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Introduction

Sandrine Micossé-Aikins and Elke aus dem Moore

“Freedom” is a concept, or better still an aspiration, that is central to the shared experiences of Africans and people of African descent in the Diaspora. It links together divergent histories, cultures and societies and remains a goal, to be achieved through multiple ongoing struggles sparked by the history and present ramifications of slavery, colonialism and apartheid. In a constant process of renegotiation, adaptation and appropriation, the idea of freedom manifests itself within everyday practices just as much as within the realms of the arts, academia and institutional politics. The project *In the Seams* was interested in approaching fashion and styles as a location in which all of these different realms intersect and become accessible to everyone.

It came in the shape of an artistic conference that, instead of limiting itself to a discursive approach, included the practical examination of textures and garments by creatively engaging with them, and challenged everyday notions of the public space in Johannesburg by directly and performatively intervening into it. This concept allowed the participants to become actors, researchers, teachers and artists at the same time, thus discovering not only answers but also new questions in relation to the topics tackled.

The essays assembled in this book are a reflection of the project, and sometimes an extension of its themes.

In the Seams was a conference held within the larger framework of the creative networking project *prêt-à-partager* which was initiated by the Institut für Auslandsbeziehungen (ifa) in 2008. *In the Seams* took place at the Center for Historical Reenactments in Johannesburg on the 7th and 8th October 2011. Revolving around two workshops guided by the dress historian Carol Tulloch as well as the artists Sinethemba Twalo, Tulo Pule and Xiluva Khosa, the participants discussed and explored the ways in which fashion and textiles are used to express different ideas of freedom in Africa and the African Diaspora.

The event opened with keynotes by Elke aus dem Moore, Head of ifa’s Visual Arts Department, Leora Farber, Director of the Research Center Visual Identities in Art and Design, Carol Tulloch from the Chelsea College of Art and Design and the Victoria and Albert Museum, and Khwezi Gule, Chief Curator of the Hector Peterson Memorial, who also moderated the discussions. These themes derived from a previous *prêt-à-partager*-inspired artistic intervention that brought to the fore the allure and controversy associated with freedom in the South African context.

In 2010, a workshop entitled “IMBUZi” dealing with the topic of identity had triggered a public discussion about the ideas of freedom in South Africa across communal, racial, generational and class lines. When a Cape Town mall was spontaneously transformed into a platform for a lively public debate that drew in many shoppers and passers-by, the intervention

made it clear that freedom in post-apartheid South Africa remains charged with promise, aspiration and a sense of the as-yet unfulfilled. It still is a term intrinsically linked with collective and personal ideas of identity, its controversy being rooted in the new economic and social restraints and forms of bondage emerging as the apartheid regime was removed, even as social hierarchies remained largely the same. The IMBUZi experience led us to further explore the textures of freedom, and our efforts were channelled into the creation of *In the Seams*.

In her essay featured in this book, Carol Tulloch identifies freedom as central to Africana¹ culture, as it ties together diverse Black experiences through a common continuous aspiration. This struggle for freedom has manifested itself in manifold ways through Black cultural productions such as poetry, music, art and, last but not least, fashion. It is thus not surprising that “freedom” keeps coming up as a topic in the works created within the context of *prêt-à-partager*, which is focused on fashion and art. Wandering the streets of Cape Town or Johannesburg, we find – just as we do in Accra, Dakar, London and Paris – global ideas of freedom and its conflicts reflected in garments and style choices that connect people of African origin around the globe. Fashion allows us to make visible the multitude of fragments that our personality and identity consist of. It allows us to embrace, display and renegotiate the diversity of the self that – with regard to Black identity – has been overwritten in the process of racialisation that flattened Blackness to be essential, characterised by sameness.

Rael Salley in “In the Seams: The Aesthetics of Freedom Expressed” reflects back on the issues discussed and expressed during the conference and locates these discussions and creative encounters within the larger context of the relationships between Africana culture, aesthetics and style





and the meanings of freedom. Taking a look at the intersectionality of power structures and cultural production and expression, he highlights the challenges, as well as the potential “stylistic agency” contained within this co-dependent relationship.

