's photograph of Mthunzi (the posting of which on Facebook led to a 30-day ban) and to Mthunzi's gesture itself. The University administration instituted disciplinary procedures against Mthunzi and he was reported to the Human Rights Commission⁸⁴. When Wits students protested the University's actions against Mthunzi, launching a graffiti campaign which sprayed "#fuckwhitepeople" across campus, the University administration accused these students of forcing them to spend money on graffiti removal that could otherwise have gone towards students' financial aid⁸⁵. These events combined with Hutton's arrival in Cape Town and the shock at both its literal whiteness⁸⁶ and what they saw as the investment of South African universities in white privilege prompted Hutton's early imagining about their #FWP piece (Hutton, 2017).

#FuckWhitePeople began as a performance piece in which 'Goldendean' (Hutton's performance persona) wore a tailored suit made from a black and white fabric which read FUCKFUCKFUCK WHITEWHITEWHITE PEOPLEPEOPLEPEOPLE in alternating lines. 'Goldendean' appeared in numerous public spaces in Cape Town (including the University's of Cape Town's Michaelis campus and the Waiting Room on Long St) between March and October 2016 wearing this suit. At some of these performances they distributed cards containing humorous and provocative questions about whiteness. Hutton wore a GoPro camera to document the performance (with participant consent) and serve as a layer of self-protection (the idea being that the threat of surveillance would temper potential violence). The cards directed people to a website <https://fuckwhitepeople.org>, which provided viewers with twelve steps to learn to 'fuck the white in them' (Hutton, Dean [Photographer, Artist] Interview, Cape

⁸⁴ <http://www.iol.co.za/news/south-africa/gauteng/the-man-behind-that-wits-t-shirt-1983503>

⁸⁵ <https://www.wits.ac.za/news/latest-news/general-news/2016/feesmustfall2016/statements/offensive-graffiti-on-campus.html#sthash.oAcFvfKJ.dpuf>

⁸⁶ 'In Cape Town, I walked into a room at a public university on the African continent, where I was to study for two years, and there were almost no black people in the room' (Hutton, 2017:63).

Town, October 2016). Hutton, describing the performances, observed that they consistently provoked 'very important conversations with people who had begun to deconstruct their identities as white people' (ibid). Hutton wants the performance to render visible or trouble whiteness and its associated privilege, but also to express allyship with black South Africans.

#FuckWhitePeople was also exhibited as a 'selfie booth' installed at the Iziko South African National Gallery in Cape Town as part of the *Art of Disruptions* exhibition (from 16th June- 23rd October 2016), the gallery's response to the socio-political climate of the time. The selfie booth comprised two posters, a wheat-pasted old school chair, and a pair of worn gold Adidas high tops. The posters and chair were covered very simply in the same black and white design of 'Goldendean's' suit that read FUCKFUCKFUCK WHITEWHITEWHITE PEOPLEPEOPLEPEOPLE in alternating lines (see figure 4.4A). Viewers were encouraged to engage with the piece by photographing themselves in the booth and tweeting the result with the hashtag #fuckwhitepeople. Hutton was only present in this version of their piece in the written explanation of the work that accompanied it, and in the presence of 'Goldendean's' hightops.



DEAN HUTTON
(b. 1976)

fuckwhitepeople wall, chair and goldendean boots

2016
On loan from the artist

From the artist:
"If you are white, you're probably feeling some type of way right now. White people have been having a lot of feelings lately about 'reverse racism' as if it's a thing.

White people made racism and made sure it is deeply embedded in our social systems, laws, economics, institutions and individuals. So this provocation is here to make you feel that 'white pain'. Breathe deeply through it.

Earlier this year I photographed a student Zama Mthunzi wearing a t-shirt with the words 'Fuck White People' smeared in black pain(t). He was threatened with expulsion and a case at the Human Rights Commission. None of the complainants said anything about the front of the t-shirt which read 'Being Black is Shit'.

You see, white pain demands attention all the time, while black pain flows constantly. So I made a suit to fuck white people. It began as an experiment to see what happens when a white body wears this. It makes people angry, sometimes to the point of violence. But I can do it - that is white privilege. I'm here for your pain because white people think empathy can cure racism but what we must strive for is a complete dismantling of the systems of power that keep white people racist.

Learn to fuck the white in you too.
Fuckwhitepeople.org #fuckwhitepeople"

Figure 2.3A (Left) – *Fuck White People*, Iziko National Gallery, Cape Town, 2016, Installation by Dean Hutton. Photo: Tessa Lewin

Figure 2.3B (Right) – Accompanying Text. Photo: Tessa Lewin.

The choice of the name 'Goldendean' as Hutton's performance persona merits comment. On a very generic level the gold suggests value, beauty, excess. Equally it signifies something lurid, hyper visible, queer. Specific to the South African context, the gold evokes the mining wealth that so much of the economy was built on, and which has been the source of so much suffering and inequality for many black South Africans. Goldendean's shoes in the context of the gallery display, become the shoes of privilege. Hutton's symbolic removal of these shoes can be seen as a decolonial gesture that recognises this privilege and chooses to reject it. Goldendean's gold body then becomes a reminder that this act is only possible as a symbolic gesture. Hutton cannot escape their white (gold) skin.

Mouffe describes public space as 'a battleground on which different hegemonic projects are confronted' (2008:9). She regards critical artistic practices, such as

Hutton's, as playing an important role in 'subverting the dominant hegemony' (ibid). Such practices work both to disrupt the smooth appearance of a particular symbolic order (in this case white supremacy) and in so doing, to construct new subjectivities (Mouffe, 2008:13). Hutton's recognition of whiteness as white supremacy, or a 'collective racial epistemology with a history of violence against people of color' (Leonardo, 2009:111) requires them to actively find a way to construct an alternative subjectivity. #FWP can be read as an experimental gesture acknowledging that *all* white people benefitted from apartheid and trying to break what Steyn terms the 'ignorance contract' that allows white supremacy to persist in post-apartheid South Africa (Steyn, 2012: 90).

Here Hutton talks about grappling with the dis-ease they experience in their own complicity with hegemonic whiteness, and their desire to escape this:

I have felt this discomfort with this identity my entire life. it's not something that is new... the real potential of the project is that white people can see a way out of white supremacy. Because it's like with the history, and it's like we can't get caught in the guilt (Hutton, Dean [Photographer, Artist] Interview, Cape Town, November 2016).

Many white South Africans routinely disengage from conversations about the politics of race; partly because they can afford to (they remain privileged), and partly because they feel they do not have a right to do so, as Hutton articulates they 'get caught in the guilt'. Race theorists suggest that whiteness has remained largely invisible and unexamined (Dyer, 1997; Steyn, 2001). What #FWP tries to do is reveal the hegemonic form of whiteness (white supremacy) as a historical construction (Steyn, 2001) and in doing so, open up the possibility of its deconstruction.

Additionally, Hutton is attempting to denaturalise the connection between their white skin, and whiteness as a 'ruling class social formation' (Allen, 1994).

Reactions to Hutton's work have been extremely varied, and many of the reactions (both positive and negative) have been as much to do with Hutton's queer embodiment as the content of the piece.⁸⁷ John Marnell, who works for GALA (the

⁸⁷ In January 2017, a group of Cape Party members restrained the security guards at the National Gallery in Cape Town and defaced Hutton's selfie-booth by placing a large sticker reading 'Love thy Neighbour' across Hutton's #FuckWhitePeople posters. The Cape Party then sought an order from

South African Gay and Lesbian Archive) and has used images of *#FuckWhitePeople* at workshops, comments on the nature of some of the responses to it:

I think people get exhilarated by just the 'fuck you' element, of course; the race element, and the owning of the space, and the embodiment of it all. People respond most of all to the fact that this person is publicly playing with their gender - either androgynous, or crossing the boundary, and doing it with a sense of fun. I think that's part of it as well (Marnell, John [Queer activist] Interview, Johannesburg, October 2016).

John Marnell argues that it is precisely Hutton's visible queerness (specifically their size, and their androgyny) that ensures the work's success. He goes on to talk about the levity of the piece; its carnival sensibility, and the affect it creates:

I think it gives it a sense of relief to the state I was talking about before, because things haven't changed. You know. Things are not changing, and people are still dealing with the same shit everyday...(people) actually just want to say: 'Fuck White People'. I've had enough. And so, seeing someone actually do that, who is white, in this kind of embodied way, people are just like, 'finally!' (Marnell, John [Queer activist] Interview, Johannesburg, October 2016).

Hutton's *#FuckWhitePeople* piece ultimately comes from their own grappling with the discomfort and guilt of their complicity in whiteness. It is Hutton's attempt to begin to move beyond the paralytic self-indulgence of white guilt and contribute to social change. In this way, Hutton is claiming political agency. Hutton is sharing not just their (un)learning process, but also *themselves*. They literally put their own body on the line in their performance work, risking the possibility of violence. The process of publicly sharing their body and making themselves vulnerable through their public performance can be seen as a ritual offering, a surrendering to the public, and it is Hutton's overtly queer/androgynous embodiment that underscores this process.

the Cape Town magistrate's court against the National Gallery to have Hutton's work declared hate speech. The South African National Gallery defended *#FuckWhitePeople* and issued a statement defending their freedom to exhibit provocative and challenging work. In July 2017, the South African Equality Court dismissed charges of hate speech laid by the Cape Party against the Iziko National Gallery's display of *#FuckWhitePeople*. The Chief Magistrate's ruling amounted to an endorsement (and explanation) of *#FuckWhitePeople*, and a stern rebuttal of the Cape Party.

In Hutton's own words their performance 'centres (their) Fat Queer Trans White body, and by making itself available for documentation by the audience to be generously shared across networks of friends and followers on social media; evolves into a collective work in which thousands of bodies and minds collaborate in an extended conversation around not only art, art practice, design and communication, but also language, politics, racism, white privilege, gender, trans identity and the embodiment of power in the decolonial moment' (Hutton, 2017: 25). Hutton is using their queer physicality to subvert normative whiteness.

Marnell describes Hutton's work as productively breaking social taboos about what it is acceptable to verbalise, and therefore diffusing some of the racial tension produced by the continuing structural legacy of apartheid. He also comments on the way in which he sees Hutton's work as allowing a move *beyond the self* – as producing an affect of solidarity and fostering cross-racial allyship. This notion of using the 'self' to build solidarity is present in all the works I have discussed in this chapter. In grappling with their own immediate realities and making public this struggle, through their performance, their performance becomes a political act.

Conclusion

In this chapter I argue that my respondents are using a queer politics and identity to navigate the post-apartheid context in South Africa. I have suggested that given the death of rainbowism as a structuring national myth, an identification with queer is being turned to by the queer visual activists and artists whose work I engage with as one that provides an alternative symbolic architecture of hope (Muñoz, 2009). Broadly speaking, for white South Africans, this is about a grappling with privilege, and for black South Africans, about a claiming of power; for both, it is an identification that offers political agency. I chose the three artists I explore in this chapter because they each represent particular approaches to navigating their context which broadly express those I found occupied by others I interviewed.

It is clear from my respondents that contrary to some of the literature and popular discourse, 'queer' as a category of identification and critical practice is currently

being embraced by some South Africans, rather than imposed upon them. This identification is not across the board with Mampane and Mfazwe, for example, still preferring the specificity offered by the identity of 'black lesbian'. However, many others are decentring the Euro-American model of queerness with their own local version of it.

Several of the themes that recur in Chapter Five and Six are already evident here – the inseparability of race and sexuality, the opportunistic use of platforms for queer visibility (evidenced most clearly here in Mampane's Ms Leather performances), the notion of queerness as a utopian mode of desiring (something teased out in more detail in the next chapter), and the use of individual queer visibility to both challenge normative/hegemonic identities and foster allyship or solidarity amongst those occupying marginal identities. Chapter Five looks in more detail at how this move from self to solidarity is made.

5. Queer (Re)making: from self to solidarity

The practice of creating queer representations is partly about intervening in the public space to remake reality (Mouffe, 2008:9) but also about queer world-making (Berlant and Warner, 1998); about creating 'sites of becoming' (Thompson, 2015). This chapter starts with an exploration of the notion of queer representation in the South African context, before looking at two 'sites of becoming' - Kate Arthur's body portraits and *FAKA*'s performance work. Both these artists challenge and ultimately broaden our understanding of what constitutes activism. Arthur's quiet, delicate paintings emerge from a conversation process during which Arthur takes photographic portrait shots of her participants, and they mutually explore their queer identification. *FAKA*'s much louder performance work is showcased in club venues and on fashion shoots and is part of a broader project in which they identify and promote other black queer artists.

5.1 Sites of becoming

Both Arthur and *FAKA*, through their work, have created 'sites of becoming' for themselves, by which I mean that they use their work as a space in which to grapple with and express their own identities. The opening up and sharing of this process, invites solidarity and creates 'sites of becoming' for other queer people. Their work is both challenging the existing scripts of gendered and sexual identities and seeking solidarity with others.⁸⁸ Chapter one described the South African context as one with extremely high levels of gender-based violence (Reid, 2013:13) and one in which, despite legislative reforms, there is a dominant narrative of homosexuality as unAfrican (Hoad, 2007: xi; Gunkel, 2010:25; Ekine, 2013). Within this context, choosing to risk queer visibility is an activist gesture; it is both a claiming of public space and of self-worth.

Chapter Two described visual representation as one of the social technologies that contributes to the discursive construction of social identities. Understanding visual representation as central to the construction and articulation of the self in everyday

⁸⁸ This borrows from Bennett's (2013:173) observations about Muholi's work.

life, is key to understanding the importance of this work; representations can create, or challenge, or shift what is regarded as normative. Equally important is the understanding that discursive constructions have material implications. As Stuart Hall wrote: 'questions of culture and ideology, and the scenarios of representation – subjectivity, identity, politics – [have] a formative, not merely an expressive, place in the constitution of social and political life' (Hall, 1996: 443). In other words, representations don't merely depict reality, they also construct it.

Arthur and FAKA, through their creative practice, create 'sites of becoming' outside of the logic of heteronormativity. These sites of becoming are safe spaces that allow for self-fashioning and community making. In so doing they link the everyday to the utopic because it invokes a world which is not racist, or sexist or homophobic.

The sharing of this practice, in asserting queer visibility, intervenes to shift social norms, temporarily asserting queer visibility against potential erasure (Lewis, 2005; Bennett, 2013:173) and in so doing allow 'alternative infrastructures' to develop.

Buckland (2002), writing about the queer clubbing scene in New York, draws on Berlant and Warner's (1998) ideas of queer world-making, to suggest similar processes in which safe spaces allow for self-fashioning and community making outside the logic of heteronormativity. She describes the 'improvised social dancing' that happens in these clubs as facilitating the creation of 'pre-political configurations of community' (Buckland, 2002:86). Both Arthur and FAKA's crafting of queer representations can be seen as an enacting of prefigurative politics; experiments in developing new forms of social engagement that prefigure a desired (more just) society (Cornish et al, 2016).

