

#3

featuring

**Ken Hollings,
Zanele Muholi,
Paolo Pedercini,
Kay Rosen**

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"Or maybe a horse is just a horse."



TRACE & INTENT

by Daniel Staincliffe



Trace, © 2010 Daniel Staincliffe

“Whenever and wherever, human existence leaves marks upon the land. These marks can be divided into two basic types: trace and intent. Trace is a record of man’s efforts and actions without a conscious awareness of their imprint. This category includes such phenomena as dirt, grease spots, signs of use and wear, or the trampled grass of a footpath. Intent is the mark of man’s conscious attempt to intervene in the environment in some way.”—Marc Treib^[4]

Intent is no better defined than by the development of infrastructure. The roads, pavements, drains, sewers, pylons, and buildings that humans have

constructed to sustain large numbers of people in one place, make up the city. Infrastructure is integral, definitive, and inseparable from the concept of the city. City is infrastructure, and infrastructure’s omnipresence “leaves us largely unaware of the mechanisms of social organisation that surround and define it.”^[2] In our day-to-day lives, repeated journeys and commutes see each of us explore and alter the beaten paths we tread. The discovery of an alleyway, park entrance, or more convenient bus service allows us to identify the quickest and most cost-efficient routes to and from our appointments.^[3]

This causes us to cut the corners of paths and pavements. Where planned and constructed infrastructure fails to provide the quickest route from A to B, desire lines may form. These are usually the lines of “least resistance.”^[4] Richard Long’s photograph *A Line Made by Walking* (1967) documents the artist’s repeatedly trodden line in a field.^[5] It is a line with no conventional origin or destination; it is the conscious execution of an idea; a manifestation of intent. Long found beauty in the lines made by recurring desire.

The routes we take may be trajectories, journeys, or navigations, but the “desire line” implies physical evidence of a path. A trodden line in the turf, or a line drawn on a map, for example. The erosion of turf by regular individual time-cost analyses creates a physical line that, in turn, encourages more traffic along that route. Indeed, the management and restoration plans for New York’s Central Park reveal that desire lines were mapped and recorded in order to identify the most useful pathways. Some desire lines were officially sanctioned in circulation field studies, as if a path were not “legitimate” without recognition from the relevant authorities.^[6]

Rudolf Arnheim’s notion that disorder is not “the absence of all order” but rather “the clash of uncoordinated orders”^[7] supports the idea of city planning clashing with the individual who takes

his most “cost-efficient” route by cutting corners.^[8] There is beauty in the clash of two orders: nothing is controllable absolutely. Human activity never ceases to prove this rule. “All systems of order, including nature itself, are affected by entropy,” writes Treib. “All systems decay and move toward stasis.”^[9] It is against the backdrop of streets and highways that the desire line, this trace of human inclination, captures our imagination.

Matthew Tiessen observes that there are at least two different purposes for desire lines: the economical, corner-cutting commuter creates the first category: “business,” whilst the second category is defined by the wanderer, who concerns himself with “pleasure.”^[10] The meandering, zigzagging desire line is formed by travelers who enjoy the process of treading new ground. Robert Finch theorises that the desire to explore points to an “ingrained restlessness” in the human race, “a desire simply to see what may be there, with no specific destination or expectations.” Pleasure desire lines may be a conscious resistance to the omnipresence of urban infrastructure. But business desire lines refine the routes we transverse and, in doing so, actually improve the rational, economical nature of the planned city.

The use of fences, walls, and planting sometimes force us to avoid the quickest route and stick to a deviating infrastructural course. To force

pedestrians to stick to designated footpaths, Central Park developers built large mounds at the edges of paths to obscure views which might cause deviations. Trees were also cut back to optimize views of certain landmarks (such as bridges) further along the routes, encouraging compliance. ^[11]

Whenever and wherever they occur, desire lines are only of significance in the context of the concrete jungles many of us inhabit today. As seen from the perspective of the planning offices of infrastructural power, they constitute the visible evidence of mass intent.

△

Daniel Staincliffe is a Manchester based artist.



INTERVIEW

with Paolo Pedercini

Paolo Pedercini is an artist and game designer exploring the intersection between gaming and politics. He publishes games through his *La Molleindustria* (www.molleindustria.org) project.

This interview was conducted in August 2010.

#3: What do you see as characteristic of “Radical Gaming” as opposed to more “mainstream” or “commercial” gaming?

Paolo Pedercini: I never actually attempted to define the term but I often use it to refer to games that question, rather than reinforce, the dominant system of value. “Mainstream” games appear to “mainstream” players as non-political, or ideologically neutral, simply because they build their systems upon our Western, 21st century, common sense. Of course expanding your business and maximizing profits is the goal of every business management game; of course killing a fable-like caricature of an Arab is the goal of a contemporary war game; of course colonizing and possibly destroying other civilizations is the goal of a strategy game. A “radical” game is not only a game with a radical message, but a cultural artifact that indirectly points to and criticizes the assumptions that inform mainstream games.

#3: Do you feel there is a clear historical trajectory to how electronic gaming has become so entrenched in mainstream entertainment? Was there a distinct shift in how games were conceived, played or designed when it was absorbed from the margins?

PP: The history of electronic games is full of ups and downs, crises and re-births. But I believe the most relevant paradigm shift happened in the mid-nineties, with the mass diffusion of

personal computers (Windows 95 and the PC as multimedia device), the dominance of 3D games, and the introduction of the CD-ROM. That’s when the concentration happened: small software houses were unable to keep up with hardware’s exponential growth, or to compete in a market flooded by content-intensive products. More memory, more processing power, more polygons require bigger teams and bigger capital investment. The game industry became increasingly similar to the Hollywood studio system with a few majors dominating the market, and development teams of hundreds of people.

This mode of production has a profound impact on the quality of content. Big investments are a deterrent to creativity and innovation, not to mention to potentially subversive messages. Majors tend to favor marketing-driven titles, sequels, cross-media licenses—and they are more prone to bow to hardware manufacturers and their cycles of planned obsolescence.

#3: Can you think of any commercial games from the last ten years or so that managed to carry a subversive message into this “major-dominated” entertainment market?

PP: Subversive is a big word. Many games borrow from the post-apocalyptic sci-fi tradition, and therefore have some element of social critique embedded in the plot. A controversial and not



Everyday the Same Dream, Paolo Pedercini, music © Jesse Stiles

particularly successful shooter called *Postal 2* was a vehement satire of North-American bigotry. *GTA: San Andreas* presents a complex representation of a city torn by inequalities and racial tensions; despite its over-the-top gangsta-rap tone, it addressed quite effectively class and privilege, issues that are almost taboo in other forms of entertainment. The more recent *Flower* by thatgamecompany (TGC) is a beautiful, poetic hymn to social change. Even if it doesn’t directly address issues of energy and sustainability, it conveys a sense of urgency and portrays the kind of calm, powerful, all-encompassing transformation force that we desperately need.

#3: In your interactive video piece, *Every Day the Same Dream*, or in your interactive text-based piece *Ergon Logos*, the notion of traditional progress is emphasized to the point of absurdity, eventually breaking down completely. How much of radical gaming is based on first acknowledging the inherent rules in a given system, then allowing for breaks where resistance becomes possible?