The workshop *Identities and Consumption*, for instance, took the participants to a local second-hand market in Johannesburg. Contemplating this experience in his essay, Sinethemba Twalo characterises this space as a site that accumulates the different aspects revolving around the politics of dress: desire, consumption, appropriation and the performance of identities, all of which contain the potential to oppress as well as to empower. “Hey You Second-hand!” tackled the subject through interviews and interventions into the public space of De Villiers Street as well as into the textures of second-hand clothing. Charity second-hand clothing from the West has turned into a huge business in Africa that is believed to be gradually endangering the local textile and fashion industries. The dynamics of this business are often expanded, used and innovated by creative young Black minds who – by customising the clothes – turn cheap vintage into limited-edition, high-fashion items. Another, inquisitive look at the second-hand business has been taken by Olumide Abimbola in “The International Trade in Used Clothing”, wherein he follows the trajectories of clothes all the way from German sidewalks through the small shops and street stands in Lagos to the homes of their new owners, unpacking the myths surrounding the economic impact of this market while shedding light on how new local jobs are being created. Both essays are concerned with the stories we can read from the history of a single garment, as well as from the biographies of those whose hands it has been passed through. How does the meaning inscribed into the garment change as it is journeying through different contexts?

The text “The Stories that Fabric Tells” by Khwezi Gule follows a similar exploratory path, weaving together various aspects touching on the impact and meanings of fashion on our contemporary moment. Using the seShoeshoe² and the beaded waistcoat³, the newly emerged political practice of the “slut walk” and the work of Yinka Shonibare as references, he highlights the ways in which the global circulation of material and cultural goods and concepts – be it through intended import and export, the media, art, or through the accidental itineraries of waste – are inscribed in the textures of the everyday. Khwezi Gule’s essay zooms in on the constant state of flux that lies in the nature of fashion and style, thereby withstanding the notion of a “traditionally African” realm that is static and unshaken by historical, societal, political and cultural shifts.

For several decades now fashion has been a means of resistance and rehabilitation for people of African descent. It is, as Rael Salley puts it, a way of approaching questions of individual belonging. Think of the politics and circulation of hairstyles, such as dreadlocks or the afro, between different Africana contexts as they reflect Black People’s struggle to reinvent the image of their own body. Think of the Pan-African colours, as symbols of liberation and collective struggle, mutual roots and history. Think of the famous Madiba shirt⁴ that, before being turned into a commercial product, functioned as a signifier for resistance, cultural pride and belonging. Think of the Jamaican dancehall dress⁵, the Congolese Sapeurs⁶ or the Swenkas⁷ in South Africa as a means of appropriating and performing styles otherwise reserved for and associated with a rich elite or banned from the realm of the appropriate. Fashion and style also usually team up with movement and sound to communicate their intended meanings. They have been an integral part of the politics and performances of well known Black musicians like Sun Ra⁸ and Papa Wemba⁹. The workshop *Freedom is a Road Selected Travelled by the Multitude* led by Carol Tulloch explored these linkages. She encourages her participants to combine music and techniques of working with textiles and styles to look at the aesthetics of freedom as something that is rooted in both spheres equally. Her essay is a reflection of her workshop and an analysis of fashion and music as vessels in which concepts of freedom and liberation are travelling, connecting communities and individuals on either side of the Black Atlantic. This notion is exemplified in the title, which is inspired by the Public Enemy song “Show ‘Em Whatcha Got”.

Another song by Nigerian hip-hop artists Eldee da Don, Kaboom and Dare Art Alade exemplifies the struggle with the connecting quality of cultural products that accumulate the twists and turns, the distant linkages of African and African Diasporan creative expression throughout history:

“– ... Young man now tell me where did you get your skillz from?
 You must have gotten it from foreign lands.
 You spit too tight to be African
 ...
 – I hear my people say yo, rap is not an african art
 come on! It’s a Black thing
 so I just chose to play my part
 our ancestors took rhythm and applied it to poetry
 Its a thing of the mind
 the style is the fluency
 tales were told in rhyme
 from back in time
 (of the) pyramids of Egypt to
 the hypocritical days of mine



civilisations started
 in my back yard
 genesis of all nations
 written by god
 im Nigerian, I represent
 the area im from
 I spit tight in my
 mother tongue
 no idea is original
 theres noting new under the sun
 its never what you do
 but how its done”