5.2 Representation/Visibility

The introduction to this chapter has outlined the importance of queer representations in symbolically challenging dominant (hetero)normative representations (of gender and sexuality), and in doing so, complicating or remaking reality. In contexts where there are very few visible queer people, those that exist become hugely symbolically important. In other words, representation remains a significant form of activism in

contexts of exclusion. The ways in which queer artists in South Africa have sought to challenge hetero-normative forms of representation can be linked to Mouffe's writing on artistic activism, which argues for an understanding of identities as not pre-given but discursively constructed, and a result of processes of identification (2008:11). She conceptualises politics as a space of constant conflict and renegotiation between social agents, where what is considered 'natural' is determined by the dominant hegemonic order (2008:9). The way in which power is configured by this hegemonic order can be challenged by counter hegemonic practices (ibid). Queer art is one such practice. Like other critical art, it gives 'voice to all those who are silenced within the framework of the existing hegemony' (Mouffe, 2008:12), thus both challenging the dominant symbolic order, and contributing to the construction of new subjectivities (Mouffe, 2008:13).

As well as challenging the dominant symbolic order by depicting non-heteronormative lives, visual proof in the South African context that queer South Africans exist, queer representations give affective affirmation to other queer people. Thus, these representations both depict individual queer South Africans, and stand in for others. An Xiao Mina, writing about art, the internet and social movements, suggests that 'art distributed through networks can play a powerful role in affirming the community's beliefs and feelings, whether that's spreading joy and humor or providing an outlet for collective grief' (2015). She draws on Mary Rowe's concept of micro-affirmations (2008), small gestures that have a significant cumulative impact, to describe the important role art activists play in sustaining social movements.

Many of the artists I spoke to talked about the affirmative role that representations of other queer South Africans played for them. They spoke of the importance of discovering that they were not alone, that there were others who expressed their gender or sexuality in non-normative ways. As Hennessey writes: 'affirmative images of lesbians and gays in the mainstream media...can be empowering for those of us who have lived most of our lives with no validation at all from the dominant culture' (1995:31).

Artist Athi-Patra Ruga, in a discussion about the work of Steven Cohen and Jean Brundrit,⁸⁹ who were two of the earliest 'out' fine artists in post-Apartheid South Africa, commented:

that outness was very helpful...there's that thing of, it's a desert, and you become this drop of water...so that reaching out becomes a form of activism (Ruga, Athi Patra-. [Artist, Tapestry-maker, Performer] Interview in Cape Town, December 2015)

Cohen and Brundrit were producing work in the 1990s, when Ruga was a child (he was born in 1984), and although there have been significant changes to how queer people are represented and how they represent themselves in South Africa since 1994, Ruga sees his own current role, as someone who is publicly visible and queer, as one that remains important. When I asked Ruga who he thought of as his audience he said:

my audience is that black kid in East London. My audience is the gay community...to see how we can heal (Ruga, Athi Patra-. [Artist, Tapestry-maker, Performer] Interview in Cape Town, November 2016)

The 'black kid in East London' is Ruga's childhood friend, a boy who was overtly feminine, and ostracised as a result. The fact that Ruga refers back to this moment as still relevant in the present, suggests that not enough has changed and that there are still non-binary boys being socially excluded because of their non-normative gender expression, and stigma and discrimination towards people who identify as or who are identified as LGBTQI.

Buyani Duma (one half of the performance duo *FAKA*), lists as his 'heroes' a number of what he calls 'micro celebrities' – people who are queer and both 'out' and active in their communities, and therefore positively shifting public opinion about queer people. One of his greatest heroes is the "out" gay celebrity Somizi Mhlongo. Duma equates Somizi's visibility with activism: 'just (by) being visible, I feel that that in itself

⁸⁹ Annie Commbes's (2003 :266-7) *History After Apartheid* includes a discussion of Brundrit's *Does Your Lifestyle Depress Your Mother?*

is activism' (Duma, Buyani. [Artist, Performer] Interview, Johannesburg, November 2015).

Currier (2012) and Tucker (2009) have both shown how queer South Africans strategically shift between visibility and invisibility to protect themselves, a factor mediated by both race and class. Duma's respect for Somizi is based on the fact that he is unequivocally, permanently "out", and therefore allowing the general public access to queer representations. Here he explains why this has been important to him:

He's basically a celebrity, but everyone knows about his sexuality, and I feel like his visual activism has had a great impact, and he deserves the recognition and the credibility, because often times people will just think, oh Somizi, he's just gay, without actually looking at the impact. Like if Somizi didn't exist, we'd actually be in a different place, like in terms of society. Maybe my grandparents wouldn't be as exposed to knowing what a homosexual man is. That a homosexual man and be a talented performer on television. He can be a person who loves his mother, because he's been public about that as well, and he has a daughter as well, and the complexity is so humanised, and I feel like he most represents like queer culture for my generation (Duma, Buyani. [Artist, Performer] Interview, Johannesburg, November 2015).

Duma's reading of Somizi underlines the importance of context in determining whether or not something is considered activist. In spite of being both black and gay, in fact Duma suggests even *because* of this, Somizi has been financially and professionally successful. Here Duma talks about the importance of his own grandparents seeing, through Somizi, the multifaceted-ness that a queer person can have; that they are not purely defined by being gay. For Duma, Somizi's presence on national television provides much needed proof not only that queer people can exist, but that they can be valued (socially and economically), and that they are capable of having the kinds of loving family relationships that his grandparents regard as important. Somizi's public visibility both facilitates (in relation to his family) and affirms (in relation to himself) Duma's own queerness.

South African performance artist, Selogadi Mampane, comments that for her, as a black lesbian, what is important is not so much that representations of black lesbians exist, but the *form* that they take. What she sees as missing is not representation per se, but persistent and nuanced representation. Here she talks of the tendency for representations of black lesbians in South Africa to be tied to reporting on hate crimes:

Like Zanele Muholi would say, (it is important) to create visual art so that people will know in the future that we are here – that we existed. And so that’s what I really wanted, I wanted to let people know that we existed, and we didn’t just exist when people would read a news clipping about a lesbian being murdered. We existed beyond that (Mampane, Selogadi [Performance Artist, Academic, Activist] Interview, Pretoria, November 2015).

For Mampane, it is not just a case of affirming one’s existence, although she does acknowledge that this is important. Also important is affirming one’s existence beyond the dominant media depictions of hate crimes. Mampane feels that images that reflect the complexity of black lesbians lives are important to her as an individual, because they counter her sense of being erased literally, and figuratively. And they are important historically, for future generations because they affirm not just that black lesbians exist, but also that they *live*. In problematising the language of ‘corrective rape’, Matebeni expresses a similar sentiment: ‘This victim narrative of black lesbians is a problematic, limited view of how we as black lesbians experience the fullness of our lives.’ (Matebeni, 2013b:344) Mampane tries to show in her performance pieces not only how black lesbians experience being constrained, and oppressed, but also how they experience pleasure, and autonomy and in this way seeks to complicate the dominant narrative of black lesbians as victims.

This chapter so far has explored some of what representations of queer people do in the South African context, specifically how they can affirm other queer people, while challenging, complicating and remaking reality. The following section explores *Things you can tell*, a body of work by the painter Kate Arthur. Arthur understands her work as a form of queer visual activism because she is both representing and making more visible queer South Africans. Although I don’t dispute this

characterisation of her work, it misses important elements of its activism - the conversations about queerness that Arthur facilitates as part of her creative process, and the symbolic valuing implied by her careful crafting of her subjects' portraits.

5.3 Things you can tell

Kate Arthur is a queer fine artist and illustrator based in Cape Town. She is part of a community of queer people, many of whom studied together at Rhodes University, who express themselves in a variety of different ways, through different media.

Arthur's *Things You Can Tell*, is a series of watercolour portraits and monotypes of 'queer bodies'. In this series, Arthur only paints people that expressly identify as queer. She explicitly identifies this body of work as activist and explains her perspective in the following way:

I (do) consider it an activist exhibition in that my aim, my commitment, is to represent the bodies and identities of people who aren't straight, who aren't cisgendered, who aren't white, who aren't men, and to represent them in ways that are a celebration. I think that visibility is important, and I know that Zanele's focus, for example, is black lesbian women or trans men, you know, that line, whereas my focus is particularly on queer people, and queer being an identity that they claim for themselves (Arthur, Kate. [Painter, Illustrator, Visual Activist] Interview, Cape Town, December 2016).

Arthur's intention with *Things You Can Tell* is to build an archive of self-identified queer people. The notion of what constitutes an archive has been variously theorised, both as a place of preservation and one of loss (Thomas, 2014:124). If we understand an archive as a contested site that reflects what society deems valuable and worth preserving, then entry into that archive invariably becomes a measure of social value (Thomas, 2014:50; Baderoon, 2014:330). In creating an archive, Arthur is asserting the value of those she paints.

She aligns her work with Muholi's, in that it is making visible non-normative bodies and celebrating these bodies but marks a difference between her work and Muholi's work in that she is explicitly focusing on self-identified queer people, whereas Muholi's focus has been on black lesbians and trans men. Arthur's subjects do not fit

the binaries of hetero/homo-sexual, male/female, abled bodied/not. In truth, many of Muholi's participants do not either, but the archival project for which they are most famous, and to which Arthur refers here, is *Faces and Phases*, an archive 'limited' to black lesbians and trans men. She argues that her work is activist because it positively represents the bodies of people who are non-normative, either in terms of their sexuality, or their gender. In Chapter One, I used Gammon and Isgro's (2006:173) writing to outline three broad different uses of the term queer. Muholi's work in *Faces and Phases* fits most closely to its usage as an umbrella term for a the 'laundry list' of possible marginal identities (in this case lesbian and transgender women). Muholi's work is very much about both recognising and valuing these particular identities. Arthur's use of 'queer' fits more closely with an understanding of queer as a non-identity, that resists regimes of both normative hetero- and homosexuality.

Arthur's choice of medium is significant in that the extensive labour required by her in painting her subjects, adds symbolic weight to their value.⁹⁰ In crafting these portraits, she can be seen to be actively affirming and honouring the subject of the portrait. Because her portraits are painstakingly crafted, the work that has gone into their creation is palpable. Arthur's work here bears some resemblance to the South African Gabrielle le Roux's much publicised 'collaborative portraits and stories with trans and intersex activists' project 'Proudly African and Transgender' (see le Roux, 2013:54). However, le Roux very explicitly positions and circulates her work in activist spaces (not fine art ones). Le Roux first created her portraits at a gathering of trans activists in Cape Town to honour these activist and increase their visibility as part of an African trans movement (le Roux, 2013). The work was first exhibited by Amnesty International (le Roux, 2013:68).

Arthur's choice of media here marks a departure from her previous oil painting, in that both water colours and monotypes are less solid, less fixed. This suggests a recognition of the fragility and fluidity of her subjects' identification. Arthur's portraits are primarily of people she knows who she has approached to be involved in the

⁹⁰ Portraits have traditionally been intimately connected to social status (Mirzoeff, 2015:31)

project, although as it has gathered momentum some participants have approached her and asked to be included. A central component of her process is a photo shoot, in which she collects the images from which she will paint the final portrait. Arthur takes numerous photographs and then later chooses one to paint from that she feels captures most accurately her subject.

Here Arthur explains how she instructs her sitters for the portrait photographs:

The brief is to show as much body as you are prepared to show, but to keep your underwear on, because I don't want it to be about genitalia...I don't want it to become about what's in the person's pants...that's not what this is about. And, I'm interested in the kinds of, you know usually people express their identity, and you know elements of who they are, and what they stand for, with their clothing, with accessories, I don't know, an outward dressing, something that they put on, external representation, and what I'm interested in, is when we remove all of that, like, what of your identity is still visible. Just your body. And I think they're very beautiful, you know, like I'm interested in where male bodies are feminine, and where female bodies have masculinity in them, and what we consider to be masculine and feminine, which I think is problematic (Arthur, Kate. [Painter, Illustrator, Visual Activist] Interview, Cape Town, December 2016).

Arthur's subjects are topless, and she has intentionally asked them to strip their body of any external markers of identification. In Arthur's portrait of her partner, 'B' (figure 3.1), we can see the scars on their chest, which hint at the removal of their breasts. In her portrait of Gabi (figure 3.2), her twisted body suggests that she is differently able. However, her portraits of Kyle or Siya, give little away in terms of their gender or sexual orientation. They are both slim, and possibly feminine, but their 'otherness' is not necessarily legible. Although purportedly this project is about documenting and representing queer bodies to an outside audience, the subject's non-normativity is not necessarily readable in the portraits. The subjects are presented almost as medical specimens, exacerbated by the fact that their heads are cropped in half. This is perhaps about denying complete legibility to the audience; maintaining some privacy for the subject.

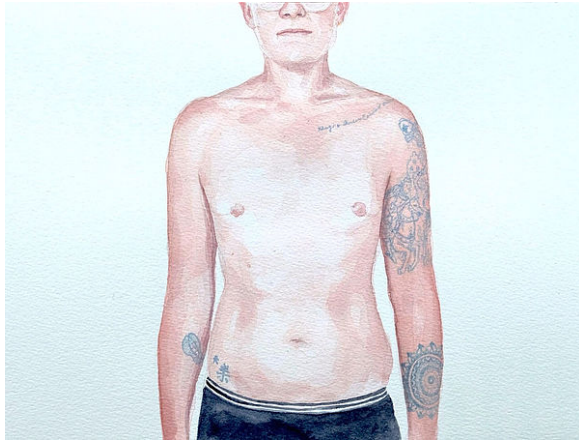


Figure 3.1 (Left) - 'B' Watercolour by Kate Arthur



Figure 3.2 (Right) – 'Gabi' Watercolour by Kate Arthur

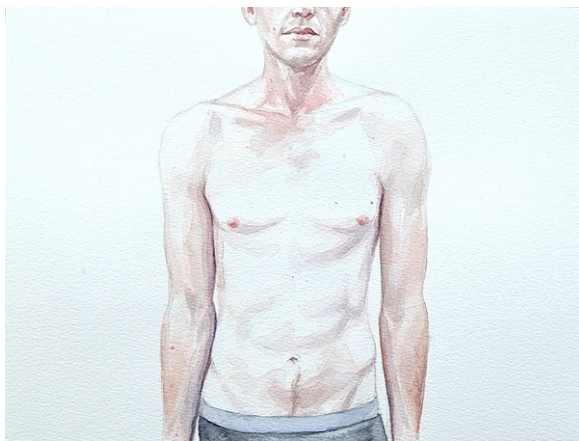


Figure 3.3 (L)- 'Kyle' Watercolour by Kate Arthur

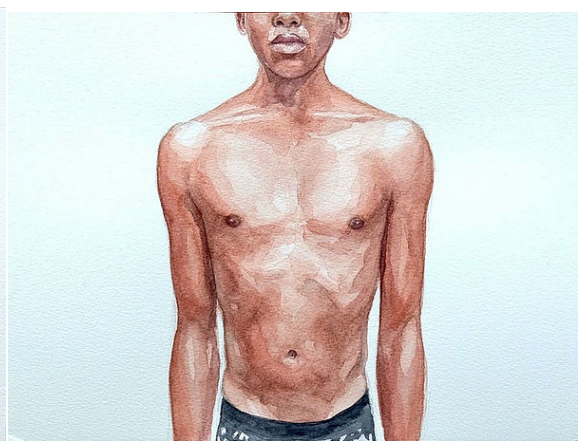


Figure 3.4 (R) – 'Siya' Watercolour by Kate Arthur

Arthur's statement quoted above suggests the importance of the process of developing these portraits. She seems to be both searching for an essence of queerness that lies beyond external signifiers of identity and suggesting there is none. These are humans. The 'queer essence' that Arthur's seeks then becomes part of the private exchange between herself and her portrait subjects; a process of mutual empowerment (not unlike that described in Chapter 6 in relation to Hamblin's work with *Sistaaz Hood*). During the photo shoot, Arthur talks to her sitters about being queer, why they identify as such, and what it means to them. She does not document the conversation in any way, but imagines some residue of the interaction is held in the portrait; she also says that if this is not the case, that's ok. In other words, the interaction was important, to both her, and her sitter, in ways that don't

necessarily require sharing, and that that private moment still constitutes activism for her. The conversations here are reminiscent of those held by civil rights activists and feminists in the consciousness raising groups of the 1960s and 70s, which allowed them to try out and consolidate their views, and often became the basis for political engagement (Cole et al, 1998:366). This ‘consciousness raising’ was about learning to understand and articulate minority issues, in a way that built both self-esteem and solidarity, and ultimately linked to movement building (Sarachild, 1973; Weitz, 1982).