PP: I think the practice of culture jamming (or subvertising)* can be applied to games. Games, probably more than other forms of expression, build on pre-established conventions: when confronted with a particular visual layout or

* the practice of satirically re-creating corporate advertisements

pattern the player will tend to interpret it according to his/her past gaming experience. That is why, for example, a designer wouldn't even have to tell you that a creature crawling at you is an enemy, and you have to jump on his head to kill it. Since a player's actions are expected to "activate" the text, designers have to make sure that these actions appear reasonable and easy to learn. This obviously produces a crystallization of genres, clichés, and all sorts of cheesy rewards and punishments (points, deaths, objects to collect, levels, accomplishments...) that are meant to guide the player towards the goal. Challenging a player's expectations, twisting genres, and subverting clichés can piss some people off but might also encourage them to think about these arbitrary conventions and encourage a broader range of interpretations.

#3: In games such as *Oiligarchy* there is a level of satirical humour that critiques the socio-economic and socio-political reality of our world. How do you envision humour, and by extension, entertainment and fun, as being key elements in radical gaming?

PP: So-called "serious games" (an umbrella term referencing games for education, training, journalism, or social commentary) often employ a more authoritative, humorless tone. My problem with regard to this is that games are very opaque artifacts, they are not committed to truth, and they don't have to provide documentation of

any sort. Everything is purely virtual, and by changing a few lines of code you can make the game produce completely different outcomes. Since we can basically make up every imaginable system, I believe we should state in a clear way our rhetorical intentions, allow a little distance instead of providing an experience that pretends to be absolutely realistic or scientific. Satire is one of the modes of communications you can use for this purpose.

#3: The anti-WTO slogan often credited to Jello Biafara, "Don't hate the media, become the media," is cited on your website, and you teach a course at Carnegie Mellon titled "Game Design for Artists, Mavericks, and Troublemakers." You seem to theorize resistance to major entertainment corporations and, as you stated, are concerned with the opaqueness of more "serious" games. Is working from within conventions in order to re-appropriate and critique them a key element in your art and design practice as well as your teaching? In "becoming media", how does one avoid being swallowed up in these conventions?

PP: I definitely consider the course I'm teaching an integral part of the molleindustria project. I believe a critical/artistic intervention in the realm of electronic entertainment should consider the textuality of games (loading games with political messages or experimenting with new forms), but also the modes of production and distribution of these cultural products.

That's the valuable teaching of Indymedia*: it's not just about producing communication that can "change the world," but about changing the very way communication is produced and consumed. Right now there is a strong independent game developers movement that can be compared to the well-established independent cinema or music scenes. Even if very few "indies" are actually injecting social commentary into their games, their refusal of industrial modes of production has an intrinsic political relevance. It's another piece of cognitive work that affirms creative and financial autonomy over the big capitals. In parallel to this phenomenon there are many initiatives that aim at making game development more accessible to a broader number of people. Democratizing the means of production, introducing non-gamers and non-geeks to the art of game design is the first, fundamental step to inject

** a international network of outlets for the creation of alternative media*

alternative ideas into the medium. These are the ideas behind "Game Design for Artists, Mavericks, and Troublemakers," a game development course within a fairly traditional undergraduate art program. Teaching game development to young artists without programming experience is a real challenge, but it is already producing very interesting results.

#3: In an environment of media convergence, do you see a clear distinction between art and games?

PP: Games are cultural forms of media that have been explored in the artistic practice for years now. Of course we are talking about a form that is not "natively" artistic, but we can say the same about video, bio art, architecture, and all forms of art that deal with technology. At least since Duchamp, art doesn't discriminate against any media. Certainly we can discuss which



Oiligarchy, Paolo Pedercini



Tamatipico, Paolo Pedercini

games - digital and non-digital - can be included in this sandbox for cultural experimentation that we call art, but it would be a long debate. I personally believe artists should engage and blend directly with pop-culture, abandoning self-referential artistic circles and gallery-oriented media, taking advantage of the new channels for amateur cultural production while still providing the depth and intellectual poignancy that is expected from our practice. But I realize this is a fairly unpopular position: it is hard to desert the comforting, privileged, sophisticated, elitist, and subsidized art system(s).

#3: As technology continues to develop, the entertainment gaming industry seems keenly interested in furthering

the emergence of the body as a point of literal interaction—whether through motion sensors, cameras, or voice recognition. When it comes to this level of immersion, are you concerned that our bodies are becoming further indentured to entertainment capitalism? Or is it just another area that you see as ripe for re-appropriation, critique, and so-called “hacktivism?”

PP: The irony is that experimental gaming interfaces have been a subject of artistic inquiry for years. Myron Krueger's *Video Place* now looks like a prototype for Sony's EyeToy, Jeffrey Shaw's *Legible City* is quite similar to modern exergaming* systems, and you can see many examples of new media installations

** a genre of gaming that combines physical exercise and video games.*

that employed tilt-based interactions, motion-detection, facial-recognition, and physical interfaces that are implemented in the gaming platforms of the latest generation. I wouldn't be surprised if the current experiments in haptic* technology, brainwaves, and wearable interfaces will also be

absorbed by the entertainment industry in the near future.
* touch-based technology

I guess the drive behind this kind of artistic experimentation was the desire to overcome the passive spectator; to empower the art user to transcend the limits of functionalist computer interfaces. But the landscape of mimetic interfaces is presently quite depressing. These sophisticated technologies are not being used to explore new frontiers of gaming, but instead to create surrogates of activities that people are already familiar with. The machine in the living room is trying to subtract time to the gym, to the tennis court, to the bowling alley, to the park, and to the garage used for band practice. The cultural diversity that these spaces entail is substituted by a customized, sanitized, corporate-controlled online sociality that can only produce more self-segregation, community degradation and gravity toward the asphyxiating nuclear family. Can these technologies be re-appropriated or subverted? I honestly cannot see how.

△

Paolo Pedercini is an artist, game designer and educator. He currently lives in Pittsburgh, PA.



WELCOME TO THE LABYRINTH

by Ken Hollings

The following text is the opening chapter of
Ken Hollings' forthcoming book, *The Bright
Labyrinth: Sex, Death and Design in the Digital
Regime*, due for release in 2011.

www.kenhollings.blogspot.com

1.

"Only that which is without history can be defined." —Friedrich Nietzsche,
On the Genealogy of Morals

The welcome is a transitory ritual to which we are all long accustomed. Words of welcome indicate a point of entry where we might not otherwise detect one. As such they offer access to an increasingly soft architecture of responsive environments, transparent barriers, audible directives, unseen electronic gateways, transportation systems and temporary spaces, all of which can only be conjured up through a series of greetings. *Welcome to London Transport, Welcome to Heathrow Airport Terminal 5, Welcome to American Airlines, Welcome to the Hyatt Regency, Welcome to CNN*: each marks an entry point in a narrative timeline that extends across space. We set great store by how we are welcomed because we have usually covered a great distance to get there.

The welcome connects websites with airports, television channels with supermarkets, hotels with malls and casinos. It also represents the reverse face of security in an age so obsessed with terrorist attack that the subject can barely be mentioned anymore. Attempts have already been made by US Secretary of Homeland Security Janet Napolitano to replace the word "terrorism" with the more nuanced "man-caused disasters." Meanwhile the US threat level for all domestic and international flights remains at orange, which means that it is still considered to be high.