The grappling with notions of freedom, identity and belonging is an ongoing exchange that is continually giving rise to new practices of cultural expression and merging different artistic fields. We hope that *In the Seams* will contribute to the creation of knowledge and an understanding of the ways in which creative expression can help us to actively shape who we want to become, as well as the society in which we want to live, and to voice the issues that we think matter. Fashion can turn our bodies into canvases, into our own private billboards through which we can communicate even during the smallest encounters. It is in this realisation and the re-appropriation of this site that we can find freedom in the midst of a world dictated by the taste of power.

Or, in the words of Coco Chanel: *Fashion is not something that exists in dresses only. Fashion is in the sky, in the street, fashion has to do with ideas, the way we live, what is happening.*



¹ The term “Africana” here refers to both Africa and the African Diaspora.

² The fabric, originally introduced to South Africa by the Germans, is now mostly produced in the United Kingdom. It is widely used by the Basotho in South Africa and is often tailored into garments resembling British colonial dress.

³ A hybrid garment derived from waistcoats given to Zulu domestic servants by their colonial masters. The waistcoat was then combined with traditional Zulu bead work.

⁴ The name for these batik silk shirts derives from the former president and freedom fighter of South Africa, Nelson Mandela, whose nickname “Madiba” refers to his Xhosa clan name. Ever since he wore one at the dress rehearsal for the opening of South Africa’s first democratic parliament in May 1994 – instead of a Western suit and tie – these shirts have become a symbol of liberation and pride in African culture and values for Black People around the world.

⁵ Dancehall is a Jamaican movement revolving around a specific genre of music. It is common for followers, especially women, to dress in very eccentric and revealing ways that are often disapproved of or even outlawed by society outside the movement.

⁶ The SAPE (Société des Ambianceurs et des Personnes Élégantes) is a movement that originated in the DRC. Sapeurs dress up and pose in colourful and elegant designer suits and luxury accessories, thereby abiding by a complex set of moral, spiritual and aesthetic rules.

⁷ The Swenkas are a group of mostly working-class Zulu men who combine extravagant dressing with choreographed movements to create a competitive fashion display. Like the Sapeurs, the Swenkas follow a set of moral rules that include things such as physical cleanliness, sobriety and – above all – self-respect.

⁸ Sun Ra was an African American jazz musician, philosopher and poet who is often considered the father of Afro futurism, a concept that merges elements of Afrocentricity and science fiction in literature, music and the arts. Sun Ra (who named himself after the Egyptian god of the sun, Ra) was known for his extravagant costumes that referred to Egyptian aesthetics and science fiction, recontextualising the Black experience within a new discourse of belonging and pride in cultural heritage.

⁹ Papa Wemba is a Congolese musician who is associated with and even seen as the leader of the SAPE movement. He is also known as the King of SAPE.



'It Takes a Nation of Millions to Hold Us Back'¹: Freedom and the Dynamics of the African Diaspora

Carol Tulloch

In the Seams: The Aesthetics of Freedom Expressed was an inspired conference theme. The combination of seams and freedom resonates with me. My research is predominantly concerned with how individuals negotiate their sense of self through dress on a diasporic, transnational, national and local level. Although the concept of freedom is often the foundation of my enquiries, I have not discussed the term in detail. Generally the pursuit and exploration of freedom is an invisible critical framework. For me, a lasting impact of the open-space conference *In the Seams: The Aesthetics of Freedom Expressed* is the realization that freedom is so much a part of what we all want, yet we take for granted its complex meaning.

The aim of this essay is to address a number of points and to review the thinking that informed the workshop I co-ordinated, 'Freedom is a Road Seldom Travelled by the Multitude'; as the event took place in South Africa, and in the light of its history, personal, political and economic freedom have been acute issues, aspects of freedom that were raised in the workshop. The opportunity for individuals to meditate on and re-consider what freedom meant to them through dialogue and making, and through the exchange of ideas and skills, was cathartic and empowering. A summation of the workshop experience is outlined. In line with my research interests, three interpretations of what personal freedom can be are considered.² Bearing in mind my own reaction to the conference theme raised above, a review of the expansive definition of the term 'freedom' requires consideration here.