I asked Arthur if she saw her activism as located in the images themselves, or in the conversations that are part of her working process. She answered:

both, I think. The conversations are crucial. Crucial for me. Crucial for the kind of shared experience of it. I like the ways in which those kinds of conversations open up things to think about, things I haven't thought about, possibly things that my sitter hasn't thought about, and that I know, when I'm going through all those hundreds of photographs, I recall what was shared, I know the moments where like a person is turning their head, I know. And I do feel that in the images that I choose, that those moment hold a lot more than just a pose, for me they hold a lot more (Arthur, Kate. [Painter, Illustrator, Visual Activist] Interview, Cape Town, December 2016).

As suggested in the introduction to this chapter, repurposing Thompson's (2015) notion of ‘sites of becoming’ is useful here. Thompson describes alternative social spaces as social affinity sites where people can come together to talk, commune and produce a new form of politics (2015:131). Thompson argues that in these spaces people come to see themselves not as isolated identities but as social actors (2015:131). Arthur describes the exchange between herself and her collaborators as one where their queer identities are articulated and shared in a safe and affirming environment, as part of the process of image creation. We can see this image creation process as a ‘site of becoming’ where Arthur and her sitters mutually craft a queer identity. This process is not just mutually self-empowering, but also produces what Thompson calls ‘infrastructures of resonance’ (Thompson, 2015:142). These infrastructures are perhaps best explained as communities held together with an affective glue; in this case a queer community formed, or strengthened through a particular artistic practice. In Arthur's case strengthened is more accurate than

formed as she knows the majority of her sitters prior to their portrait painting. Arthur's finished portraits can be seen as a valuing not only of the portraits' subjects, but also of the shared process between artist and sitter.

The making public of these portraits invites viewers to witness Arthur's celebration of their subjects, as well as an embryonic queer community. However, Arthur's relative disinterest in formal exhibitions suggests that her primary audience is the subjects of her portraits, and other queer people who might be helped by these representations. Arthur paints her work with an online audience in mind and she expressed a genuine lack of concern regarding how many people saw her work in the exhibition space. I asked her, given her belief in the importance of representation, whether she thought the success of something as activist is determined by how many people see it. Her response was as follows:

I don't think that the physical space of the exhibition has a very wide reach, and the reach that it does have is limited, but that's why social media platforms like Facebook and Instagram, I think that the reach is further there. Much further... I think a lot more people have seen my work online than in real life... I think it's vital in this day and age, that you have an online presence, and that I, whether the work is seen in the real, or on a computer screen, I think just as long as it's seen, and you know people share it, and it gets shared and shared and seen, and it's great. For me, that's good enough, like I don't need people to come to an exhibition and see the work on the wall (Arthur, Kate. [Painter, Illustrator, Visual Activist] Interview, Cape Town, December 2016).

Arthur is very confident about the life of the images beyond the exhibition. In fact, she could be argued to be creating the work primarily for an online audience. Her paintings certainly stand out in a digital context, because they are distinctly non-digital. Jenkins et al refer to the idea of 'spreadable imaginary' - material that attracts online audience interest and that they then want to share (Jenkins et al, 2013). Reestorff uses this idea to describe what she calls the 'affective activism' of the Femen movement⁹¹ whose protests create 'spreadable imaginary', their

⁹¹ Femen is an international radical feminist group known for their topless protest – a tactic they call 'sextremism' (<https://femen.org>)

photographed protest events are spread through online platforms; and 'enable communication between bodies', their protests are also embodied performances witnessed by embodied audiences (Reestorff, 2014:478). Both their live protests and the documentation (or spreadable imagery) these create, are designed to evoke an affective response from their audience. Adapting Reestorff's work to Arthur's portraits, her production process, which facilitates the mutual empowerment of herself and the portrait subject, enables a 'communication between bodies'. Her awareness of the importance of the online life of her images suggests that they are also being generated as 'spreadable imaginary'; as 'affective activism'.⁹² Mina (2015) suggests that this online imagery has the capacity to generate micro-affirmations such as pride, dignity or unity in their online audiences, making viewers feel less alone in the face of injustice, and ultimately contributing to incremental change.

To return to the offline life of *Things you can Tell*, an easily overlooked aspect of Arthur's work is the locus of the exhibition. Here Arthur talks about Chandler House, the gallery that showed *Things you can see* in late 2016:

The audience there is quite touristy, it's also I think very white, kind of middle, upper class people with big homes who live in Constantia,⁹³ who like ceramic objects, and paintings of flowers...I think Michael⁹⁴ took a chance, and I think he's glad he took a chance, and I do hope it helps in kind of opening up the kind of repertoire that his space offers.

Again, Arthur's choice of media serves her well here. At least at face value, watercolour portraits read as innocuous, and apolitical, arguably a factor that made it possible for her to exhibit them at Chandler House. Although Arthur is slightly apologetic about the non-political nature of the gallery, she recognized that Chandler House and its audiences would not ordinarily encounter queer bodies in this space. Arthur's work both politicised and queered the exhibition space, and in doing so possibly opened it up for future queering. Given observations earlier in this chapter

⁹² Reestorff's term (2014)

⁹³ A very wealthy, predominantly white, suburb of Cape Town.

⁹⁴ The gallery owner

about the context-dependent nature of visual activism, one could argue that her choice of venue in this instance also constitutes activism.

Arthur's artistic and cultural work is inherently social. I have argued here, that although Arthur presents her work as activist because of what it does for queer visibility and queer representation, there is more going on here. I conceptualise the conversations and negotiations that are part of the development of Arthur's portraits, as 'sites of becoming', both for Arthur and her participants, and the portraits as the evidence or distillation of this process. Jenkins et al understand 'participatory politics', as 'the exercise of expressive and discursive power – through education and cultural change' (2016:4). They suggest that many grassroots organisations now see this form of politics as more effective in promoting social transformation than institutional politics (ibid). Arthur's artwork is designed first and foremost for peer consumption – in other words for those she paints, and others who identify with them. Engagement with a commercial gallery space raises Arthur's artistic profile, and is necessary for a developing commercial artist, but can also be leveraged in support of her online visibility (Arthur, Kate. [Painter, Illustrator, Visual Activist] Interview, Cape Town, December 2016). It is here, amongst her peers, and through their networks, that much of the value of Arthur's work lies.

5.4 FAKA's subversions

The following section examines the work of queer black performance duo, FAKA. FAKA's performance first emerged through a blog platform that they set up as an online networking and showcasing space for queer black South Africans. They perform in clubs and galleries and on online fashion spaces. FAKA have recently been employed as brand ambassadors for Adidas and have worked with Versace.⁹⁵ They embrace this 'commodification of blackness' (hooks, 2014:231) as part of their broader project of challenging and remaking normative reality. I read this performative engagement with corporate capital through what Munoz terms, 'a mode of being in the world that is also inventing the world' (Muñoz, 2009: 121). For FAKA,

⁹⁵ Their track *Uyang'Khumbula* was chosen to launch Versace's 2019 Spring/Summer Fashion Show in Milan.

being visible *is* being activist, so they are exploiting their commodification to augment their visibility (Duma, Buyani. [Artist, Performer] Interview, Johannesburg, November 2015). They perform against the popular notion that one cannot be both queer and African (Ekine, 2013), or male and feminine. Like Arthur, FAKA place a lot of emphasis on the importance of queer visibility in their work. Also like Arthur, their artistic product (their performances) can be read as evidence of a process of becoming, or 'self-actualisation',⁹⁶ that is central to their craft. Also like Arthur, this process is a shared one, through which they create 'sites of becoming' for other queer black South Africans. FAKA are based in Johannesburg and made up of Desire Marea and Fela Gucci (the performance personas of Buyani Duma and Thato Ramaisa). Here I draw on an interview that I conducted in 2015 in Johannesburg with Buyani Duma (aka Desire Marea), one half of the FAKA duo.

FAKA use self-fashioning to challenge and remake normative reality. They also use carefully crafted spectacles to create contemporary indigenous queer rituals. There have been three broad strands to their work so far: gallery-based performance pieces, music videos, and heavily-stylised fashion (self)-portraits. Their aesthetic sense is extremely powerful and unusual, partly in the way that they blend contemporary and traditional visual elements, and partly in their performance of the erotic, and of their femininity. FAKA means 'to penetrate', but also 'to contribute to', so even within their name there is surprising mixture of irreverence and social responsibility. This type of sensibility that parodies serious issues and relies on a self-mocking black humour has been written about as a queer strategy of subversion (Blake cited in Smith, 2015).

⁹⁶ FAKA in Mongo Ali, 2015

(IMAGE NOT COPYRIGHT CLEARED)

Figure 3.5. FAKA. 2016. Cover Image for 'Bottom's Revenge' their debut EP. Photo credit: Nick Widmer.

Figure 3.5 is the cover image for FAKA's debut EP 'Bottom's Revenge', it depicts FAKA resplendent in wedding gowns, looking alluringly, perhaps defiantly, at the camera; celebrating their marriage to themselves, each other, their fans, their music, their fabulousness? The title 'Bottom's Revenge' is a queer joke that plays subversively with their name; queer as in FAKA. Here they explain this:

FAKA, in the context of sexual intercourse, is an order given to the perpetrator to penetrate and our ownership of a term linked to the assumption of passivity is a protest to empower the most shamed identities. It is the 'bottoms revenge' (FAKA in Mongo Ali, 2015).

FAKA are claiming their femininity whilst simultaneously rejecting some of components that patriarchy assumes as part of this femininity, for example that it is submissive.

Their work also reclaims and adapts history, a queer strategy that is 'not just nostalgia but marks an active incorporation that is self-knowing' (Horne and Lewis, 1996:7). One of their early music videos is *From a Distance*, which they

describe as ‘a gqom⁹⁷-gospel lamentation for Dick’ (Lekena, 2017). Its title references Brenda Fassie’s live rendition of Bette Midler song. Both Fassie⁹⁸ and Midler⁹⁹ have been celebrated as queer icons. *From a Distance* has a self-shot, homemade aesthetic, and shows the duo doing improvised and sexualised dancing against the backdrop of South African scrubland. FAKA, talking about their admiration for Brenda Fassie say that she ‘symbolized self-actualization... she was able to embrace her truth regardless of how her private life was violently publicized...she taught us sexual liberation and the diverse ways of existing as a black queer person (FAKA cited in Klein, 2015). FAKA insist that their ‘art is not window-dressing. It’s a way of being and a way of being expressly political’ (Summerbell, 2015). Their use of popular culture and self-fashioning as a form of political expression firmly positions their work within a culture of ‘fabulousness’.

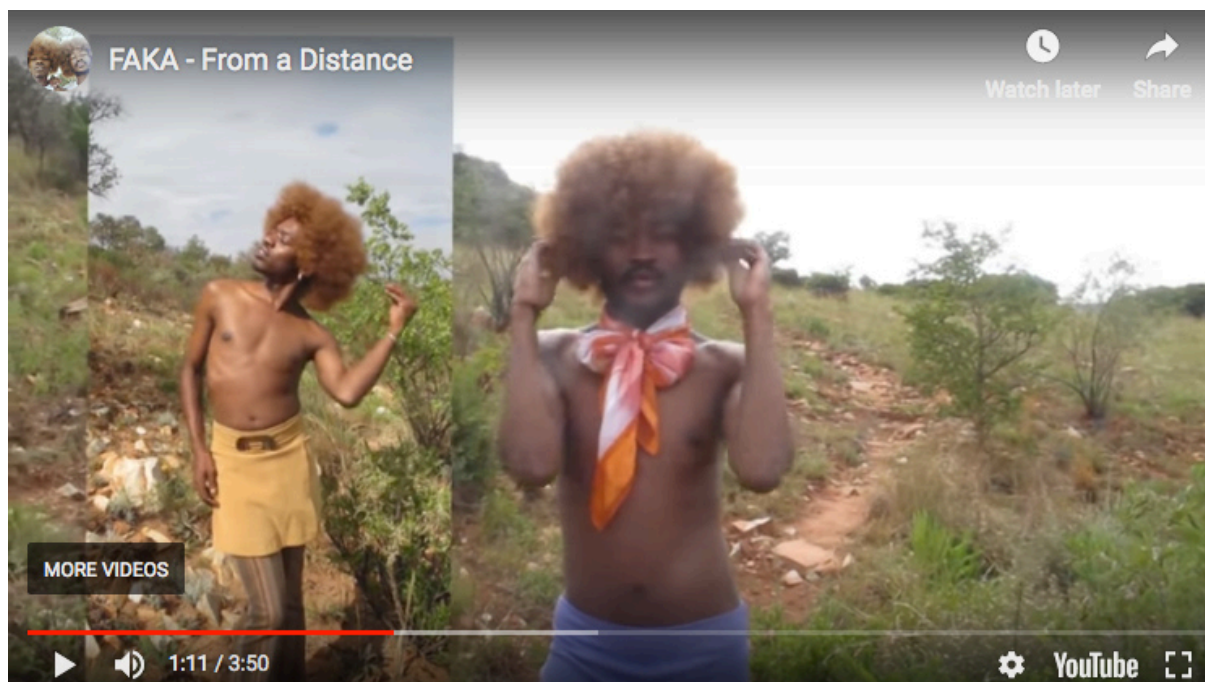


Figure 3.6. Still from FAKA’s music video *From a Distance*, 2015. From YouTube.

⁹⁷ Gqom is a form of deep house music that originates in Natal, South Africa.

⁹⁸ Brenda Fassie was a controversial, lesbian, South Africa pop star, who was constantly involved in various media scandals. She was known as “the Madonna of the Townships” to which she responded, “No, no, no sweetie, Madonna is the Brenda of America” (Mills, 2017).

⁹⁹ Bette Midler is an American singer and performer who began her career performing in gay bathhouses in New York city.

Fabulousness is 'an embodied queer aesthetic practice' that uses creativity and spectacle to counter social exclusion (Moore, 2018:22). Here FAKA describe their practice:

A lot of the things that we express stem from the displacement of our bodies on the counts of race and sexual identity in a system that heavily operates through racialized hetero-patriarchal constructs. Performance came naturally to us as it puts our bodies, our immediate space, at the forefront of a bigger discussion about how our bodies intersect with the spaces we occupy. Performance is a form of resisting all these ideas that try to keep us oppressed (FAKA in Mongo Ali, 2015).