The soft spaces opened up by the welcome consequently stand as a stark complement to the hard spaces created out of our need for security. The welcome marks the presence of a "gateless gate" in a society of metal detectors, scanners, CCTV cameras, bulletproof glass, surveillance systems, electronic eyes, temporary cordons and checkpoints. The welcome, in short, has become a way of informing us that we have the right access code. We know the password and have been allowed into the system. But what precisely is this system? Where exactly do we find ourselves today and how did we get there?

2.

"In the same way that the classical architect makes visible the hidden geometry of the universe, the postwar architect makes visible the hidden geometry of electronics. The unresolved question of how such network structures could be occupied echoed the unresolved question of our basic relationship with electronics." —Mark Wigley, *The Architectural Brain*

Or to put it in historical terms: "Welcome to Dallas, Mr. Kennedy."

When President John F. Kennedy's head exploded across the wide spectrum of communications media operating in 1963, it gave form and momentum to an electronic delirium in which a number of conflicting effects – textual, environmental and audiovisual – entered into an increasingly unstable relationship with each other. A new architecture came into being: one that connected the central nervous system to a shifting environment of physical and electronic structures, buildings and networks. There would be little to separate media news reports from traffic flows and concrete underpasses, car rental agencies and book depository buildings, mail-order weapons catalogues and tourists with cine cameras. "And suddenly," Archigram's Warren Chalk announces from the pages of the *Architectural Form* for October 1966, "the medium is seen to be more important. Architecture will no longer be concerned with individual buildings or groups of buildings, but with forming a permissive environment that is capable of any configuration according to circumstances." Benjamin's age of mechanical reproduction, in which the ritual is replaced by the political, is consequently thrown into complete disarray: more than forty years of conspiracy theories have helped to take care of that.

3.

Chalk's choice of title for his essay already anticipates the new shaping of social space: *Hardware of a New World*. The changes brought about by digital technology are so profound and pervasive that it is no longer either useful or appropriate to talk in terms of a digital culture but of a digital regime: one whose effects are as much economic, social and legal as they are cultural. That it has been possible to refer in the past to a "digital revolution" implies a process already geared towards the relative stability of a regime. Just days before the opening ceremony of the Beijing Olympics took place in August 2008, an *Economist* leader pointed out that "the spread of the internet and mobile telephony" had already done more to transform Chinese society than the staging of such an international spectacle ever could. In the age of digital representation, politics is giving way to ritual. What kind of welcome now exists behind the great firewall of China?

Beyond the software platforms used to process text, images, music and design are the networks that regulate delivery and maintain copyright control. Access codes transform soft spaces into hard ones: anyone who has ever opened an email account or set up a blog will appreciate the importance of names and passwords to online security. Much of the keyword blocking technology used by Chinese authorities to prevent access to offending sites is supplied by western companies. Access to online weather reports is similarly blocked in Dubai, thereby ensuring that the "official" temperature rarely exceeds 99 degrees Fahrenheit, just below the legal limit set for outdoor manual labourers, even when daytime temperatures regularly climb to well over 110, simply in order that its ambitious and exhausting building program be allowed to continue. Meanwhile time stands still inside the marble halls of Dubai's climate-controlled shopping malls. "Days blur with the same electric light, the same shined floors, the same brands I know from home," observes a correspondent from the *Independent* as he wanders through their air-conditioned interiors. "You see, my son," Gurnemanz announces in Act One of Wagner's *Parsifal*, "here time turns into space." It is a declaration accompanied as much by the sound of moving scenery as it is by talk of shifting consciousness. Wagner himself was keenly aware of this moment's

duality. "The unrolling of the moving scene, however artistically carried out," he asserted when commenting upon this moment, "was emphatically not intended for decorative effect alone; but, under the influence of the accompanying music, we were, as in a state of dreamy rapture, to be led imperceptibly along the trackless ways to the Castle of the Grail; by which means, at the same time, its traditional inaccessibility, for those who are not called, was drawn into the domain of dramatic performance."

This linking of "dreamy rapture" with "inaccessibility" anticipates today's equally illusory relationship between the welcome and an absolute need for security. As networks increasingly serve to collapse space, the "standing up" of panoramas and facades occurs in the wake of this major technological shift in an attempt to maintain the appearance of continuity. Sports arenas and shopping malls built to pressing deadlines merely provide the means by which we distance ourselves from speedy regime change. The US Administration bunkered down in Baghdad's infamous Green Zone even spoke of how quickly they had "stood up" new civil or legislative bodies to replace those dismantled in the wake of the 2003 invasion of Iraq. Stage machinery does not effect change: it is change that brings the stage machinery into being. In such a manner is time transformed into space.

4.

"The answer to the riddle of the Ages has actually been out on the street since the First Step in Space. Who runs may read but few people run fast enough. What are we here for? Does the great metaphysical nut revolve around that? Well, I'll crack it for you right now. What are we here for? We are here to go!"

—Brion Gysin, *The Process*

Transcending mere events, absolutes tend not to require a history. There is nothing remotely relative about the digital regime: the binary coding of zeros and ones upon which it depends ensures that its values are never shaded. Furthermore as the digital regime expands, it no longer requires a history but an actual geography: a sense of distances covered, of connection points that link with – and report back on – the trackless ways of a seemingly familiar yet still largely unknown terrain. The collapsing of time and space also collapses our understanding of what is meant by the word "transport;" and a new metaphysics of communication is forced into being. Or as Microsoft expressed it in their first ever global advertising campaign: "Where Do You Want To Go Today?" A confrontational appeal to individual desires, Microsoft's fabulously seductive question dispenses with notions of work in favour of mixed allusions to travel and play, power and command, velocity and distance. The screen becomes a means of transport, not production. Inaccessibility and dreamy rapture take over the desktop workstation, transforming it into a magic carpet. No longer forced to outstay our welcome in the expectation that we might actually be called upon to do something, we are finally "here to go"—to use a phrase originating from deep inside the electronic delirium of the 1960s. Such extreme mobility must appear unencumbered or it will not exist at all. In 2009, Microsoft marketed the cross-platform features of its latest operating system under the slogan "Life Without Walls."

Defining and regulating accessibility and security within the digital regime is the network: the summation of all the trackless ways across time and space. "Inasmuch as it is a network," observes Professor Wigley, "it is a whole world, a complete spatial system: you cannot simply be inside or outside of it. It is a

landscape without an exterior. The operational principle is redundancy. There are always multiple pathways between any two points and multiple options being activated at any one time." The electronic delirium of the 1960s expressed itself in terms of decentralized systems and simultaneous happenings: it presented history as the unfolding of human consciousness in time. The digital regime, however, represents its instantaneous unfolding in space over a distributed network of multiple pathways and multiple options. "Distributed intelligence does not involve an idea moving from one place to another," Mark Wigley continues. "The network itself is a brain, a thinking machine, and each thought belongs as a whole, regardless of the particular geography being activated at any moment. Events don't simply happen in space. The space itself is the event."

5.