Freedom is the Word

The term 'freedom' is part of the soul of the African diaspora experience. The pursuit of freedom, particularly political and personal freedom, across the African diaspora has resulted in a shared experience, in spite of the specific historic cultural and social identities of the different parts of the diaspora. It is interesting to note that some essential publications associated with the study of the racial, colonial and imperial dynamics of the African diaspora do not include the term 'freedom', among them *Post-Colonial Studies: The Key Concepts* (Ashcroft, Griffiths, Tiffin 2006) and *The Encyclopedia of Race and Ethnic Studies* (Cashmore 2004). This is perhaps because 'freedom' is about the choice of *being*. But I reference these publications as colonialism, imperialism and racism are tenets of freedom for some, yet were imposed on and crushed the freedom of others. Whilst, for example, *Africana: The Encyclopedia of the African and African American Experience* (Appiah and Louis Jr. 1999) has a number of entries alluding to freedom: 'Free African Society', North America; 'Freedom Charter', Africa; 'Freedom's Journal', North America; 'Freedom Summer', North America;

'Freetown, Sierra Leone', Africa; 'Free Village System', Latin America and Caribbean; 'Free Womb Laws', Latin American and Caribbean. These are specific examples of the establishment of organisations, communities, and legislation that were the result of activism for equality, civil and human rights – structures as opposed to personal experience.

Individuals have expressed a more personal rendition of freedom. Markedly, auto/biographical works allow the space to blend agency and empowerment that the quest for freedom enables³. A case in point is *Nelson Mandela By Himself: The Authorised Book of Quotations* (2011)⁴. 'Freedom' is one of the 317 categories listed in the book. Mandela's reference to it from 1953 to 2008 is voiced over five pages. This entry is followed by the categories 'The Freedom Charter', 'Freedom Fighters', 'Freedom of Expression', 'Freedom Struggle'. In essence Mandela communicates within the umbrella term of 'freedom', and its associated subjects, that freedom is not a given, but a constant aspiration. As we know, within the Apartheid regime of South Africa, freedom was a chronic need, literally a matter of life or death.

The definition of 'freedom' is expansive. Its long presence in the English language qualifies this. The *Oxford English Dictionary* cites 1230 as the first recorded use of the word freedom:

Exemption or release from slavery or imprisonment; personal liberty; Liberation from the bondage of sin; Exemption from arbitrary, despotic or autocratic control; independence, civil liberty; The quality of being free or noble, nobility, generosity, liberality; a. The state of being able to act without hindrance or restraint, liberty of action; The quality of being free from the control of fate or necessity; the power of self-determination attributed to the will; Readiness or willingness to act; Frankness, openness, familiarity ... outspokenness; The overstepping of due or customary bounds in speech or behaviour; undue familiarity; *to take the freedom* (to do something); of action, activity etc.: Ease, facility, absence or encumbrance; Boldness or vigour of conception or execution; exemption from a specific burden; To act free.

(*The Oxford English Dictionary*)

To dissect the term 'freedom' further, the word 'free' was first used in 888, but believed to be developed from Old English around 725. A primary sense of the adjective 'free' is 'dear'. The Germanic and Celtic meaning of it is 'the distinctive epithet' of household members, those connected by family ties with the head of the household, and distinct from slaves. Whilst in Latin 'free' is '*liberi* (children)', literally the 'free' members of the household. *The Oxford English Dictionary* outlines further that 'free' is a referent

'Of persons: Not bound or subject as a slave is to his master; enjoying personal rights and liberty of action as a member of a society or state. Not in bondage. Of or pertaining to subversive movements in a country; released from ties, obligations, or constraint upon one's action. Of actions, activity, motion, etc., Unimpeded, unrestrained, unrestricted ... of persons: Unfettered in their action ... Acting without restriction or limitation; allowing oneself ample measure *in* doing something ... Frank and open in conversation ... ingenious, unreserved; also in bad sense = overfree, forward, 'familiar, ready to "take liberties"'.