This idea of performance as creating a space outside of heteropatriarchal logic, connects back to the queer world-making (Berlant and Warner, 1998) that Buckland (2002) describes in queer New York club culture. She writes 'in a queer lifeworld, being fabulous was hard currency'; this currency is exchanged for self-esteem and belonging (Buckland, 2002:36). Buckland's writing makes clear that the process of self-actualisation she describes is a communal one through which queer participants form 'pre-political configurations of community' (2002:86). FAKA have always insisted that their own 'self-actualisation' is closely connected to their desire for a broader, communal liberation from oppressive norms, as they put it: 'humanizing black queers looks like liberation learned through self-actualization' (FAKA in Mongo Ali, 2015). Like Arthur, FAKA's artistic practice creates 'sites of becoming' for themselves, and others. Their performance first emerged through a blog platform that they set up as an online networking and showcasing space for queer black South Africans. They talk about themselves not just as a duo, but as a 'queer movement' (Duma, Buyani. [Artist, Performer] Interview, Johannesburg, November 2015). They envisage themselves as mothers of the 'House of FAKA', after the New York ball culture documented in *Paris is Burning* (Livingstone, 1991), using their practice to create a safe space for a community of fellow queer black South Africans.

As outlined in Chapter One, South Africa is famous for its regional exceptionalism marked both by its constitution, which explicitly outlaws discrimination based on sexuality or gender and the existence of gay marriage. South Africa became the fifth

country in the world to legalise marriage of same-sex couples in 2006. The debates around this reform, and the journey taken towards its institution are celebrated, documented, and analysed in Judge et al (2008). However, despite this legal inclusion for queer South Africans, there have been numerous cases of violent homophobic murder, 'signifying the continued social exclusion of those at the sexual margins' (Judge, 2015: iii). South Africa also has extraordinarily high levels of gender-based violence, with more rapes committed per capita than any other country in the world (Anderson, 2000:789). Gqola's book *Rape* argues that rape works to keep patriarchy intact (2015:21) and that it is a national culture, not just a behaviour attributable to a small minority of men (ibid, 178).

Much queer visual activist work in South Africa has concentrated on the documentation of hate crimes, and either supporting or challenging the criminal justice system in an attempt to better support the victims of hate crimes.¹⁰⁰ FAKA's artistic production on the surface is the antithesis of this kind of work, much more concerned with celebrating life, than documenting death, although it too is motivated by a desire to challenge both damaging gender norms and homophobia. FAKA's decision to be artists was based a belief 'that culture is a higher governing body than law when it comes to power over bodies',¹⁰¹ an opinion echoed by Steyn and van Zyl, who suggest that without challenging the gendered nature of social institutions, gender-based violence will persist, regardless of how well the criminal justice system works (2009:12). In challenging normative gender constructions by unapologetically performing their femininity and challenging the social conservatism around sexuality (by being overtly sexual), FAKA hope to challenge both gender-based violence and homophobia. Here Duma explains this:

we represent our generation, and our generation needs different things. Like, it's a whole different narrative now. It's more about issues of representation, and yes, the hate crimes are still there, but we sort of try to get to the root of things, because we wouldn't feel like there would be so much homophobia if sexuality wasn't so like frowned upon in our society. Because anything that even hints at sexuality is like

¹⁰⁰ See for example the work done by Zanele Muholi with *Inkanyiso*, and by Iranti.org

¹⁰¹ See <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kFkgN9PGdMM> - Duma's talk at Creative Mornings Johannesburg, June 2016.

completely expunged, and that's why AIDS, or HIV, was stigmatised for such a long time (Duma, Buyani. [Artist, Performer] Interview, Johannesburg, November 2015).

FAKA's performance piece *Wait Lorraine* (2015) is about refusing the stigma attached to sexuality.¹⁰² Lorraine represents heteronormativity; the imaginary policer of social constructs. The background to this piece is a video track featuring Ugandan Pastor Ssempe (Chairperson of the National Task Force against homosexuality), railing against homosexuality, and describing same sex sexual acts to his congregation in graphic detail. FAKA emerge to a Gqom soundtrack, each shedding a cloth that covers them, as if shedding Ssempe's vitriol, to reveal their provocative leather clubbing gear. The gallery space has been transformed into a queer club night. FAKA proceed to dance and gyrate suggestively, a provocative embrace and rebuttal of Ssempe's characterisation of homosexuals.¹⁰³ FAKA describe this piece as one built around a philosophy of what they call '*Siyakaka Feminism*'. *Siyakaka*, means 'we shit' in Zulu. Duma calls *Siyakaka Feminism* 'a healing manifesto for the perpetually broken', a reference to the continual breaking of queer people by mainstream culture, which makes them feel 'unsafe being ourselves'. Lorraine, who FAKA put on hold in this performance in order to create a safe space, a 'site of becoming', represents all that is respectable and socially acceptable. *Wait Lorraine* is partly an assertion of pride, but it is also an emphatic countering of the argument that homosexuality is un-African; an argument that structures much homophobia in South Africa (Ekine, 2013). FAKA's work is both definitively queer, and definitively (South) African.

FAKA consciously position themselves as role models offering guidance to younger black South African queers. Borrowing from Pepper LaBeija,¹⁰⁴ Duma introduces himself as 'Desire Marea - legendary half mother of the house of FAKA'. The younger artists they profile on their website¹⁰⁵ they refer to as '*Top Upcoming*

¹⁰² https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=181&v=uzJyF1QlyrA

¹⁰³ Ssempe was filmed regaling his congregation with in-depth descriptions of various alleged sex acts practised by homosexuals, including rimming, or 'anal licking' as he calls it, 'where even poo poo may come out' (see Thomas, E. 2014).

¹⁰⁴ A central figure from the New York ball scene of the 1980s

¹⁰⁵ www.siyakaka.com

Legendary Children, and 'The House of FAKA', is 'a counter institution meant to shelter everybody who is alienated by mainstream culture', although their 'community' is based online, not in a physical space (Duma, Buyani. [Artist, Performer] Interview, Johannesburg, November 2015).

FAKA's desire to be famous is very much imbricated in their desire to model what Munoz (2009) calls a 'critical utopia', and FAKA a 'reimagined existence for black queer people'. The art world is just one of the many platforms that they see helping them to access bigger and more diverse audiences in the long term. Chapter Six documents their growing public profile both in South Africa and internationally, from being appointed brand ambassadors to Adidas in 2016, to working with Versace in 2017. and outlines how they view their engagement with corporate capital as furthering their activist aims; they use these platforms to subvert mainstream or normative representations.

Conclusion

Throughout this thesis, I have pointed to the different ways in which queer visual activism is understood in the contemporary South African context. Arthur and FAKA's work does not immediately read as conventional activism. However, as Jenkins et al (2016) argue, what we think of as activism has radically changed with the advent and growth of social media. The work Arthur and FAKA do, creates 'sites of becoming' not just for themselves, but their peers, and potentially also their wider communities. What we learn from these two examples of queer visual activism is that visual activism does not always present in an 'obvious' form. This is because the activism itself is not necessarily located in the visual image but rather in the social structures or communities created through the artistic practice.

The visual image itself constitutes an epistemological and pedagogical intervention, but what constitutes visual activism is far more than this. Through my interviews with Arthur and FAKA I came to see their visual practice as creating 'sites of becoming', for themselves and their peers. Through these sites they create representations of their peers and themselves as they wish to be seen and in so doing, expand the

boundaries of gendered identities. Their practice acts as a queer convening space for their peers through which they are enacting a form of prefigurative politics (Maekelbergh, 2012). In both examples their artistic practice offers a solidarity with others that constitutes a form of movement building.

The following chapter continues to examine the practices that surround the production of visual texts through two projects that represent the central and systematic use of visual activism for movement building. Both projects emerged from social movements and from seasoned activists who have turned to fine art institutions to support and amplify their work.

6. Creating Value: the Political Economy of Visual Activism

Introduction

In this chapter I focus not on the visual artefacts of queer visual activism, but on the political economy of their production and circulation (Mosco, 2009). By political economy, I mean the systems of production, distribution and exchange through which queer visual activism takes form and which in turn are shaped by queer visual activist practices. I examine the political economies of two specific projects – Zanele Muholi’s *Faces and Phases* and Robert Hamblin’s *InterSexion*. The second half of the chapter explore visual activism as a route to economic empowerment.

As discussed in Chapter Two, the majority of the literature that looks specifically at *queer* visual activism is focused on Zanele Muholi’s work, and Muholi has been hugely influential both in South Africa, and internationally because of the way in which they make visible black queer gender and sexualities. What is missing from much of this literature is an understanding beyond the image to an articulation of the processes that drive both the production and dissemination of Muholi’s images.

I am concerned with showing how activists build ‘communities of practice’ through and around their work. Here I am appropriating Lave & Wenger’s (1991) term, and using it to mean the communities that develop (or are built) through an artist’s practice. The members of *Inkanyiso*,¹⁰⁶ for example, are part of Muholi’s community of practice. In the visual activism I describe, the social organisation of these relationships (the political part) is constituted through the creative practice. I am also interested in the broader networks that both use and circulate these images (the economy part).

¹⁰⁶ Inkanyiso – is a online digital space and a non-profit organisation founded by Muholi in 2009. It provides training for writers and photographers, a focal point for community events and activities and a way for Muholi to document her work and travels, much of which involves members of Inkanyiso. See Thomas (2013) for a more detailed organisation profile.

This idea builds on McLagan and McKee's (2012) idea of the 'image complex'¹⁰⁷ but where their emphasis is on the circulation of images, I pay specific attention to the ways in which the activists I study create communities through the production of their work. These communities are then imbricated in advocating for and sustaining this work. A political economy lens allows me to move beyond a limited focus on the images themselves to understand the context in which they are made and circulated as central to understanding their meaning. In doing so, I am working against 'scholarship's preoccupation with the symbolic function of finished works' (Bruce and Homan, 2018:1), in both art history and visual culture literature, which holds the product 'as the measure of success for a communicative action' (Bruce and Homan, 2018:3).

The second half of this chapter draws attention to the ways in which these activists engage with the market and adopt what I understand to be a very particular form of decolonial redistribution. Key to understanding how radical this concept is, is an understanding of the networks and communities described in the first half of the chapter, and that the impact of individual success in the art market is shared by these communities. The strategic embrace of capitalism by South African visual activists marks a fundamental difference between the visual activism characterised in much of the literature, and the way in which it is understood and practiced in queer South Africa. The critique of capital, often prevalent in the work of visual activists elsewhere (Demos, 2016), is complicated in the contemporary South African context, where economic privilege is expressed as a post-apartheid *freedom*, previously (and still, in the majority of cases) denied to the majority. This is something that Posel (2010) explores in her analysis of the historically constitutive relationship between the regulation of race in South Africa and the regulation of consumption. Posel (2010:164), notes that the 'official conception of race drew heavily on people's relationships to the world of things.' In apartheid South Africa, for example:

strategies of African township development were intended to ensure that township life remained sparse; that these would not become spaces of longing or aspiration,

¹⁰⁷ McLagan and McKee (2012: 22, 23) use the idea of an image complex as the way of capturing several mutually constitutive realms (aesthetics, political movements, mediation) that are brought together at the point that politics is brought into visibility.

because that would bring floods of unwanted people from rural areas to town. Houses were typically small and meagre, with no fixtures and fittings. Apart from small local shops selling basic groceries, shopping facilities in townships were expressly prohibited (Posel, 2010:169)

Being a black South African under apartheid meant being denied access to social, economic and political opportunities (Southall, 2007; Posel, 2010:168). So, freedom of acquisition and, more broadly, economic freedom, became an apartheid legacy closely linked to the making of selfhood.

The notion of economic freedom has taken on increased importance in South African public discourse in recent years, as exemplified by the populist political party the EFF (Economic Freedom Fighters).¹⁰⁸ Colonised South Africans, and indeed by extension, all those who were categorised 'non-white' under apartheid, were not only forcibly removed from their land, but also systematically excluded from systems of profit. Engaging with, for example, the fashion industry, or the international art market, as some of the visual activists I study are doing (both to make a living and to continue their work) can be seen as an ideological assertion of self-worth. As Tuck and Yang (2012), referring specifically to the American settler colonial context, and in particular calls for land redistribution, have written: 'decolonisation is not a metaphor'. Many visual activists view their visual activism as a pathway to the economic freedom denied to black South Africans prior to 1994 (Southall, 2007; Posel, 2010). This freedom is important imaginatively and symbolically, and also materially. It is often also not just about individual survival or enrichment, but community building. Muholi has symbolically gestured to this recently in choosing to use the pronoun 'they'. They have explained this identification as a nod to their gender expression, but more importantly as a statement of Africanism (there are no gendered pronouns in Zulu) and they are also referencing a subject position that comes into being through and with other people. In Muholi's own words: "I say 'they' as in my ancestors, and even deeper than that. The collective. To say, 'I am not [just] one. I come with many forces'...The dream, it's bigger than me" (Gevisser, 2018).

¹⁰⁸ See www.effonline.org

6.1 Existing Conceptions of Visual Activism

As outlined in Chapter Two, the term ‘visual activism’ has been used in a diverse range of contexts to describe a very broad range of activities where ‘the realm of the visual is marshalled in the service of wider political efforts’ (Bryan-Wilson et al, 2016:6), or fine art photography that allows the photographic subject some control over the framing of their portrait (see Hallas, 2012), to protest graffiti (Thomas, 2018a), to political funerals (Thomas, 2017), to action research using photo elicitation (Wilson and Milne, 2015). Its use and political currency are growing, exemplified by Mirzoeff, an important writer on visual culture, describing himself as a visual activist in his eBook on *Black Lives Matter* (2017).

Demos (2016) points to the limits of defining something as *visual* activism because in isolating the visual, we then lose activism’s other components, for example its auditory or physical attributes. He sees the visual as one component of a broader activist practice, as one that documents, symbolises, or supports what Murphy and O’Driscoll (2015) call an ‘ephemeral intervention’, by which they mean time-bound protests. In Demos’ conceptualisation *visual* activism as a descriptor, necessarily contains a lack. However this is only the case if we understand the visual as a discreet artefact, separate from the processes within which it is imbricated. Demos’ critique introduces a false distinction between the visual and the action/activism. As my fieldwork and research illuminate, and as I argue throughout this dissertation, visual activism is best understood in all its dimensions. If we see the visual not only as inseparable from the broader activism it is a part of, but also as the *central organising feature* of these activities, one that both defines and produces them, it allows a much richer understanding of visual activism.

Those I interviewed who defined themselves as visual activists, have created communities through their visual practice. Their visual images are the currency for their social interactions, both in terms of affective and economic exchange. In other words, these images form the centre of social, community building work, and generate income. There are a number of texts that point to this conception of visual activism, for example McLagan and McKee’s (2012) writing on the ‘image complex’

which sees the aesthetic and political as mutually constitutive, Butler's (1997) argument in *Merely Cultural*, which also rejects the notion of separating the cultural from the political, Azoulay's (2008:11) work on the 'civil contract' of photography (in which she writes about photographs as product of an encounter and start of a dialogue), and Mina's (2015) writing on the micro-affirmations provided by the circulation of political images through social media platforms.

Interviewee Robert Hamblin hints at the idea of visual practice creating communities when he talks about artwork as a geographical place that brings people together:

I think art is a place. Artwork is a place. A place of potential reflection. A place of potential discussion. A place of processing. It's a place. So, it doesn't matter what kind of art it is, it's a place, you know. People have to gather around it (Hamblin, Robert. [Photographer, Artist, Activist] Interview in Cape Town, November 2016).