The only other manmade structure to regulate accessibility and security in such a manner is the Labyrinth. Built at Knossos in Crete by Daedalus to house the Minotaur, it was designed to keep the monstrous creature from wandering into the outside world while at the same time allowing in those sacrificial victims selected for it feed upon. "Daedalus, an architect famous for his skill," Ovid recounts in Book VII of *Metamorphoses*, "constructed the maze, confusing the usual marks of direction, and leading the eye of the beholder astray by devious paths winding in different directions. Just as the playful waters of the Meander in Phrygia flow this way and that, without any consistency, as the river, turning to meet itself, sees its own advancing waves, flowing now towards its source and now towards the open sea, always changing its direction, so Daedalus constructed countless wandering paths and was himself scarcely able to find his way back to the entrance, so confusing was the maze."

To explore the mythological dimensions of the Cretan Labyrinth is to discover a place where sacrifice, mutation and technology all meet. The Labyrinth is also a network turned inside out: it is all exterior. Humans find they have no place there for very long. Only monsters can reside in labyrinths; and monsters by tradition are never allowed into human society but remain constantly forced out to its perimeters.

A redistribution of walls in space, the Labyrinth extends itself without end or limit. More importantly, it has no gate and consequently offers no welcome to those who enter. As such it represents a territory without borders that has still to be settled and explored. Redundancy as an operating principle is expressed in negative terms by the Labyrinth's structure. It is simultaneously all link and all node. "I know of a Greek Labyrinth that is a single straight line," remarks a character in the short story *Death and the Compass* by Jorge Luis Borges. "Along this single line so many philosophers have lost themselves."

Today the shortest distance between two points is all that separates "Home" from "End" on the computer keyboard. If the Labyrinth, hardening and hollowing

out the network's multiple pathways, seems gloomy today, it is because we have become blinded by its brightness. In Book 18 of *The Iliad* Homer describes the Labyrinth as a dancing floor created by Daedalus as an offering to the Minotaur's human sister the "lovely-haired" Ariadne for the golden youth of Knossos to move across in unison. Its intricate layout has been skillfully worked into the design of Achilles' shield by the divine engineer Hephaestus. Too bad it cannot protect the Greek hero from his own weakness. The hardest labyrinth to escape is the one you don't realize you're already in: another reason why it offers no welcome to the unwary but only a monster hiding within.

△

Ken Hollings is a lecturer and author whose work has appeared in a wide range of journals and anthologies. He also broadcasts a weekly radio series titled Hollingsville, available as free podcasts from Resonance FM.

INTERMISSION
-Candy Break-



~~_____~~
I'm a compulsive painter, photographer and writer
finding inspiration in tales, folklore, myths, nature and animals.
legends of different civilisations.
I'm in love with Inuit and Amerindian art and culture

The horse, mythical animal. Majestic, intelligent, wild, mysterious
and powerful

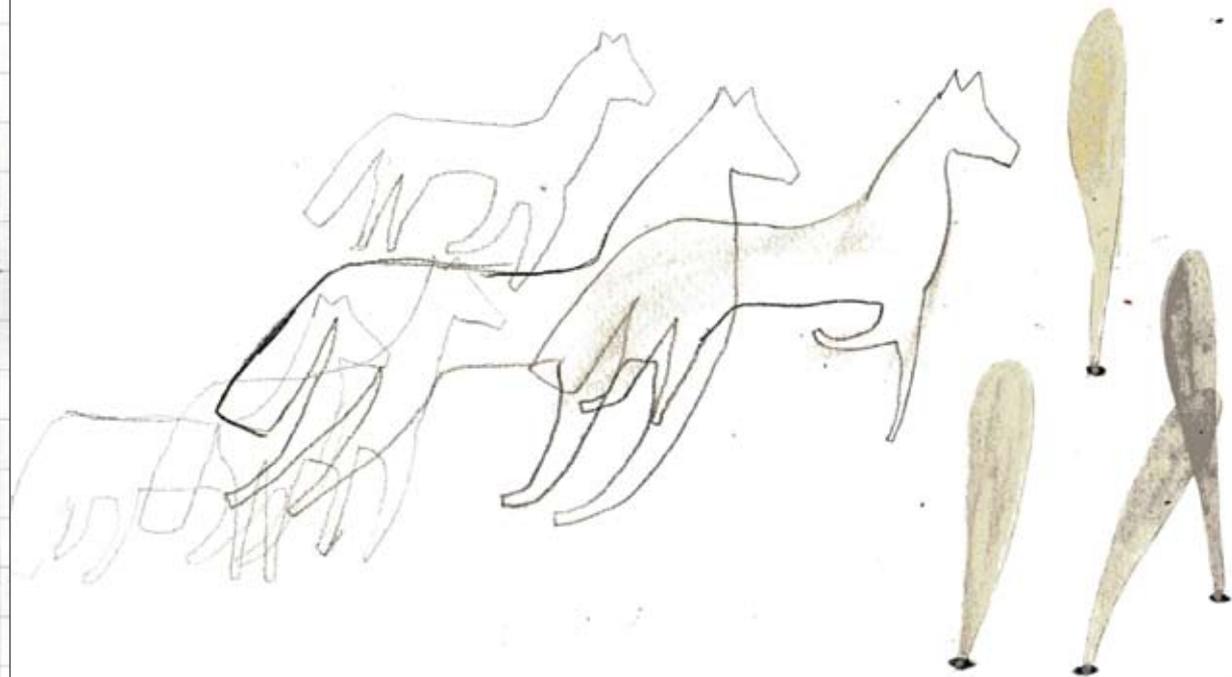
I've always drawn animals more easily than humans
Someone told me once about this "horse serie": "it's like the ~~_____~~
story of the world in one picture."

the horse maybe represent the human, face to face with the Nature, who can
save him but also destroy him...

Or maybe the horse is "just" a horse. Safe from danger, contemplating
the human disaster...

~~PO~~ pagan & sacred
ritual
spiritual
wild
rain
dust
water
fire
sun

exoticism, gold, silver, white, ochre, blue, grey, simplicity, essential, light, organic,
contemplation, mountains, meadows, feather, mirror, trees, human being, hands, plain





A CONSTRUCTED CONVERSATION

between Kay Rosen & Virginia Woolf

The following text is an imagined conversation between Kay Rosen and Virginia Woolf, in which Rosen was invited to respond to excerpts from Woolf's 1937 broadcast, *Craftsmanship*.

Kay Rosen is a contemporary artist whose work explores and challenges the process of reading. She works with Klosterfelde Gallery in Berlin, and the Ingleby Gallery in Edinburgh. Her latest exhibition, *Black and White and Read All Over*, is currently on view at the Barbara Krakow Gallery in Boston.

www.kayrosen.com

VIRGINIA*ia*
WOOLF*f*

Sheep in Wolf's Clothing (1994), graphite on paper, 35.6 x 53.3cm - © Kay Rosen

Virginia Woolf: “[Words do not] like being lifted out on the point of a pen and examined separately. They hang together, in sentences, in paragraphs, sometimes for whole pages at a time.”

Kay Rosen: As true as this might be for writers who compose large passages of text, it is completely untrue for me, whose practice does just that—extracts single words and examines them alone or in small groups, as objects, architecture, or sculptures. Instead of being shaped by surrounding paragraphs and pages of words, my texts are shaped by visual clues associated with art, grammar, and typography; and by the words’ own internal structural components: letters. A work like *Leak*,

which suspends *ROOF* upside down over *FLOOR* so that the letters line up (except for *L*) exploits its own letters and the relationship between two words to depict an architectural situation.