The suffix '-dom' signifies position, condition and dignity in Old English, as well as statute, judgement and jurisdiction. Therefore 'free-dom' - 'freedom' is 'the condition or fact of being free' (*The Oxford English Dictionary*). To contract these meanings to the more human experience of seeking or enjoying freedom, then, personal and political freedom is a useful focus.

Freedom: A Personal Pursuit

Jane Bakerman's article 'The Seams Can't Show: An Interview with Toni Morrison' (1978) is an interesting text to help gain a better understanding of what personal freedom can mean. Freedom is writing for the African-American writer. Morrison's explanation of this is the space it provided her when she was a single mother in the 1970s, whilst caring for her sons and her home, and attending to her teaching and editorial work. Within this context of personal freedom Morrison allowed herself the 'luxury', alongside the love of her other commitments, to hone her novels over a lengthy period of two to two and a half years in order to create 'a genuinely polished, beautiful whole' (Bakerman 1978:56). To achieve this was often a struggle, but she enjoyed that struggle as this was part of her creative freedom, her particular brand of writing aesthetic, as Morrison explained 'The point is so that it doesn't look like it's sweating ... it must appear effortless! No matter what the style, it must have that. I mean the seams can't show.' (Bakerman 1978:56). A seam is often a line that connects and demarcates sections that can be complimentary or dynamically different. Seams are nonetheless about achieving wholeness and remaining whole. As Morrison observed, all of us at some point are '*victims of something* ... In a world like that, how does one remain whole - is it just impossible to do that?' (Bakerman 1978:60). The open-space conference was an exciting opportunity to explore this aspect of personal freedom. One could say that the members of the workshop 'Freedom is a Road Seldom Travelled by the Multitude' 'seamed' the past and present meanings of freedom through the different forms of dialogue they engaged in. They, as individuals, were the channel - the line - that made the connections. As Vukile Zuma stated, 'Freedom is being who you are *and* explore *and* remember where you come from'⁵.

The work of the German-Jewish psychologist Erich Fromm on freedom extends Morrison's experience of the luxury of freedom as a contribution to her wholeness. Fromm explained in '*The Fear of Freedom*' the characteristics of 'positive freedom'. It enables the individual to engage in original thinking, to seek truths in order to better understand the world, themselves and themselves in the world. Positive freedom also encourages spontaneous activity, which leads to another realization of the self. This informs creatives, and Fromm refers specifically to artists, who engage with the world to develop different kinds of relationships - personal, community, social, cultural, political. This form of freedom develops within a democracy to: 'imbue people with a faith that is the strongest the human

mind is capable of: the faith in life and in truth, and in freedom as the active and spontaneous realization of the individual self' (Fromm 2004[1942]:237). Although Fromm's thinking is useful, I do think that all kinds of people, as well as artists, seek positive freedom. Another psychoanalytical definition of freedom is the construction of the 'independent self' (Delgado 1983:58), the 'ability of a person to produce his[her] own conceptions, to generate alternative and conflicting conceptions, to think and value in terms of multiple perspectives, and to define one's identity and his[her] relation to others on the basis of these self-generating conceptions of the world' (Schroder et al. 1971).

Therefore the combination of personal freedom, the independent self and positive freedom can achieve wholeness, making - metaphorically and literally - the different parts of ourselves, the different parts of our lives good to live with, to *be*. To return to Toni Morrison's concern that 'all of us at some point are '*victims of something*' (Bakerman 1978:60), the thing, of course, is not to become a victim, to overcome external issues that impact our lives. I have argued for some time that one of the ways to address this is through the transformation of the body into an aesthetic form through styling, either in the pursuit of freedom - political or personal - and/or post the achievement of that freedom. Often the same genre of garment or textile, hairstyle or accessory works effectively in both situations. Sometimes they are used consciously to provocative effect, as in the Afro hairstyle of



the 1960s and 1970s, at other times it can be a potent by-product of a situation. Crucially it is the *adaptation* as Fromm pointed out (2004[1942]:11), the styling of an item and its use in the construction of a look on the body, that makes the critical aesthetic expression of freedom.