Hamblin is talking about an exhibition of his collaborative work with *Sistaaz Hood* here, and is referring to the viewing of a finished piece at an exhibition, but I am interested in how the idea of the artwork as a place that brings people together and facilitates critical reflection, can also apply to the development of the artwork. In this conception, the creation of a visual performance or artefact becomes a convening space that facilitates dialogue and encounter. The artefact (during and after its production) generates affect, which builds communities, through direct human interactions and collaborations, and the micro-affirmations that are enacted by the images themselves as they circulate, through exhibition or media platforms.

The next section of this chapter outlines some of the multiple affiliations of queer visual activists, and shows how their visual production has allowed them to work across diverse contexts and become central to their activism.

6.2 The workings of queer visual activism

Something remarkable about the South African queer visual activist context is the extent to which those involved in queer visual activism have moved across and

between different institutional contexts, from mainstream media, to the NGO sector, to the Fine Art world, to academia. Some still straddle several of these contexts, and both their positionality, and the networks they have created, impact the way in which their images circulate. It is also the NGO sector, media, academia, and the art world that have variously fuelled visual activism, providing artists with visibility (an exhibition platform and audience) and money. With this growing visibility has come a growing awareness of the symbolic, political and literal value of these visual forms.

Many of those working in what might broadly be seen as queer visual activism, are in communication with each other, and form a loose network, or community. Often, they have traversed very different fields in their work. This section builds on McLagan and McKee's (2012) term, the 'image complex', which they use to describe the channels within which images circulate and the platforms within which they are discursively framed. Here the 'image complex' also refers to the communities and networks created through the image production process. Visual activism is understood as a distinct mode of activism, which has visual production at its centre.

The next part of this chapter (6.2.1 and 6.2.2) examines the role of visual activism in community building in more detail, with reference to two specific projects – Zanele Muholi's *Faces and Phases* and Robert Hamblin's *InterSexion*. What we learn from these examples of queer visual activism is that the activism is not only located in the visual image but rather in the social structures or communities created through the artistic practice. The visual image itself constitutes an important epistemological and pedagogical intervention, but what constitutes visual activism is far more than this. Both *Faces and Phases* and *InterseXion* emerged from grassroots activism in which visual skills were crucial to do the necessary political work. Muholi and Hamblin both moved into fine art practice because it furthered their political activism (and later, provided an income). This move from activism to art (and often back again) is a defining feature of 'visual activism', as opposed to 'art activism' which usually involves artists doing politically-themed work but located firmly within the art world context.

6.2.1 Faces and Phases

Before Zanele Muholi became a fine art photographer they were a reporter and photographer for the LGBTQII website *Behind the Mask* (established in 2000). They co-founded The *Forum for the Empowerment of Women (FEW)* in 2002, to support black lesbian and bisexual women (Currier, 2012). Both organisations made visible and strengthened an emerging pan-African LGBTQII movement (Currier, 2010; Currier, 2012; Currier and Moreau, 2016; Currier and Migraine-George, 2016). Much of Muholi's work with both these organisations was about documenting and making visible not only the existence of African homosexuality, but the everyday lives of queer South Africans (including their experience of gender-based violence and homophobic hate crimes). Thus, the production of visual imagery emerged as centrally important to their work.

Muholi began photographing *Faces and Phases* in 2006, and the book comprising 250 black and white portraits, was published in 2014. *Faces and Phases* is a 'living archive' of black South African lesbians and trans men. Muholi started the project when two of her close friends, both only 25 years old and both survivors of hate crimes, died of AIDS (Blignaut, 2013). Mfazwe, one of my interviewees, was one of the people photographed for this project. Their portraits (fig 4.1 and 4.2, p 127) typify Muholi's style throughout the book. None of the portraits in *Faces and Phases* show people smiling. Muholi explains: 'these are not party photos. These are historical documents...Lesbians are being killed here. There's no reason to smile.' (Blignaut, 2011). *Faces and Phases* serves almost as a visual body of evidence for the existence of queer South Africans. It has been widely exhibited internationally and is the project that firmly positioned Muholi on the world stage. Muholi regards of the participants of *Faces and Phases* as their community, of which they are both advocate and witness, and *Faces and Phases* as a 'lifetime project' (Moakley, 2013).

(IMAGES NOT COPYRIGHT CLEARED)

Figure 4.1 (Left) - Collen Mfazwe, August House, Johannesburg, 2012. Photo Credit: Zanele Muholi

Figure 4.2 (Right) - Collen Mfazwe, Women's Gaol, Constitution Hill, Johannesburg, 2013. Photo Credit: Zanele Muholi

Collen Mfazwe (figures 4.1 and 4.2), through their encounter with Muholi became a photographer themselves, and was ushered into a community of fellow black queer visual activists. Mfazwe met Zanele Muholi in 2012. They had just been crowned 2nd Prince of the Mr.Uthingo pageant in Daveyton. Muholi was taking photographs of the pageant, and asked Mfazwe to be in *Faces and Phases*.¹⁰⁹ Mfazwe agreed straight away. In exchange for their photograph, Muholi offered to help Mfazwe get through photography school, mentored her and took her in to join the *Faces and Phases* family.¹¹⁰ Gevisser (2018) describes Muholi's process as using 'the camera to

¹⁰⁹ Faces and Phases is Zanele Muholi's (2014) book, comprising portraits of black South African lesbians and trans men.

¹¹⁰ Collen has written about this, and her time living in the Inkanyiso boarding house (Muholi's flat) for Inkanyiso - <https://inkanyiso.org/2013/07/09/2013-july-9-living-in-and-loving-the-lesbian-boarding-house-in-hillbrow/>

construct a surrogate family', and the taking of their portrait as the initial ritual into that family.

Mfazwe attended the Market Photo Workshop, the school founded by well-known photojournalist David Goldblatt, which Muholi themselves attended.¹¹¹ While Mfazwe was at the school, they lodged in Muholi's apartment, to avoid an expensive commute from their township home into the city.¹¹² During this time, Mfazwe regularly contributed to *Inkanyiso.org*, community blog project at the heart of Muholi's work, *Faces and Phases*. Mfazwe is one of many that Muholi has supported to attend the Market Photo Workshop and learn the skills of photographic documentation, both because they regard queer visibility as vital to social change and because they are committed to supporting a younger generation to find employment. From Muholi's visual work, in particular in the *Faces and Phases* project, has emerged a complex economy, with these images at its centre. Muholi, through their visual activism, has developed and supported a community of queer black South Africans.

¹¹¹ The Market Photo Workshop (www.marketphotoworkshop.co.za) has produced numerous award-winning photographers including Jodi Bieber and Sabelo Mlangeni. According to John Fleetwood, who ran the school until 2015, 70% of the photojournalists in Johannesburg have passed through it (O'Toole, 2017:52)

¹¹² The legacy of apartheid geography means that most black South Africans live away from city centres, and have to endure lengthy and expensive daily commutes to work (Kerr, 2015)



Figure 4.3 Mfazwe, Collen. 2013. 'Inkanyiso Members at the black lesbian home'.

Adding to this complexity is the fact that the community that Muholi has created through their visual practice is also involved in the dissemination of their work. In touring *Faces and Phases*, Muholi insists on travelling with members of the *Faces and Phases* community. This serves two purposes - it further legitimates their work, by offering embodied proof of the community that they represent; and, it gives unprecedented opportunities to members of their community who would otherwise be highly unlikely to afford to travel. The travel experiences of *Inkanyiso* members are documented on their blog, as are any talks or exhibition. Muholi is meticulous about documenting and archiving their work through *Inkanyiso*, as if they are constantly reasserting its presence and consequence, against erasure. 'I'm trying to get these voices heard. To have a platform where they can tell their stories in their own way. *Inkanyiso* says we are here, we exist, black and queer, we are not un-African,' (Muholi in Blignaut, 2013).

Inkanyiso has also served both as a virtual community, and a training platform for young journalists and photographers like Mfazwe. *Inkanyiso* members document

black LGBTQI weddings, funerals and pageants, as well as Muholi's work (Gevisser, 2018). Mfazwe describes *Inkanyiso* as a 'stepping tool' that allowed them to find an audience for their work. It is impossible to extricate Muholi's images from the community with whom they were created, and on which they depend for both their literal and ethical currency.

As Muholi's success has grown, so has the number of people they travel with. At some of their exhibitions, there is a wall devoted to hate crimes in South Africa and a memorial service involving members of the community who travel with Muholi (Gevisser, 2018). For Performa 2017, Muholi travelled to New York with 20 members of what Gevisser refers to as their 'court', 'including drag artists, contemporary dancers, a phalanx of documenters, the mother of a murdered lesbian and even a personal gynaecologist' (ibid). In an interview on their Summer 2017 London exhibition of *Sonyama Ngonyama* with the Guardian, Muholi commented 'if you don't see your community, you have to create it. I can't be dependent on other people to do it for us' (Saner, 2017). For me, this short quote captures much of what I understand Muholi's style of visual activism to be doing. When Muholi here talks about not seeing her community, she is referring to the lack of representation of black South African lesbians within mainstream visual culture. The enormity of this gap historically might help explain the prolific nature of her working. She is also referring to living bodies in space. When Muholi launched an exhibition at the Stevenson Gallery in downtown Johannesburg, she bussed in her audience/community from the townships, to ensure they were able to attend, temporarily transforming the predominantly white middle class demographics of the gallery audience.¹¹³ So Muholi's transformation of the space is temporary and performative but the relationships they build, are not. Muholi, through their visual work, is literally, actively creating their own community. Their discursive move from 'I' to 'us' displays the politics at the heart of their project and their visual activism.

¹¹³ This strategy was also used by Nodi Murphy and Jack Lewis who ran the *Out in Africa* Gay and Lesbian Film Festival in South Africa. They bussed audiences in to urban centres for screenings, as well as finding venues in the countryside where audiences could safely watch queer films (Murphy, Nodi [Film maker, Festival Director, Activist] Interview in Cape Town, October 2015).

6.2.2 InterseXions

Hamblin's work with *Sistaaz Hood*, which I now explore, bears some similarities to Muholi's *Faces and Phases*. Before becoming a full-time fine art photographer, Robert Hamblin was the co-founder of Gender Dynamix (GDX), an NGO founded in 2005 to support the rights of the transgender and gender non-conforming community in South Africa, and beyond.¹¹⁴ The establishment of GDX, was particularly radical at the time given the deep-seated intolerance of gender variance in South Africa (Vincent and Camminga, 2009; Prinsloo et al, 2011; Swarr, 2012). GDX was the first African organisation focusing on the transgender community and given the persistence of transphobia its work remains important (Davids, 2017). Again here, the production of visual 'evidence' to support the existence of trans Africans, both as a gesture of solidarity with other trans Africans struggling with identity formation, and to educate cis-gender Africans, was very important.

Hamblin is a white, middle class, transgender man. He started his professional career as a commercial photographer, before co-founding *Gender Dynamix*. In 2012 Hamblin left *Gender Dynamix* to pursue a full-time career as a fine art photographer. During this time, he helped establish a support group for black transgender women sex workers at *SWEAT*. *SWEAT* is the Sex Workers Education and Advocacy Task Force and supports the health and rights of sex workers. Hamblin's partner, Sally Shackleton, was the Director of *SWEAT*, hence Hamblin's involvement. *Sistaaz Hood's* first advocacy project, was a joint photography project with Hamblin, exploring their representation. The development of the support group, and this body of work, is thus inseparable. As an advocacy project, InterseXion contributes to the lobby for the decriminalisation of sex work and raises awareness around the socio-economic challenges faced by trans women sex workers in South Africa. Hamblin uses his images not just to generate income for himself, but also to mobilise resources or the members of *Sistaaz Hood*. At its heart InterseXion is also about using portrait photography to build relationships and to support psychosocial wellbeing.

¹¹⁴ See <https://www.genderdynamix.org.za/>

Hamblin and *Sistaaz Hood*, together, have very consciously negotiated the terms of their engagement. They developed their photography project together, and Sistaaz Hood instigated this process. So, there was a shared commitment to the process and their relationship developed slowly, over time. Their collaborative artistic practice became the means through which they explored themselves, and each other, and how they wanted to be represented.

Here Hamblin talks about the process out of which the photographs emerged as a mutual exploration of representation:

a beautiful thing that came for me from discussions around the project, was about representation, you know, how do other artists look at us, how does the media look at us, we looked at all those things, very, it got more formalised and workshopy. And then, how do you want me to look at you? What do you want me to see? They were all like 'well we're sex workers, so we want to be sexy, um, you have to pay us if you want to take off our clothes, we want to take our clothes off, because we are poor, we are never going to be able to alter our bodies, but people think we're crazy when we tell them that we're women, so we want to show that we don't have breasts, we're not ashamed of being poor, or that we're never going to be able to have breasts, we're not crazy, we know we don't have breasts (Hamblin, Robert.

[Photographer, Artist, Activist] Interview in Cape Town, November 2016)

Much of what Robert was asked to represent was about creating beautiful images of the Sistaaz Hood women, to counter existing media representations of them. To make them feel valued. The insistence on not hiding their lack of breasts was a display of authenticity and pride, again against those that made them feel devalued.

The *form* of Hamblin's photographs emerged through the mutual exploration of identity and representation that took place in his workshops with Sistaaz Hood. Here he describes their discussions about movement and performativity:

we spoke a lot about the performances they do when they are doing sex work. There's a lot of movement involved, so they have to perform, to obscure, to

obscure, you know, their male bodies, so that's where the movement came from (ibid).



Figure 4.4. Hamblin, Robert. 'Sulaiga'. From the Sistaaz Hood Gallery, *InterseXion*, 2016.

Hamblin's trademark long exposures which create a blurring of the image are here about obscuring the women's male bodies and showing the movement symbolic of the multiple performative moves they make. As in his other work, they are also about a refusal of fixed notions of identity. Hamblin describes revisiting the same themes within the group, and over several years, developing both a visual and verbal language with which to communicate. Through the collaborative process of crafting visual representations of themselves, Hamblin and *Sistaaz Hood* go through a process of transformation in relation to their understanding both of themselves, and of each other. Their visual project, and the work that both parties do in engaging with it, creates a space in which they both become active and learn. Here Hamblin talks

about the importance of the collaboration being not so much about the image creation, but the mutual (self)learning it facilitated:

So, it was an amazing collaboration that way, not a collaboration like we're making art together. A collaboration like in we're getting to know our identities here, and we are arming ourselves against a communal enemy. Ya, so that was the process of working with them. Very laborious (Hamblin, Robert. [Photographer, Artist, Activist] Interview in Cape Town, November 2016).

What Hamblin describes happening here is complex. Their process initially involves self-empowerment and community building, and ultimately both movement-building and advocacy. Hamblin's previous work, both as a commercial photographer, and as an NGO worker, very clearly facilitate and inform his current visual activism. His slow, community building, workshop approach to engaging with *Sistaaz Hood*, refers back to work with Gender DynamiX. It is partly this approach that enables the depth of engagement required for successful visual activism.

Part of the discussions and negotiations around developing *InterseXion* have also been about how to share income from the project. Hamblin talks about trying to develop 'better ways' for artists to be, not just in terms of the content of his photographs, but also how he manages the income from the work. Here he explains how they have agreed to share any money that *InterseXion* generates:

I paid them (the *Sistaaz Hood* members) for the shoot, and a fee was negotiated...and then I gave them commission on sales on the first edition of the print. Anyway - so that. And then, except for that, they are my fifty percent partners. So, after all the costs have been paid, and the commissions have been paid, then the profit on the work, I get half and the group gets half. (Hamblin, Robert. [Photographer, Artist, Activist] Interview in Cape Town, November 2016)

This financial arrangement reflects Hamblin's acknowledgement of the collaborative nature of the work. When the work toured in 2017, Hamblin accompanied it with members of the *Sistaaz Hood* group. It is partly the extent to which Hamblin

acknowledges the collaborative debt that makes this work both queer and activist.¹¹⁵ It is also the dialogue that the work sets up between Hamblin and the *Sistaaz Hood* members, and their vastly different socio-economic positions that holds our engagement. In the mutual interrogation of themselves, and each other, there is an unusual, if temporary, dispersal of power.