My verbal universe is small, in this case nine letters, and in imposing these limits, the work insists on great athletic and conceptual feats from its little population.

VW: “We are beginning to invent another language—a language perfectly and beautifully adapted to express useful statements, a language of signs.”

KR: A shorthand system of communication is not by any stretch a substitute for the elegance of more

syntactical language. But language also has the capability to function quite well in a compact zone that efficiently multitasks as reading and seeing, as both symbols and phonetic language. In a small field like this, excessive meaning can be wrung out of just a few letters, and every gesture carries more weight than it would among hundreds of words. Even parts of letters carry weight. For example, the little stroke that creates a *G* out of a *C* (upper case) can make *CHANCE* into *CHANGE*, and suggest that random events can be controlled.

Public works, like wall paintings and billboards, have a greater challenge to be economical and “sign-like.” They need to be read and engaged as people quickly speed by on a highway (*A-B-C-D-E-F-G-H-I*) or on a busy New Orleans street (*OHNOAH*), and they must be accessible



Leak (1997), paint on wall, Galerie Michael Cosar, Dusseldorf - © Kay Rosen



Taking Charge (2005), colored pencil on paper, 38.1 x 55.9cm © Kay Rosen

and democratic without compromising the work.

VW: “[Words] are highly democratic, too; they believe that one word is as good as another; uneducated words are as good as educated words, uncultivated words as cultivated words, there are no ranks or titles in their society.”

KR: Words can be used by anyone. But I am finding that the words I use most are the most commonplace language. They are simple, unremarkable words that just happen to contain remarkable potential. Judith Kirchner called them “the most mundane and undervalued bits of speech” and Rhonda Lieberman called them “found tidbits of short-circuited speech.” There are some cases where the language requires some specialized knowledge, but for the most part the words I use are part of normal every day usage.

I wonder if humor might also fall under this particular topic, as humor is most successful when it is democratic and

ABCDEFGHI

UP IT UP, THEN PACK IT UP
COLE'S

consensual and has broad support. Humor is a byproduct of my work and takes many shapes, ranging from silly to sly. Often it arises from the discovery of an unforeseen linguistic event revealed in the work. So *A Sheep In Wolf's Clothing*, with its text *VIRGINia WOOLf* often elicits laughter, not because it is “ha-ha” funny, but because it unexpectedly connects two unrelated situations.

VW: “No writer presumably wishes to impose his own miserable character, his own private secrets and vices upon the reader. But has any writer [...] succeeded in being wholly impersonal?”

KR: I think it’s impossible. But the critic Jerry Saltz once told me that my work has a slight autistic gene. I think he was referring to this neutral tone, to the detached third-person voice that comes from (1) minimal intervention into (2) found language, just to the point where the viewer can take over and interpret. The works are practically self-made since they are created out of their own body parts, with only a little push from me. As such, they do not filter my intentional voice or anyone’s intentional voice. They emit through the arrangement of their letters a message that is mediated and inflected by the viewer, not by me, the author. The most active gestures on my part are cognitive and physical: recognizing the language’s potential and enabling it. These words are very proud of themselves, that they can reframe their meaning, exceed their meaning, behave like an object, become the



New Orleans (2005, 2006), paint on wall, Yvon Lambert Gallery, New York © Kay Rosen

signified rather than the signifier. They are show-offs and I am happy to assist.

Rhonda again: “What Kay Rosen does [...] is she sets herself up as the revealer of language, but sidesteps the role of its consciousness. As its revealer, she shows it doing things that are totally above,

beyond, and/or below its function as a mode of communication.”

VW: “Words, English words, are full of echoes, of memories, of associations naturally. And that is one of the chief difficulties in writing them today-that they are so stored with meanings, with memories, that they have contracted so many famous marriages.”

KR: The storage of so much residue in words does make them impure, but that can be a benefit. The cipher-like ability of art to be filled up with viewers’ associations and memories activates it and enriches it. As language becomes sparse and less circumscribed, it offers more space for the viewers to insert themselves and negotiate meaning. In my work I think there is about a 50-50 partnership between the actual text and the viewers’ own extra-, supra-, meta-textual experience. A full partnership. My thoughts always begin with the language and how its structure and meaning intersect, but during studio conversations and talks viewers have suggested meanings that I never thought of, but often are so obvious and wonderful.

VW: “To talk of craft in connection with words is to bring together two incongruous ideas, which if they mate can only give birth to some monster fit for a glass case in a museum.”

KR: In the world of painting and drawing, and probably sculpture, I think of craft as the care and attention given

to the production of artwork. For me, there is something about precision and skill that gives the language authority. It needs to reflect a strong commitment by the artist to the message, and it can only do that if it takes itself seriously and looks good.

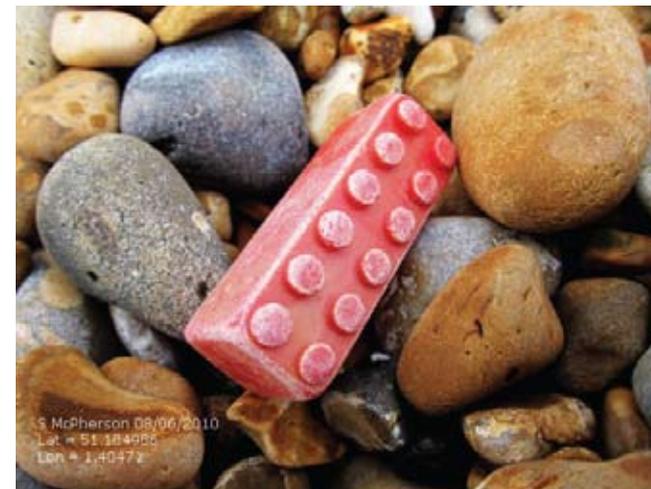
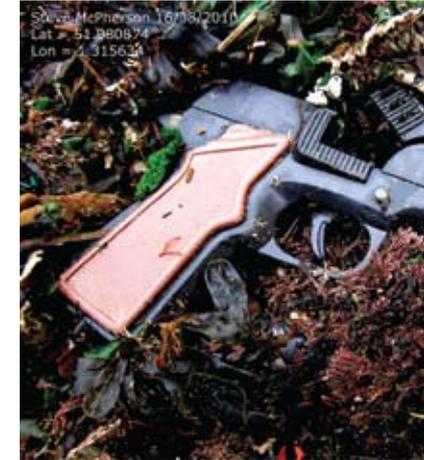
VW: “Perhaps that is [words’] most striking peculiarity – their need of change.”

KR: I don’t even think it’s possible for language to be pinned down and die. It must constantly change because it is constantly being used. It isn’t a relic or a fossil in a museum. Whether it is spoken or written, heard or read, if it is used, it will constantly be remade in the image of its user.

VW: “A few trifling rules of grammar and spelling are all the constraint we can put on [words].”

KR: When it comes to reading my work, throw out all the rules you ever learned: spelling, spacing, capitalization, margins, linear reading, composition... all your old reading habits will be useless.