A case in point is the meaning of the school uniform, particularly the school blazer, as worn by a Black British male pupil in London, and his counter-part, a Black South African pupil in Soweto (Tulloch 2010). Both were engaged in differing degrees of activism. A photograph of the former, taken in 1976 by Syd Shelton,⁶ was co-opted into anti-racist mediation produced by the Rock Against Racism Movement (RAR, 1976–1981)⁷, of which Shelton was a committee member. The photograph appeared on the record sleeve and flyer of the activist record *Up Against the Wall* by the Tom Robinson Band, who were also members of RAR. This anti-racist material was also designed by Shelton. Meanwhile during the Soweto Riots of 1976 young Black men defended themselves, their educational rights, and resisted Apartheid. Photographs by Black South African Sam Nzima of these teenagers, wearing their school blazers and protecting themselves with household dustbin lids, have become evocative historical documents. The school blazer worn on these black bodies was “the recalcitrant object” (Coombes 1994) “kicking’ against constraint or restriction, to be obstinately disobedient or refractory” (*The Oxford English Dictionary*). “These Soweto students were no longer “acting like a good student” or “being a good student” (McVeigh 2000:98), they were being politically active pupils and individuals who employed subjectivity and agency to secure their self-hood and future as black South Africans, and thereby confronting the “official

gaze” (McVeigh 2000:99) ... The question is, do these two examples of school uniform used by black teenage boys become “black school uniform” with a particular identity and history connected to specific moments in political activism and social history? What can be said of these two examples of a relationship between a black body and school uniform in London and Soweto in 1976 is that they illustrate the traceable associations of objects–people–geographies–activism–histories, that is a network of ideas and concerns that connect Africa and its diaspora.’ (Tulloch 2010:296).

‘Freedom is a Road Seldom Travelled by the Multitude’: A Workshop

As mentioned above, I co-ordinated the workshop ‘Freedom is a Road Seldom Travelled by the Multitude’. The Rap artist Chuck D of the hip hop group Public Enemy sampled this phrase. It was used in their song *Show ‘Em Whatcha Got*. The track featured on their eponymous 1988 album *It Takes a Nation of Millions to Hold Us Back*. The phrase ‘Freedom is a Road Seldom Travelled by the Multitude’ was originally said by saxophonist Harvey ‘Joe’ Henderson of the Bar-Kays at the landmark Wattstax Festival, held on 20th August 1972. The event was organised to commemorate the 7th anniversary of the Los Angeles Watts Riot in 1965.⁸

I was drawn to this sampled phrase as it evoked the spirit of the conference, and *Show ‘Em Whatcha Got* referenced civil-rights activists and freedom fighters from different parts of the African diaspora. Pointedly,



music is integral to African diaspora culture and, in terms of the aesthetics of freedom, it is often difficult to separate the influences between music and the styled body – the individualized construction of a look through the assemblage of garments, accessories, and beauty regimes that may, or may not, be “in fashion” at the time of use. For example workshop member Johnny of the pop group Amaule pointed out that Congolese singers have a cultural responsibility to style themselves well. The cost of the components is immaterial, whether of a low or high price, it is the styling that is paramount.⁹ Additionally music shapes all aspects of life as a soundtrack to identities, particularly when an identity has to be clarified in a space that categorizes black people as different. Music can provide the means to bring people together as well as to diffuse racial tension. The use of music by different cultural groups helps to define them but has a secondary impact as well – it allows others to see them ‘from the inside’.

Additionally my focus on the sampled phrase ‘Freedom is a Road Seldom Travelled by the Multitude’ addressed a subtext of the workshop, to connect the past with the present. Sampling for Chuck D is a response to his African-American and broader African diaspora heritage. Through the incorporation of previously made ‘black’ statements into his work, Chuck D believed that he acknowledged black history and simultaneously created something new, in order to move forward.

The aim of the workshop was to use music, style and making as exploratory tools for fresh thinking on freedom. The programme was comprised of:

1. A brainstorming session on what freedom meant to the individual participants.
2. A group discussion on music. Participants brought one piece of music that represented freedom to them.
3. The making session. An intuitive expression of freedom through a variety of making techniques – embroidery, sewing, knitting, painting. Workshop members were encouraged to bring items from home, garments, textiles or accessories that were part of their autobiography, which they could work into and use to extend familial heritage, for example.