Both *Faces and Phases* and *InterseXion* demonstrate an approach that embeds the visual within a much broader networked community. It is this approach that characterizes the contemporary South African conception of queer visual activism. With both Muholi and Hamblin's work, it is the artefact that arises out of this process, and also facilitates and contains the process. So, the activism is located at multiple points within and around the visual image, and the interactions it both creates and is created by. Here again, the visual is not only inseparable from the broader activism it is a part of, but also its central organising feature.

6.3 Towards Economic Empowerment

Muholi and Hamblin both use their engagement with the art market, not just as a platform for increasing the visibility of their work, but also as a source of income that they then redistribute (in different ways). The art market is effectively funding their activism. As I have argued elsewhere in this thesis, much of what is recognized as visual activism in 'the West' (for example work created around COP15 or the Occupy Movement) is closely linked to struggles against global capital and neo-liberalism. In stark contrast to this, however, the South African artists I interviewed were consciously using capital to further their work and were mostly pragmatic about the necessary collusion with global capital involved in engaging with the art world, both in terms of making a living, and enabling their activism. Some articulated engaging in the global market as not just a necessity, but as a right; as an important post-Apartheid freedom.

¹¹⁵ Despite the long tradition of collective authorship of art, there is still an enduring myth of the singular 'genius' (Kester, 2011: 3; Reckitt/ Phelan (Eds.) 2012:12).

Ruga expresses this perhaps most clearly, he talks about rewards for his work, as a black queer man, as a form of reparative economic and epistemic justice. In the quote below, he is referring to the inclusion of some of his tapestries which were part of the Irma Stern retrospective at the National Gallery in Cape Town in 2015. The pieces were commissioned tributes to Stern's work. Here Ruga talks about the unprecedented nature of work by someone who is both black and queer, being acquired as part of the permanent collection of a South African museum:

But a black queer body in a museum, in South Africa? For perpetuity! That is the ultimate for me. Also, fucking reparations, to take those works, reimagine them, and then sell it back to white people! That is masterful to me. And I mustn't lie, my poverty has a lot to do with how I navigate my subject matter. And I think it is naïve to think that artists don't do that sometimes (Ruga, Athi Patra-. [Artist, Tapestry-maker, Performer] Interview in Cape Town, December 2015).

Ruga is commenting on the fact that his work symbolically challenges both Stern's racism, and the historical legacy of the museum's institutional racism. But he is also not just unapologetic, but proud, about earning money from a historically racist institution through work that contains in it an implicit critique of this institution. Ruga jokes about his work being motivated by fear of being poor, but he also talks about the importance of money to buy the influence necessary to redress queer black history:

In order to say anything, you need a platform, and that platform has to be a position that is paid for most of the times, especially in this luxuries industry that we work...to me it can only work in a capitalist system really...we need more millionaire artists, so we can rewrite again, what Feral Benga¹¹⁶ would have wanted for his life... basically I'm exploring queer history, and putting it within museums, because that is what my privilege can do (Ruga, Athi Patra-. [Artist, Tapestry-maker, Performer] Interview in Cape Town, November 2016).

Ruga's positionality is perhaps slightly different to many of the other artists I interviewed, in that he did not (in 2015) self-identify as activist. Ruga has a

¹¹⁶ Feral Benga (1906-1957) was a Senegalese dancer who lived and worked in Paris in the 1930s.

background in fashion, not social organising. However, because his work was considered ground-breaking by many queer South Africans, numerous people suggested I interview him. By 2016, partly because of Ruga's growing commercial success (and the freedom it offers him in terms of the content of his artwork), but also because of the politicised South African context at the time, he did regard some of his work as activist – but more in terms of the critical interventions his images were making in the public space than his artistic practice. Ruga does also support a vibrant studio, primarily through the sale of his tapestries, and he is well-known for mentoring young artists. Here he comments on this:

Capitalism buys into my art to make them feel good about themselves with tax breaks and all that bull.... but, they need to pay out of their arses - because I have six women from Zimbabwe that I need to support, I've got a mentee that comes in, an assistant that comes in, everyone needs this studio. (Ruga, Athi Patra-. [Artist, Tapestry-maker, Performer] Interview in Cape Town, November 2016)

Ruga's studio is a successful business which one could argue is redistributing money to a sector of the population that would otherwise not have access to a stable income. Although Ruga doesn't explicitly claim the employment his studio provides as 'activist' he does suggest it might be, thus complicating what we think of as activism; and suggesting that commercial art can also be activist, and activist art commercial.

The performance duo FAKA, like Ruga, are financially imbricated in both the fashion and art markets. I discuss their practice in more detail in Chapter Six, but like Ruga, their attitude to capital is underscored by an economic empowerment discourse. In 2016, FAKA were appointed as 'brand ambassadors' for Adidas. Even given the elision of culture and consumerism in contemporary South Africa (Nuttall, 2011), it seems counterintuitive to be celebrating this as a victory for queer visual activism. However, FAKA argue that they are consciously using the Adidas brand to promote themselves, and to subvert mainstream or normative representations. In an interview with the *Mail and Guardian*, a weekly newspaper in South Africa, Duma talks about using capitalism as a resource:

Capitalism gives us access to all the artefacts that can have a different meaning when subverted. Also, when you are at the forefront of a cultural phenomenon in a

time when culture is gaining a lot of economic power, you will find people trying to commodify you. It is weird for us because the thing they would commodify is the very idea of our bodies, our identities basically (in Bongela, 2016b).

Although Duma expresses some discomfort with being commodified by a brand, he sees it as inevitable, and goes on to talk about the fact that this is strategically useful in furthering not just their political project but their *own* brand. Adidas may be using FAKA to stay relevant, but FAKA are using them back, and are fairly confident that it is their own narrative that will win out as more interesting. Here Duma talks about the inevitability of collaboration between consumer brands and what Bongela (the *Mail and Guardian* Journalist interviewing Duma) calls 'self-made internet stars':

You know, it is an inescapable reality. We grew up in a very consumerist black society and in many cases the choices concerning brands were very irrational, in a sense that we believed that the brands did something to us that made us 'better' or 'okay' or 'less black and poor'. I think that was a reality a lot of black youth were trying to escape: the fact of poverty. We believed brands had the power to change that narrative. We find it interesting now, to see brands scrambling for relevant black artists to change the narrative of the cultural bankruptcy of their brands. The Adidas campaign for us was more a story of representation and in a way, we had to have faith that that story would be more potent (in Bongela, 2016b).

So, Duma argues that FAKA have appropriated the advertising opportunity presented by the collaboration with Adidas and used it to showcase their craft.

Daniel Nel, the painter, when discussing the Adidas/FAKA collaboration, comments:

in a way, I actually support those kinds of links between like very very normative platforms...I know there's that dynamic of sucking the life out of these things that have developed with very very sincere things behind them, but I think maybe that's what needs to happen, in order for things, for taboos to shift, you need those massive channels, but like I don't know, I'm also not sure about that...(Nel, Daniel [Artist, Painter] Interview, Cape Town, November 2016).

Nel is characteristically tentative about his opinion, but broadly supportive of FAKA's 'queerjacking' of Adidas, because of the symbolic potential offered by their visibility. This sense that engaging with the market is necessary for successful activism is

widely held. Hutton (a white South African), does not frame their engagement with capital within a discourse of economic empowerment, but one of pragmatism:

I understand that everybody has to pay their dues to capitalism, because how would you live otherwise? I can't see how you can *not* be compromised by capitalism, unless you are extraordinarily wealthy, because you need to earn a living, and things cost money. Cameras cost money. Internet costs money. Phones cost money. So, if you are living where you need money, you are constantly having to bow your head to capitalism. You can't otherwise. We're not in lala land. And, so I understand that I have to make a living in order to live (Hutton, Dean. [Artist, Photographer] Interview, Johannesburg, November 2015).

Of course, wealthy people are as imbricated in capitalism as anyone else, in many ways they are more 'compromised by capitalism', but what Hutton's quote points to here is the fact that the choice to not take money from sources that might undermine the activist intentions of ones work, is an extremely privileged one. Hutton is concerned with being able to make enough money to survive, and to continue to produce work. Unlike for example the France-based Laboratory of Insurrectionary Imagination (LABOFII) who Demos (2016) writes about withdrawing their work from corporate-funded exhibits, Hutton pragmatically accepts that they must 'bow (their) head to capitalism'. They are not in a position to fight that struggle.

In 2018, FAKA's gqom track *Uyang'Khumbula* was chosen by designer fashion label Versace to accompany the launch of their Spring/Summer 2019 collection. This particular success has great significance for FAKA because fashion, and self-fashioning has been central to their self-actualisation. Duma says that one of the things that brought himself and Ramaisa together was the mutual understanding that they 'didn't have the money to have certain things that make you matter these days.' Through performing FAKA, they are laying claim to that which has been previously denied to them. In the particular context of post-apartheid South Africa, their self-actualisation through fashion and consumerism, becomes analogous not only with a

post-apartheid black freedom,¹¹⁷ but also with a utopian enacting of their gender and sexuality that moves FAKA, and their audience, beyond the present.¹¹⁸

Of course, an activism reliant on the art market for its survival is limited and is not always economically empowering. Earlier in this chapter (Section 5.3.1), I discussed the ways in which Muholi supported and mentored Collen Mfazwe. Mfazwe is still hoping to make it as a full-time artist. But they have struggled to find work and live a relatively hand to mouth existence. They do residencies where possible, and recently exhibited with some other *Inkanyiso* members at an exhibition organised by Muholi as part of Amsterdam Pride. They get occasional commissions to photograph events. The gap between their sometime-life as an artist/visual activist and their everyday life is enormous. Financing on-going activist work through the art market is not an easy or assured success route.

I spent a significant amount of time with Mfazwe during my fieldwork, and I became increasingly aware of the base level of wealth required to produce work, in particular in South Africa, where the spatial geography of apartheid is very much still in place, and in a context where there is no social security. Mfazwe, for example, lives in Daveyton, a township on the East Rand, and the nearest city (where there are jobs) is Johannesburg. To get from Daveyton to Johannesburg takes at least an hour by commuter taxi and is expensive. During the time I spent with Mfazwe, between 2015 and 2016, they did not seem to be regularly producing new work. It became apparent that this was partly because they lacked the basic material infrastructure to do so – like reliable access to an internet connection, computer software with which to edit their photographs, etc. Here they talk about the difficulties of making work in this context:

¹¹⁷ See Posel (2010) and Nuttall (2011)

¹¹⁸ This borrows from Munoz's (2009:1) *Cruising Utopia*, where he writes that '*Queerness is a structuring and educated mode of desiring that allow us to see and feel beyond the quagmire of the present*'.

even besides showcasing your work, I mean, before showcasing your work, you need to do work, you need to make work, and how can you make work, if you can't afford a taxi, where will you work, in your room, always? or in a township where it's not even safe, so capital is a very big issue...then you lose interest. (Mfazwe, Collen. [Photographer, Activist] Interview in Johannesburg, October 2016)

So, for Mfazwe lack of money constrains their ability to produce work, but also reduces their motivation to do so. Where Mfazwe lives is difficult not only because of its distance from Johannesburg, but also because they do not feel safe openly carrying a camera there. Unlike many of the other artists, Mfazwe got involved in visual activism because they saw it as a possible route to earning a better living than otherwise possible. When I asked Mfazwe what motivated their visual activism they were very honest about this:

I did it because of, I had no choice, I wanted to be out of the township, you know, because I felt that I was being doing these things in the township, and it doesn't pay much, so maybe by me going to school, I'll get a better job, not realising what I'd do, so when I was in school, you know, I was introduced, to LGBTQII studies. Big studies. I was like, I might as well do this thing without getting paid, you know, because I'm a lesbian woman. (Mfazwe, Collen. [Photographer, Activist] Interview in Johannesburg, October 2016)

Mfazwe's commitment to the issues their work tackled were initially secondary to their desire to earn a living but having been exposed to LGBTQI politics and become passionate about this work, they are determined to make a living in this field. They did joke about taking up pet photography, as something potentially more lucrative. According to performance artist, Mampane, Mfazwe is in the wrong line of work:

if you come into this space and your desire is to be wealthy, or to be rich, or to make tons of money, you are most certainly in the wrong profession and in the wrong environment. That's not what we do here. I think the richness itself is the art. (Mampane, Selogadi [Performance Artist, Academic, Activist] Interview, Pretoria, November 2015).

Mampane, by her own admission, is in a better position to appreciate arts metaphorical richness. She herself had a relatively privileged upbringing, she lives with her mother, who is an academic. This facilitated her early work and continues to do so. Mampane herself, having completed her master's degree, is now working as a researcher.

One of the difficulties of the economic model that Mfazwe has been apprenticed in, is that documenting lesbian lives, particularly in a poor peri-urban environment, is a very difficult way to make a living. Muholi did so not only with significant experience from their work in the media and NGO sectors, but also with the backing of one of South Africa's most powerful gallerists, and with a prolific output of work behind them. John Fleetwood, ex-director of the Market Photo Workshop comments that 'the strain of getting by, while still keeping an eye on the bigger prize recurs in the biographies of many workshop students' (in O'Toole, 2017:52). And, as Mampane goes on to say, activist work is not necessarily a good fit with the commercial art world, and there are tensions between art and activism:

The tension firstly is just the economic landscape of making art as an independent artist, and where does one get you know these funds from, and then with activist work, like I said, essentially the work isn't really for consumption, it's really more to say something. So sometimes doing the work for money can just seem so bizarre. Because it's more, it's not artwork for money. It's actually not at all. It's artwork for politics, for voice. (Mampane, Selogadi [Performance Artist, Academic, Activist] Interview, Pretoria, November 2015).

Here, Mampane is expressing what for her is a fundamental paradox. She is not practising her art to earn money, but, if she is to continue to be an artist, and to produce work, she needs to find a way of making it financially viable.

Mampane, and FAKA, both spoke in their interviews with me about their own difficulties in navigating the need to earn money from their work, and the desire to perform for more diverse audiences. Here, Mampane expresses her frustration at the ironies and compromises inherent performing to predominantly white audiences:

I had to learn the fact that I also have to eat, and I have to make art work that people will pay to come and watch, and the other bothersome thing was that the people more who would come to watch it or have the money more readily to come and watch it, were white audiences. So, it was just, kind of alienating, but also interesting to be in that space and perform for an audience that is so distant from what you are talking about. (Mampane, Selogadi [Performance Artist, Academic, Activist] Interview, Pretoria, November 2015).

Duma, has similar things to say about FAKA's audience demographics. In South Africa, they are not yet performing to the audiences they would like, but they see the art world as one of the platforms that will help them access bigger and more diverse audiences in the long term. Here Duma talks about his approach to audience development:

Right now, our audience is not the audience we want, because our audience is mostly at art galleries, and it's a very concentrated niche audience. We so badly want to have mainstream impact...the art world is slowly becoming more open...but I guess the art world is also a business and they need to make money. So, it's sort of something you have to do on your own, independently as an artist, like put up your own structures that actually reflect that ideology of accessible art...with the help of the art world. (Duma, Buyani. [Artist, Performer] Interview, Johannesburg, November 2015).