△





FACES AND PHASES

by Zanele Muholi

The following text is an excerpt from Zanele Muholi's paper, *Mapping Our Histories: A Visual History of Black Lesbians in Post-Apartheid South Africa*.

Muholi's images are collected in the recently published book, *Faces and Phases* (2010).



Niko Blaxxx, Toronto (2008), © Zanele Muholi. Courtesy of Michael Stevenson, Cape Town

For decades black lesbians have been contributing to the history of South Africa, and to the communities where we live and work. However, due to the intersecting legacies of both external and internal colonialisms, racialized and heterosexualized patriarchies, and Black nationalism, our lesbian visibility and voices continue to remain on the margins. Historically, we lack the necessary access to economic, political, and socio-cultural resources to combat this silencing of our histories and contributions, and many have died in the anti-apartheid struggle, either of gender and homophobic-based violence, or of HIV/AIDS without realizing the dream of being recognized as valuable members of our communities, families, places of work, and nation.

For example, it was not until after 1994 that texts began to emerge within the academy on our existence and lives. Prior to 1994, activists and scholars/researchers tended to focus on the emergence of the political gay and lesbian movement and on legal battles to be fought by gays and lesbians who were seeking inclusion in the shaping of democracy during the transition period between 1990 and 1994 when democratic elections were officially held in South Africa for the first time. However, gay white men overwhelmingly dominated these movements, and if scholars did write about race, it was on the racialized/black gay male experience that they focused.^[1,2,3,4,5,6] While texts are beginning to include us today, our identities and lives continue to remain under-documented and under-theorized as they are prescribed and conceptualized not by us, but by those outside our communities.^[7]



Sokari Ekine, London (2008), © Zanele Muholi. Courtesy of Michael Stevenson, Cape Town

In their introduction to *Tommy Boys, Lesbian Men and Ancestral Wives*, authors Ruth Morgan and Saskia Wieringa state that, “the silence in which most African women in same-sex relations live their lives causes their marginalization from society. Coming out of the closet may offer the tenuous comfort of the support of an embattled group of LGBTI activists, but it is often also very dangerous. They may lose whatever support their families afforded them and may be evicted from their homes.” Silence isolates us at the same time that it protects us. Yet as Morgan and Wieringa document, we are beginning to speak, organizing, and fight the discriminatory laws and socio-cultural codes of our country.

I need to underscore that naming ourselves and ‘being’ is more than a fashion statement or a research topic. Rather, it is a political consciousness that we do not have a choice about. To be black, lesbian and African is by its very nature political in a world that is still overwhelmingly heterosexual, and where whiteness and European ways are still valued more than blackness and Africanness. Naming and ‘being’ is an act that demands that we organize ourselves politically and socially as black women who intimately love other women. The power of naming means to put something into existence. As long as it is not named and there is no concept of it, it can neither be appreciated nor be denounced which amounts to non-existence.^[8]

During Apartheid, the white minority government controlled by the National Party tightly regulated and racialized sexuality by imposing laws criminalizing homosexuality and inter-racial



Sheila Plaatje, Johannesburg (2008), © Zanele Muholi. Courtesy of Michael Stevenson, Cape Town

sexual relationships through the Morality Act of 1957. As queers, we were seen as a threat to the ordering of racial hierarchy and white supremacy through our homosexuality and our blackness. White supremacy is premised not only on a notion of racial purity and the invented notion of racial hierarchies, but on heterosexuality. While lesbians were seldom a focus of the Apartheid State's attention, women's sexuality and activity was tightly regulated because we have the abilities to reproduce and inter-racial reproduction was outlawed. The focus of homosexual regulation therefore was primarily on white gay men and inter-racial homosexuality.^[9] According to Sabine Neidhardt, this racialized and gendered sexual regulation during the Apartheid era may be one reason why lesbians in general, and black lesbians in particular, have been so neglected within the research and literature until 1994.^[10]

Prior to 1990, the year of the first Gay Pride march in Johannesburg, our faces and voices as black lesbians were never even imagined. According to anti-Apartheid and gay rights activists Sheila Lapinsky and Mazibuko Jara, a gay black presence began to come out strongly in South Africa only in 1986. This was the year anti-apartheid activist Simon Nkoli, a black member of the non-racial Gay Association of South Africa (GASA), was arrested and charged with treason along with 21 other men in what became known as the Delmas Treason Trial. Despite his activism in both the anti-Apartheid movement and the anti-homophobia campaigns against the Apartheid government, GASA's internal white and middle class race politics prevented the organization from supporting Nkoli publicly, which led to GASA being expelled from the International Gay and Lesbian Association



Anele Sibamba, Cape Town (2008), © Zanele Muholi. Courtesy of Michael Stevenson, Cape Town

in 1987. As a result, black gay organizations formed as a way of collectively organizing against, and resisting homophobia, racism, and Apartheid. However, these were spaces dominated politically and structurally by black gay men. While such lesbian organizations as Association of Bisexuals, Gays, and Lesbians (ABIGALE) emerged in 1992, and Cape Town and Sunday's Women in Durban popped up in the 1980s, they too were dominated by white lesbians who concerned themselves with feminist issues that tended to be silent on the political economy of race in South Africa. Moreover, as Lapinsky and Jara argue, "black lesbians seldom linked up with the mainly white lesbian organizations not only because they felt excluded, but because exposing themselves as lesbians may have alienated them from their more conservative black comrades in the anti-Apartheid struggle."^[11]

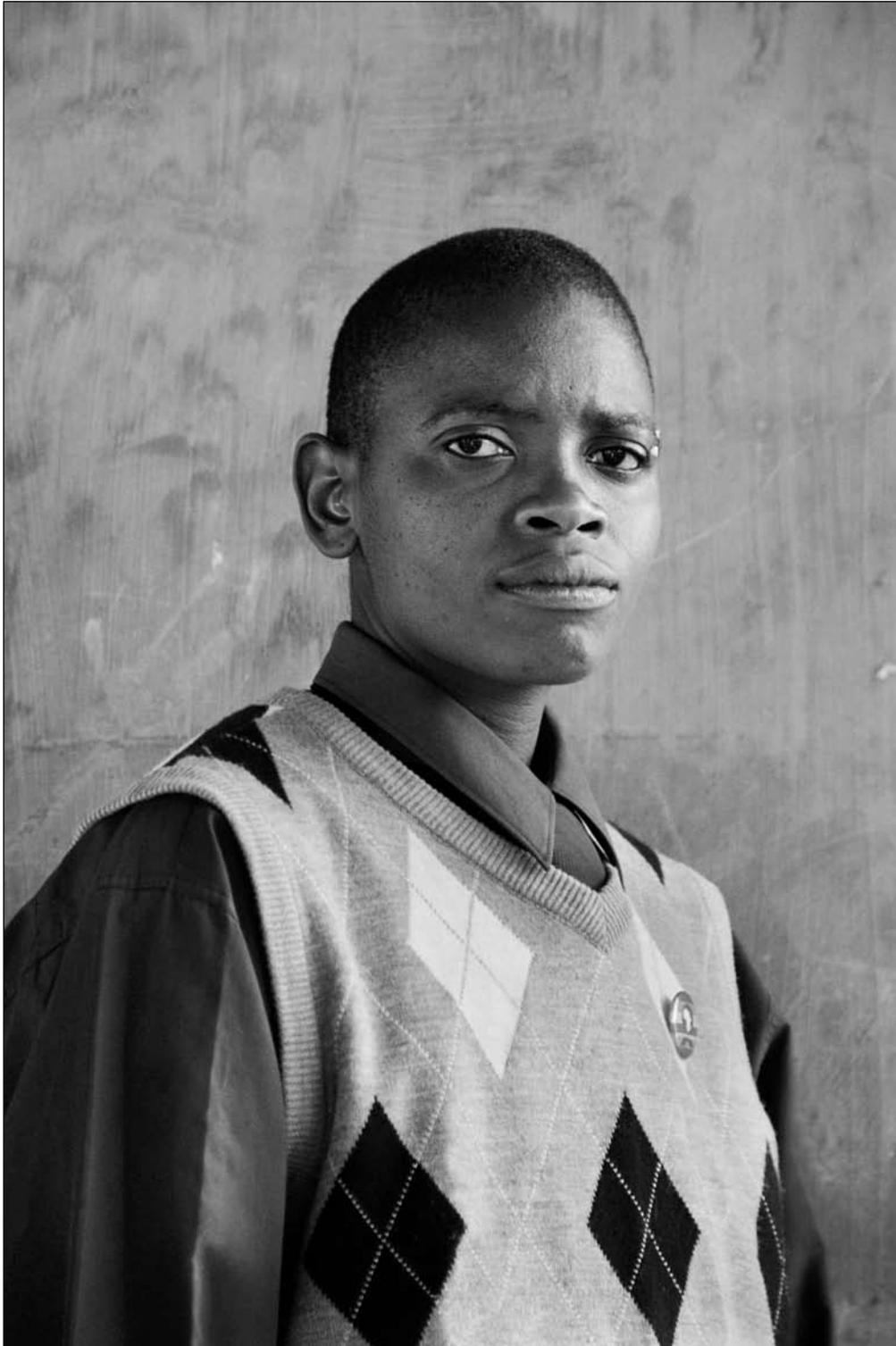
As the country saw its first Gay Pride march in Johannesburg in September 1989, six months before the release of Nelson Mandela from prison in February 1990, black lesbians such as Bev Ditsie and Phumi Mtetwa began to come out publicly to speak about being black African, female, and lesbian. This was a time when many black queers felt more comfortable marching with paper bags covering their faces. In the early 1990s, Prudence Mabele was the first black lesbian to come out publicly to speak not only about her lesbian sexuality, but also about her HIV/AIDS status. She later started and leads the HIV/AIDS organization Positive Women's Network and continues to thrive and survive the disease. As Donald L. Donham remarked, "by the late 1980s, it was clear to everyone in South Africa that a new society was in process of being born."^[12]



Jordyn Monroe, Toronto (2008), © Zanele Muholi. Courtesy of Michael Stevenson, Cape Town

Yet, despite the political engagements by black lesbians, the gendered tensions between lesbians and gay men continued, making an intersectional analysis of a radical queer history of South Africa so very important to our understanding of the complex dynamics today. Some reasons for this continued tension may be, according to Neidhardt, that while black gay men had international support from white gay organizations abroad—especially those in Britain, the Netherlands and Canada, who got strongly involved and joined the anti-Apartheid movement after Nkoli's arrest—black lesbians were struggling against the triple bias of homophobia, sexism, patriarchy, and racism.^[13] Even in the post-1994 era, and after the 1996 Constitution included sexual orientation in its Equality Clause, the issues that dominated LGBTI legal struggles rarely addressed the complex socio-cultural issues and economic struggles faced by black lesbians. For instance, while sodomy laws were officially ruled as unconstitutional and then decriminalized in South Africa by the Constitutional Court in 1999, lesbians had little to benefit as the laws did not apply to them. In 2000, the courts ruled that excluding homosexuals from pension funds was unconstitutional, and in 2001, the Pretoria High Court ruled same-sex adoption discrimination by the Child Care Act and the Guardianship Act as unconstitutional.^[14]

While in theory these legal victories are for the benefit of all, in reality, the majority of black lesbian women have neither the access to education or high enough paying jobs to access pension funds. With the official unemployment rate in South Africa at 36%, the majority of under-educated lesbians in my community are either jobless or under-employed. While we do not have official statistics on



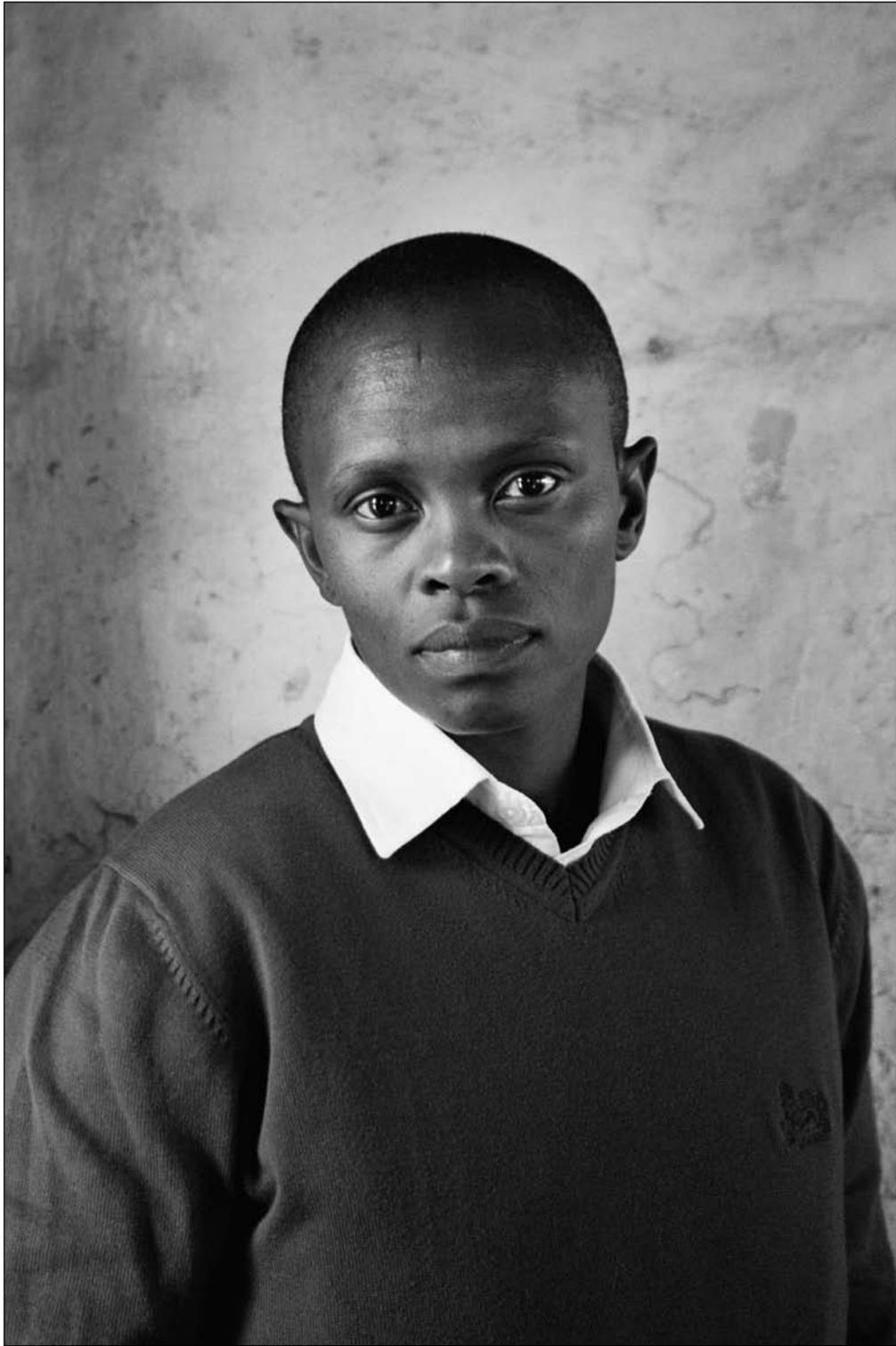
'Skipper' Mogapi, Cape Town (2008), © Zanele Muholi. Courtesy of Michael Stevenson, Cape Town