Duma here echoes Muholi's statement (see page 100) about not relying on others to create your community for you. He is acknowledging the limits of an activism reliant on a commercial gallery, but also expressing a characteristic pragmatism. FAKA's early gallery performances may not have provided them with their preferred audiences, but they have given them visibility and helped establish their careers.

Hutton introduces a further constraint to engaging with gallerists, whose concern is with the marketability of their artwork, not its activist intent. Using a commercial gallery as part of one's activist strategy can place limits on what it is possible to produce, or certainly to exhibit. Hutton's desire to study, and become better skilled in articulating their practice, is partly a reaction to the resistance that they have

experience in working with gallerists. Here they express their frustration at a gallerist trying to control both the content and the narrative around their work:

I'm not good enough as a commercial artist that makes my work very sellable, but every time I've tried to get to that context, it just drives me crazy. They don't understand. They refuse to allow it to be as queer as it could be, they act like they are saving you from yourself. (Hutton, Dean. [Artist, Photographer] Interview, Johannesburg, November 2015).

Despite the contradictions and frustrations of engaging with both an activist practice and the commercial art market, my respondents' attitudes to the art market ranged from pragmatic to entitled. This imbrication of activism in the market, can be seen as a limit of queer activism under neo-liberal capitalism, on the other hand it demonstrates how creative and subversive queer visual activists have been in working both against and within the constraints of this context.

In the South African context, access to capital is seen by many not just as a necessity, but rather as a post-apartheid freedom, and an expression of black/queer value. In this context there is not necessarily seen to be a contradiction inherent in an activist practice that engages with, and profits from corporate capital. What is seen as legitimate activism here in some ways intersects with and in other ways is very different from the North American and Western European context.

Conclusion

This chapter has argued that visual activism is not necessarily primarily located in the image/performance/artefact but often in the social structures and communities created by artistic practice. It is the visual production that facilitates social engagement. It also argued that South African queer visual activists have a complex relationship with capital because visual activism is often thought of as a route to 'economic freedom'. In fact, this form of visual activism unsettles many commonly accepted binary distinctions such as commercial art/activism, individual/communal, fine art/popular culture, culture/consumerism. The following chapter reflects on my

thesis as a whole, outlining its key contributions to knowledge, and proposing a theory for the workings of queer visual activism.

7. Conclusion

This thesis is about a very specific, local form of visual activism that has developed in queer communities in South Africa, largely inspired by the ground-breaking work of photographer Zanele Muholi. Visual activism is the mobilisation of the visual image to provoke, support and sustain campaigning for social and political change. *Queer* visual activism is the mobilisation of the visual image to promote the acceptance and rights of LGBTQI people. As Khatib (2013:1) argued in relation to the role of images in the political aesthetics of the Middle East, political struggle is a 'struggle over presence; over visibility'. Queer visibility takes on a very particular importance in a context like South Africa, where popular assertions of homosexuality as 'unAfrican' negate queer existence. It is a strategy of both resistance and solidarity.

The specific form of queer visual activism that is the main focus of this thesis is one in which activists engage (to varying degrees) with the art market to showcase and sustain their work. As the use of the term visual activism has gained popularity, it is applied to a broader variety of practices in diverse global contexts.¹¹⁹ However I found two main conceptions of its use in two different contexts; one attached to fine art, the other to street protests. Its link to the art market makes it, to some degree, analogous with art activism, however it tends to emerge from, and stay rooted in social movements. Also, like other forms of aesthetic protest, it is not confined to the context of the art world and often exists in other spaces e.g. fashion shows, online, and as such 'visual activism' rather than the proximal term 'art activism' would seem a more accurate term. 'Visual activism' is also the term that is used and understood within the South African context to describe this form of work.

¹¹⁹ There are several who have written on photovoice/documentary photo/video in Palestine/Israel (Bratchford, 2016; Ginsburg 2018). There is also a Special Section on the Sociology of Visual Activism in *Current Sociology*, 2016, that came out of the Visual Theme of the International Sociological Association Conference in Buenos Aires in August, 2012 which was titled 'Visual Activism and Social Justice'.

I set out to explore the work of significant queer visual artists and activists in South Africa and to understand how the key characteristics of their work both differs from and is similar to work in other contexts. In this chapter, in reflecting on my thesis as a whole, I articulate my key contributions to knowledge. I then propose a theory of queer visual activism, in which I conceptualise it as a creative practice that creates different forms of capital – symbolic, relational, political and literal. The alternative infrastructure created by queer visual activism can be seen as an act of resistance catalysed by the urgent necessity for decolonialisation in contemporary post-apartheid South Africa.

My literature review suggested that the specific term ‘visual activism’ was primarily being used in two distinct ways to describe two different forms of activism. Firstly, one emerging in Western Europe and America, post the financial and economic crash of 2008, and situated outside of the formal institutions of the art world, and linked to street protests, or activist campaigning, and often explicitly anti-capitalist (Demos, 2016; McKee, 2016a, 2016b; Sholette, 2017). Secondly, one emerging in post-apartheid South Africa and closely linked to the fine art market and its associated institutions. Both of these use art as ‘a constitutive force in the building of social movements’ (Holmes, 2012).¹²⁰ In examining South African visual practices as a form of protest, and looking at in the context of its emerging use elsewhere, my study complicates and broadens conventional concepts of activism.

It is important to emphasise that this binary I have set up between the dominant understanding of visual activism in South Africa on the one hand, and in the Euro-American context on the other, is not absolute. There are those in both contexts who use the term in a variety of ways (see for example Thomas, 2107, on political funerals as queer protest in the South African context). What I explored in this thesis were the dominant understandings and articulations of the term ‘visual activism’ in these two contexts. During the course of my PhD, the use of ‘visual activism’ as a

¹²⁰ Thompson’s (2015) notion of art as creating ‘structures of resonance’ is a similarly useful concept here, as is Munoz’s (1999) discussion of ‘queer worldmaking’ in *Disidentifications*.

term, and academic and popular articles employing the term, has hugely increased, adding diversity to the ways in which it is applied.

Currently, the majority of Euro-American and South African literature on visual activism is written by scholars from visual studies or art history. As a result, it tends to focus its analysis on the visual artefact, or on the impact of the visual artefact on its audience. When the South African scholarship on gender and sexuality references these visual artefacts, it is either *also* to read them as visual texts (e.g. Munro, 2012) or to illustrate the socio-political specificity of the South African context (e.g. Gunkel, 2010). What the existing literature fails to do is analyse the practices that surround the production of this work. Muholi's images, for example, are striking, and they themselves make significant epistemological and pedagogical interventions, however, as I have argued, much of what constitutes their activism is not apparent in these images. This thesis exemplifies the value of an ethnographic approach to studying visual activism that moves beyond the limitations of solely focusing on the visual artefact. This approach highlights the important aspects of visual activism beyond the frame rather than producing understandings of activism located only within the content and aesthetics of visual expressions.

Additionally, it provides the first detailed analysis of the rich contemporary queer culture production in South Africa, with a particular focus on the multiple links between visual production (photography, fine art, performance) and activism, and the networks, both local and global, through which work is produced, circulated and takes its meaning. It makes a particular contribution to the field by deliberately seeking to explore South African queer visual activism beyond Muholi's work, foregrounding the many other whose work has been under-recognised in scholarly research – FAKA, Selogadi Mampane, Collen Mfazwe, Kate Arthur, Dean Hutton, Zethu Matebeni, Athi-Patra Ruga, Robert Hamblin.

Furthermore, the thesis offers a critical intervention in queer studies by challenging the notion of the discipline's irrelevance outside a Euro-American context (Epprecht, 2008). It shows how an identification with queer theory and practice is being taken

up and reworked in a particular Southern context. Drawing on queer scholarly work beyond Euro-American publishing and centring South African activism and cultural production, it contributes to an emerging field of queer African studies. In responding to critiques of queer scholarship's inadequate recognition of race (Anzaldúa, 1991; Muñoz, 1999, 2009; Johnson, 2001; Ferguson, 2004; Barnard, 2009; Cohen, 2013:77), it is mindful throughout of the need to theorise sexuality together with race, recognizing both as mutual co-constituents of subjectivity.

The following section broadly answers several of my research questions, in particular - how might visual activism be seen as a strategy of resistance? In it, I outline a theory of queer visual activism as a creative practice that creates different forms of capital – symbolic, relational, political and literal. I explore each of these in turn. The capacity for queer activism to generate these forms of capital answers another of my research questions - why has queer visual activism become an important site of activism in the present? Another of my research questions was - to what extent is visual activism a collaborative process? The social and relational nature of the queer visual activism I studied, shows it to be a deeply collaborative process. This emerged through my interviews when artists talked about the detailed emergence and process of their creative practice in relation to a particular piece or body of work. I also asked - to what extent does visual activism foster solidarity? The relational and political capital I describe here, suggest that a key function of this form of activism is foster solidarity, within queer communities (social capital) and beyond (political capital).

My findings suggest that fine art practice can absolutely be considered as activism, but that the nature of this activism is not found only in the image. Part of the reason that queer visual activists from South Africa have become so visible internationally is because the ways in which they have managed to navigate and harness the global art world in support of their practice. They suggest also that queer visual activism has much to tell us about queer lived experience in South Africa, and is a useful entry point to understand this experience. Unexpectedly, none of my respondents identified tensions between aesthetics and politics, they all regarded their aesthetic

practice as political, and their politics as aesthetic and saw their own practice as the most logical form of political engagement.

My final research question was to do with how queer is currently defined in the South African context. Chapter Four deals explicitly with contemporary conceptions of queer identities and politics, both of which came up in my in-depth Interviews with artists, and often through discussions about their work. Throughout my fieldwork, because of my engagement with queer academic literature, I actively questioned the relevance of queer identities and queer politics to the South African context. Several of my interviewees articulated tensions in their identification with queer – some in relation to the content of their work, others in relation to the ethics of their practice, and several in relation to their sexual orientation and gender identity. Identifying, for example, as a black lesbian was seen as a necessary assertion against the possible erasure of race and gender experienced when identifying as queer. Predominantly, however, queer was seen as an emerging category of identification that was about a commitment to a decolonial politics as well as non-binary understanding of gender and sexuality.

The following section outlines my theory of queer visual activism as a creative practice, and the different forms of capital – symbolic, relational, political and literal – that it generates.

7.1 Symbolic capital: constituting and documenting selves

By symbolic capital in this context I mean the intangible resources that determine whether or not someone feels socially accepted and validated. Much has been written on the way in which discourse constitutes subjects. Discourse doesn't just describe social identities but shapes them (Parker, 1992; Foucault, 1998:100; Judge, 2018: 5). Central to understanding the operation of queer visual activism is the notion that social identities are not pre-given but discursively constructed and maintained (Mouffe, 2008:11) and visual representation is one of the social technologies that contributes to this construction. Hall (1996) explains representation as the production of meaning through language, in this case visual. The visual

representations crafted by queer visual activists are central to constituting them as subjects. The crafting of these representations is a claiming of agency; a process of empowerment. Visual activists, through their practice, create sites of becoming (Thompson, 2015) – for themselves and others. Their visual practice becomes a convening space for queer becoming; a practice of queer worldmaking (Berlant and Warner, 1998:549).

7.2 Relational capital: building solidarity

Relational capital refers to the social relationships and networks of friends and colleagues that provide people with different kinds of support. This support might include intangible assets, like psychological support or more concrete ones like childcare or food. The visual practices examined in this thesis are strongly rooted within the social. Visual activists look for multiple opportunities to build and sustain themselves, and their work across activist, academic, media, entertainment, and art world platforms. Much of their work is about building ‘communities of practice’, the networks created through sites of becoming. This works either directly, when people are brought together physically to share processes of mutual self-empowerment; or indirectly, through the affective or affirmative role played by queer representations (Buckland, 2002; Mina, 2015; Moore, 2018).

7.3 Political capital: representing selves and remaking reality

Political capital in this context relates to the degree of social recognition, legitimacy and power available to someone as a citizen. The sharing and making public of queer representations, particularly when they challenge a hegemonic symbolic order (in this case both heteropatriarchy and racism) is necessarily political (Mouffe, 2008:11). Crucial to understanding this as a political process is a changing conception of the way in which we understand political participation, where instead of thinking of it in terms of special events such as elections, we understand it as integrated into everyday social and cultural life (Jenkins et al, 2016: 272). Queer visual activists make visible queer identities and experiences that would otherwise

be invisible in the public sphere. This pedagogical intervention expands the boundaries of recognised gendered identities and changes what we see to be possible. Thus, they become not just about representation but about prefigurative politics; the performative creation of new realities (Reckitt/ Phelan (Eds.) 2012:20).

7.4 Literal/monetary capital

By literal capital, I mean access to money or financial resources. The relationship between activists and capital is a complex and often contradictory one. Although there are clearly multiple tensions and contradictions raised by a model of activism that embraces an imbrication with art markets and consumer brands, there is no doubt that this work constitutes a form of protest. The visual activists studied here are opportunistic in their use of available resources to support and amplify their work. Where activism is seen as a route to economic freedom, refusing to engage with corporate capital may be seen not only as a privileged position, but also as counterproductive to the visibility on which activism depends. Many of these artists are consciously using money earned to further their activist work and hence are mostly pragmatic about the necessary collusion with global capital involved in engaging with the art market, both in terms of making a living and enabling their activism.

7.5 A final reflection

Leigh Davids, one of the members of *Sistaaz Hood*, and one of the key contributors to their work with Robert Hamblin on *InterseXion*, died on 27th February 2019, while I was completing this thesis. It was two weeks before her 40th birthday. For me, her death is a reminder of the very real political stakes of this kind of work. *InterseXion* was not just part of an advocacy campaign to decriminalise sex work, it was not just a mutual exploration of trans-identity and representation. It was about using visual production to create symbolic, relational, political and literal value, both for those directly involved in the project, and for future generations.

The visual activism I have explored in this thesis takes place in a specific time and place. It is responsive to the particular socio-political moment it addresses and does not necessarily map into other spaces. However, borrowing from some of the debates in African agrarian studies (Bernstein, 1996; Mamdani, 2008) there have been a number of articles (Magaziner and Jacobs, 2012; Cheeseman, 2017) that characterise South Africa's contemporary socio-political context as extreme but *not* exceptional. Magaziner and Jacobs (2012) suggest that many of the issues contemporary South Africa is struggling with are linked not to apartheid, but to the more global issues of poverty and inequality. This framing is helpful in that it allows us to acknowledge the particularity of South Africa's history and context, while recognising ways in which many of the social and political problems contemporary South Africans are struggling with, are shared globally. Whilst I am wary of trying to reach for general claims beyond this context, in a contemporary political environment when there is a move to decolonise representation alongside a simultaneous rise in right wing activism, the agile, creative and opportunistic way in which these visual activists have found to work is inspiring. There is much to be learnt from these strategies and from the multiple forms and platforms they occupy. Given the rise in the right wing manipulation of the digital and social media sphere, it would seem incumbent on us to become more literate in strategies work effectively to support progressive politics and movement building.