the unemployment status of lesbians as they are categorized only by gender, age and geographic location, the unemployment rate of black women in South Africa is at 52 percent.^[15] Moreover, to fight against sexual and gender discrimination using the Constitution costs much in legal fees, money the majority of lesbians in my community do not have as they struggle to access safe housing, food for their children, and adequate and affordable health care. Shefer and Potgieter also rightly make the comment:

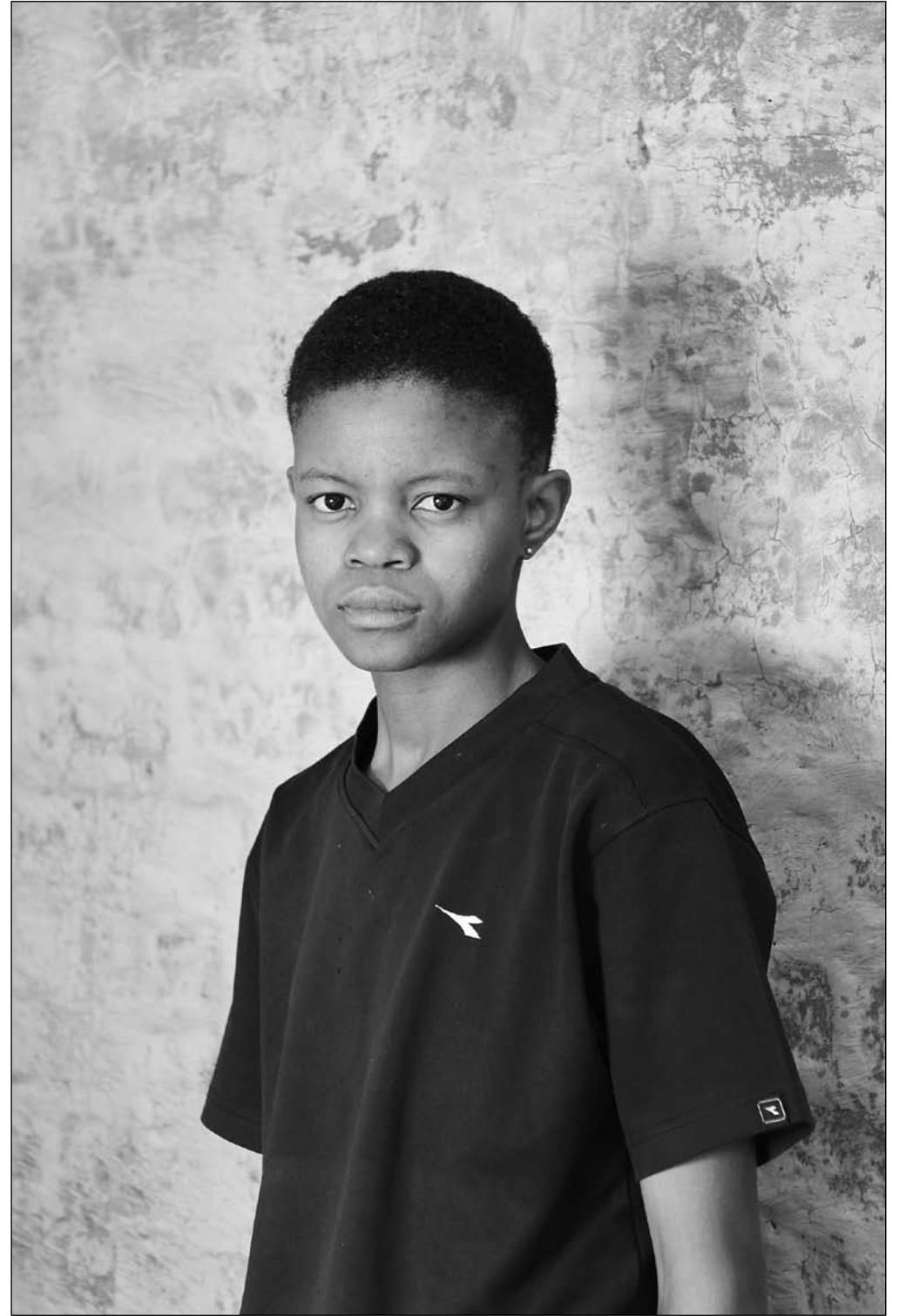
“While the Constitution clearly protects sexual rights, and there is evidently more space for alternative sexual practices and identities in South Africa with legal victories (such as the recent recognition of legal relationships between homosexual partners) securing constitutional and social gains in lived experience, South Africa remains a highly homophobic, heterosexist culture where heterosexuality is privileged above other forms of sexuality as the ideal, correct form of sexuality and relationship.”^[16]

△

Zanele Muholi is a visual activist born in Umlazi, Durban. She received the Casa Africa award and a Fondation Blachère award at Les Rencontres de Bamako biennial of African photography in 2009. Her most recent work, Faces and Phases, was published as a book by Prestel in August 2010.



Sindi Shabalala (2008), © Zanele Muholi. Courtesy of Michael Stevenson, Cape Town



Thandi Mancane Selepe (2008), © Zanele Muholi. Courtesy of Michael Stevenson, Cape Town

Projects

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Tricia Owlett
Candy Break
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p37-39
Alexa Galea
BBC (Big British Cats)
British Big Cats, also referred to as ABCs (Alien or Anomalous Big Cats), are Felidae not native to Britain but reported to inhabit the British countryside. Their existence is unproven, but many explanations exist as to how these animals might have come to inhabit Britain, including the suggestion that they are surviving Ice Age fauna. In March 2006 a police report confirmed that a Eurasian lynx was shot near Norwich, Norfolk. It had killed around 15 sheep within two weeks. The lynx is apparently now in the possession (as taxidermy) of a collector in Suffolk. One other lynx and one puma have been captured alive in the area since. Various groups have been established to research the presence of big cats in Britain, including the British Big Cats Society (www.britishbigcats.org).
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Marine Plastics
A plastic object may have been designed in the UK, manufactured in China, imported to America, shipped, bought, sold, bought again, and then left on a beach by a child on the coast of New York; lifted by the tide, caught in the north Atlantic gyre and spat out to end up back in the UK. Plastic is not an inert material.
www.marineplastic.org
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Endnotes

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