7.6 What next?

This study suggests numerous opportunities for further research. Given, as Thomas (2017: 266) observes, that 'visual activism' as a term is beginning to be retrospectively applied to work that might not have claimed this term previously, it would be interesting to try and trace both the histories of *queer* visual activism as well as and further adjacent contemporary instances of visual activism in South Africa. Also, as the term is beginning to be used in different ways in other contexts, more work on different forms of visual activism (such as the photo/video documentary work in the Occupied Palestinian Territories, or the graffiti work of the Tokolos Stencil Collective in South Africa) and across different contexts, becomes important.

In this thesis I have focused primarily on the relationships built and sustained through the artistic practice of a selection of queer visual activists. To expand on this work one could add to my approach an examining of the entire life cycle of the image, which Rose (2016) structures into four sites – the site of production, the image itself, the site of audiencing and the site of circulation. Examining the full life cycle of a particular piece throughout each of these sites, and connecting my work on the site of production through to an analysis of the image and then its display and circulation, has yet to be done. It would be particularly interesting to study how, and to what extent, these images are being used by social movement activists (such as GALA in South Africa) in their work, and to look beyond the academic literature to popular radio and print media, social media and reports by non-governmental organisations, to understand more about the reception and circulation of this work in the public sphere.

Finally, having used a political economy lens to examine a particular ‘site’ of visual activism it would be useful to link this work to the literature on human rights and social movements, with the aim to contribute to new understandings of the ‘creative praxis of social movement activism’ (Stammers 2009, 2015).

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Appendix 1

Thematic Codes – Alphabetical

Codes	Sources	References
Themes		
Activism	31	14
Activism as defiance	1	1
Activist	20	12
Against the State	1	1
Allyship	2	1
Apartheid	1	1
Apolitical work	2	2
Appropriation	2	1
Archive - promises to future	3	3
Art as Atonement	1	1
Art as empowerment	2	2
Art as escapism	4	1
Art as Healing	6	5
Art as Life	1	1
Art as Place	1	1
Art as Process	2	2
Art as Survival	4	3
Art market	1	1
Art world accessibility	2	1
Artists talking about their work	1	1
Authenticity	2	2
Autonomy	2	1
Bearing Witness	2	2
Being Woke	1	1
Berlin Workshop	3	2
Beyond Murder	1	1
Beyond Representation	4	1
Blackness	4	2
Breaking Stereotypes	3	2
Cabin Fever	1	1

Callout Culture	5	3
Capital Capitalism	56	13
Censorship	1	1
Childhood	2	2
Choosing Queer	2	1
Cisgender	2	1
Clubbing Culture	1	1
Collaboration	6	2
Collectivism	2	2
Coming Out	5	3
Community	1	1
Conceptual Art	3	1
Conceptual work a waste	1	1
Consent	2	1
Conversations	8	3
Corporate Culture	1	1
Corruption	1	1
Craft queering Art	1	1
Danger	2	2
Destroying the Binary, Unlearning	1	1
De-Taboo yourself	2	1
Difficulty of Queer Activism	1	1
Digital Rights	1	1
Dignity	3	2
Discomfort with labels	1	1
Discovering African	1	1
Documentation	2	2
Environmental Issues	1	1
Ethics	14	5
Eurocentrism	2	1
Exhibition-Audience	28	14
Facebook Banning	4	1
Failure	1	1
FAKA Adidas	1	1
Fake History	1	1

Families	5	4
Fashion	2	2
Femininity	2	1
Fluid Identity	4	2
Friendship	1	1
Gallery	1	1
Gallery/Audience	2	1
Gay marriage	1	1
Geography - Travel	3	2
Gift	1	1
Gqom	1	1
Grace	1	1
Hard work	1	1
Hate Crime	4	3
Hate Crimes	1	1
Healing	5	1
Heroes	3	1
HIV AIDS	2	1
Holding Government Accountable	1	1
homonormativity	2	2
homophobia	2	1
Hope	2	1
Identity Language	3	2
Importance of networks	1	1
Importance of visual	1	1
Income	23	10
Individualism	1	1
Initiation Ritual	6	1
Intellect vs Emotions	1	1
Intersectionality	9	4
Labour	3	3
Landscapes as Portraits	1	1
Legacy	1	1
Lesbian Families	2	1
Lesbian Stories	1	1

LGBTQI framing	1	1
LGBTQI politics	1	1
Limits of identity politics	4	1
Locating Activism	5	1
Love	14	7
Mainstream Media	1	1
Mami Wata	3	1
Masculinity	3	1
Mentoring	4	2
Microinternet figures	6	1
Misinterpretation	2	1
Misread	1	1
Mistakes	6	3
Money	10	4
Motivation	10	6
Narcissism	1	1
Narratives	2	1
Nationality	5	4
Negotiating Consent	1	1
New Queer	14	6
Not my job	1	1
Our generation	3	2
PanAfricanism	3	2
People as Systems	1	1
PhotoVoice	1	1
Politics	30	3
Power	4	2
Power of Visual	1	1
Privacy	1	1
Privilege	2	2
Pronouns	1	1
Psychology-Healing	2	2
Queer	37	17
Queer Aesthetics	1	1
Queer and GBV	1	1

Queer Community	1	1
Queer elder	1	1
Queer History	1	1
Queer Vernaculars	2	1
Queer vs Black Lesbian	3	1
Quilting	1	1
QVA - defining	31	12
QVA- history of	3	2
Race	13	7
Racism	4	4
Rainbow Nation	6	3
Rape	5	3
Realism	1	1
Rebellion	2	1
Reception of work	2	1
Relational Norms	1	1
Reparations	2	2
Representation	4	4
Representing bodies	1	1
Resisting Definition	1	1
Respect	1	1
Ritual Cleansing	2	1
Role of Art	8	5
SA Context	1	1
Safe Space	2	2
Safety	7	4
Scope Ambition	1	1
Self-empowerment	1	1
Self Intro	1	1
Self-Care	1	1
Selfies	14	3
Sexuality	4	3
Sexuality as Burden	1	1
Shoot	1	1
Silencing	1	1

Social Media	24	11
South African	1	1
Spirituality	1	1
Storytelling	1	1
Strategic Essentialism	1	1
Studying	2	2
Suburbia	12	3
Survival	3	3
Tension aesthetics-politics	6	3
Tension Art-Activism	21	10
Tension transgender-queer	2	1
The Nation	1	1
the transgender body	1	1
Trauma	14	8
Ubuntu	1	1
unAfrican	1	1
Unbelonging	8	5
Utopia	1	1
VA - PhotoVoice	1	1
VA History of	1	1
Violence	14	6
Violent Masculinity	1	1
Visibility	17	8
Visual Activism	21	3
What art does	1	1
What is VISUAL activism	3	2
What the VISUAL does	13	5
White fragility	3	3
Whiteness	22	7
Who can speak	3	2
Work opportunities	2	1
World Making	1	1
Xenophobia	1	1

Artwork

#FWP	28	4
African Dream - film	1	1
Albatross	2	1
Beiruth	3	1
Body Portraits	2	2
Breaking out of the Box	1	1
Brundrit- early work	1	1
Children of the Rainbow	1	1
Chromotherapy	4	1
Daughter Language	4	1
Difficult Love	1	1
Faces and Phases	1	1
GALA 卐 PhotoVoice	1	1
Joburg Tracks	1	1
MCQP	1	1
Miss Congo	6	1
Native Work Portraits	1	1
Night Watch Style	1	1
Queens in Exile	2	1
Queer Crossings	1	1
Seeing Woman 2004	1	1
Siyakaka Feminism	1	1
State of Emergency	1	1
Tapestries	1	1
The Children of the Rainbow Shed Tears	1	1
The Cradle	6	1
Threshold Work	1	1
'Transitions' Book	1	1
Versatile Queen Ivy	1	1
Wait Lorraine	3	1
Water metaphor	2	1
Wave Scans	2	1
Written on her Face	2	1

Organisations

#FMF	17	6
1 in 9	1	1
African Queer Media Makers Network	3	1
Behind the Mask	1	1
Black Lesbian Memory Project	1	1
FEW	1	1
GALA	1	1
Gender Dynamics	2	1
Inkanyiso	5	2
Iranti	4	3
Joint Minds	1	1
Kieskamma Trust	1	1
Mail and Guardian	1	1
Ms Leather	2	1
National Gallery	2	2
OIA ∟ Ermelo	1	1
OIA shorts	1	1
OIA start of	2	1
Sistaaz Hood	21	2
Trans Collective UCT	1	1
VW Foundation	1	1

People

Alberta Whittle	10	1
Anene Booysen	3	1
Athi-Patra Ruga	1	1
Buck Angel	1	1
Dope Saint Jude	1	1
Gabi Ncobo	1	1
Irma Stern	2	1
Jabu	2	2
Lara Foot Newton's Tshepang	1	1
Lebo Ntladi	2	2
Mikki van Zyl	1	1

Steven Cohen	1	1
Zanele	39	14
Zwelethu Mthethwa	3	1

286 codes

Appendix 2

DATA INVENTORY - Interviews and Member Checking

Name	Date	Interview Type	Length	Place
ARTHUR, Kate	28/11/2016	F2F ¹²¹ , FI/MC themes	35 mins	Cape Town
ARTHUR, Kate	03/03/2017	Follow up, email	n/a	online
BRUNDRIT, Jean	30/09/2015	F2F ¹²² , FI ¹²³	2 hours	Cape Town
BRUNDRIT, Jean	23/11/2016	F2F, MC ¹²⁴	30 mins	Cape Town
BUSH, Demelza	10/01/2016	Skype, FI	1h10 min	online
BUSH, Demelza	13/10/2016	F2F, MC	1h20m	Johannesburg
DUMA, Buyani/FAKA	31/10/2015	F2F, FI	1h	Johannesburg
HAMBLIN, Robert	09/11/2015	F2F, FI	2h	Cape Town
HAMBLIN, Robert	30/11/2016	F2F, MC	2h	Cape Town
HUTTON, Dean	27/10/2015	F2F, FI	2h	Johannesburg
HUTTON, Dean	4/11/2016	F2F, MC	2h30m	Cape Town
HUTTON, Dean	24/11/2016	F2F, Follow up	2h15m	Cape Town
IRANTI	27/10/2015	F2F, FI	1h20m	Johannesburg
JOHAARDIEN, Ashraf	28/10/2015	F2F, FI	1h	Johannesburg
KHAN, Gabriel	12/10/2016	F2F, FI	1h	Johannesburg
MAMPANE, Selogadi	29/10/2015	F2F, FI	1h30m	Pretoria
MAMPANE, Selogadi	02/11/2016	Skype	1h45m	Online
MARNELL, John	11/11/2015	Skype, FI	1h	Online

¹²¹ F2F is a face to face or in person interview.

¹²² F2F is a face to face or in person interview.

¹²³ FI is First Interview.

¹²⁴ MC is member checking.

MARNELL, John	11/10/2016	F2F, MC	1h	Johannesburg
MATEBENI, Zethu	11/11/2016	F2F, FI	1h10m	Cape Town
MFAZWE, Collen	29/10/2015	F2F, FI	45m	Johannesburg
MFAZWE, Collen	10/10/2016	F2F, MC	1h15m	Johannesburg
MURPHY, Nodi	15/10/2015	F2F, FI	1h	Cape Town
NEL, Daniel	08/10/2015	F2F, FI	50m	Cape Town
NEL, Daniel	09/11/2016	F2F, MC	1h20m	Cape Town
OLVEIRA, Elsa	18/11/2015	F2F, FI	1h30m	Cape Town
PUTTER, Andrew	13/11/2015	F2F, FI	1h	Cape Town
RUGA, Athi-Patra	11/11/2015	F2F, FI	1h30m	Cape Town
RUGA, Athi-Patra	22/11/2016	F2F, MC	1h30m	Cape Town
THOMAS, Kylie	15/07/2015	F2F, FI	45m	Berlin

30 interviews

21 people (3 of whom from one organisation – iranti)

10 people interviewed twice

Appendix 3 - People, Events and Conversations

NAME	Description
Kate Arthur	Painter/Fine artist
Demelza Bush	Film maker/journalist
Buyani Duma (FAKA)	Performance artist
Jean Brundrit	Photographer/fine artist
Robert Hamblin	Photographer/fine artist
Dean Hutton	Photographer/performer
Ashraf Johaardien	Curator/writer/arts manager
Gabriel Khan	Activist/ Creative facilitator
Selogadi Mampane	Researcher/performer
John Marnell	Activist
Zethu Matebeni	Filmmaker/academic/activist
Collen Mfazwe	Photographer
Nodi Murphy	Filmmaker/founder-director <i>Out in Africa</i> film festival
Daniel Nel	Painter/fine artist
Kelebogile Ntladi	Artist/photographer
Elsa Oliviera (MoVE)	Researcher/creative facilitator/activist
Andrew Putter	Photographer/fine artist/teacher/founder MCQP (Mother City Queer Project)
Athi Patra Ruga	Performer/fine artist
Kylie Thomas	Academic/writer/activist
Ayanda Msiza (Iranti)	Photographer/activist
Dolar Vasani (Iranti)	Activist

Meetings/Exhibitions

- 28/09/2105 Zethu Matebeni's talk on 'queering the academy', University of Cape Town.
- 06/10/2015 Irma Stern retrospective at National Gallery, Cape Town.
- 19/10/2015 Harare Academy of Inspiration (Khayelitsha).

- 25/10/2015 Dean Hutton and Roberta Whittle's 'The Cradle' Exhibition, Goethe on Main, Johannesburg.
- 26/10/2015 Anton Kannemeyer's Exhibition, "E is for Exhibition", Stevenson Gallery, Johannesburg
- 25/11/2015 UCT Out in Africa archives with Teresa Raizenburg
- 28/11/2015 Zanele Muholi's "Somnyama Ngonyama/Brave Beauties", Stevenson Gallery, Johannesburg
- 05/12/2015 Group Exhibition, 'Foreign Bodies', at *Whatiftheworld* Gallery, Observatory, Cape Town
- 06/10/2016 The "*Queer in Africa? The Cape Town Question*" symposium organised by Zethu Matebeni, District Six Museum, Cape Town
- 25/10/2016 Kate Arthur's exhibition Voorkammer Gallery, Chandler House, Cape Town
- 18/11/2016 The Art of Disruptions exhibition at Iziko National Gallery, Cape Town
- 25/11/2016 Zanele Muholi's Babhekeni / Look at Them – Institute for Creative Arts, Live Art Fellowship Collaborative Performance Event.

Conversations

Fazarnah Badsha	Curator	06/10/2015
Kelebogile Ntladi	Photographer/artist	16/07/2015
Jennifer Radloff	Activist/creative facilitator	2015/2016
Brenda Skelenge	Curator	04/10/2015

Practice-based work

- Started collaboration with Jean Brundrit – 'Moving Mountains', 2015
- Started collaboration with Collen Mfazwe – Berlin and Joburg, 2015.

Appendix 4

Part J2 - Artist Interviews – Indicative Questions

Queer Visual Activism in South Africa – Tessa Lewin, University of Brighton.

t.lewin@brighton.ac.uk

Please note that these are indicative at this stage and by no means exhaustive

Can you introduce yourself and tell me a bit about your work?

Do you think of yourself as an artist?

Do you think of yourself as an activist?

Do you think there is a tension between being both an artist and an activist?

What do you understand by 'queer visual activism'?

Who, for you, most significantly represents the 'queer visual activist' in contemporary South Africa?

Is there a part of your practice that you regard as queer visual activism?

Of the two identifications - South African, or African - which has the most meaning for you?

Do you identify as queer? What does queer mean to you?