The brainstorming session, held on 7th October, of what freedom can mean to individual workshop members, took the form of a creative act (image p. 10). The participants lay 3 sheets of A1 paper on the floor. They all wrote their words or statements at the same time, not in a formalized, list-making system, but in myriad directions on the sheets. Often the participants were on their knees or stretching over one another. At other times they stood up to view the texts from a distance, to consider and then move closer to the sheets of paper in order to add another word or phrase, much like an artist. The individualized handwriting reflected the diversity of thought. The words and phrases included:

| | |
|------------------------------------|-------------|
| ‘Think out loud, don’t say a word’ | Possibility |
| huh! | Should |
| Expression | Would |
| Variaty (sic) | Justice |
| Power | Thoughts |
| Money | Valuesww |
| Yours, or mine? | Liberty |
| Uhuru | Buntu |
| Rebels | Style |

| | |
|------------|------------------|
| Steve Biko | A is for Anarchy |
| Mini Skirt | Stance |

Once completed, the panels were pinned onto the wall of the center (and remained there for the duration of the open-space conference) for the group to assess and respond to. For example the workshop member Vukile Zuma made an interesting observation: ‘Nowhere is the word equality’. It was something he had considered over night and pointed this out to me on the second day of the event. I made Zuma’s statement into a separate panel and placed it next to the three original panels.

The expansive thinking on freedom that I had hoped for emerged in this first exercise. Views expressed ranged from the slippery nature of defining the word freedom: ‘Freedom is an abstract word. I can’t express it in words’ (Jonna Slappendel). This was supported by another statement from Zuma that ‘we have different mind sets at this current time’. Workshop members also expressed what they saw as the negative aspects of freedom: ‘Young people today are tired of the word freedom’ (Johnny); ‘Freedom is destruction, it depends on how you look at it in certain points in your life’ (Vukile Zuma).

The music session took place the next morning. The range of musical genres submitted attested to freedom of choice and personal expression. Rock, Jazz, Reggae, Spaza¹⁰ and hip hop were represented. The songs were played on DVD, CD, mobile phones and a vinyl record and included:

- ‘Black Bird’ by Nina Simone (Nkuli Mlangeni)
- ‘Camagu’ by Driemanskap (Vukile Zuma)
- ‘Can’t We Live together by Jestofunk (Jonna Slappendel)
- ‘Ice Cream Love’ by Johnny Osborne (Friedrich M. Ploch)
- ‘Show ‘Em Watcha Got’ by Public Enemy (Carol Tulloch)
- ‘Iqhawe’ by Skiohumbuzo Makandula
- ‘Black Soul’ by Amaule (Johnny).

All contributors were asked to say why they chose their particular piece of music. Some of the reflections included:

- ‘In Congo we can’t talk about music without style. A musician is someone who is looked up to, to help people to become something ... you can be what you want, you can rise above the sea. You have the power to be.’ (Johnny)
- ‘Rituals can be constraining’ (Sikhumbuzo Makandula)
- ‘Sampling is freedom ... you create a collage and change the context’ (John)
- ‘Freedom is an unspoken sound ... Freedom is the right to blossom’ (George)
- ‘We need to remember the past and traditions to contribute to the present’ (Nkuli Mlangeni)
- “Ancestors” has turned into a dirty word’ (George).

To remind the participants of transnational connections for freedom, Syd Shelton explained how he produced his 4 metres x 2.5 metres photographic anti-apartheid mural *Anti-Apartheid 1959–1994: Making Hope a Reality* (image, p.12–13). This was commissioned in 2000 by Cheryl Carolus, the South African High Commissioner in London. The mural is on permanent display at South African House, London. The graphic designer used photographs of the relentless anti-apartheid activity that took place in Trafalgar Square, outside South Africa House, during this period. Shelton presented

these as a kaleidoscope of images invisibly seamed together. They were a reminder of the thousands of people who were devoted to the cause, and the various mediums used to evoke protest against the impact of Apartheid in South Africa – black and white bodies used themselves as billboards wearing home-made cardboard statements hanging from their necks or anti-racist texts produced on reams of fabric suspended from buildings.

These statements, observations and reflections of the previous sections of the workshop fuelled the making portion of the workshop. This took place in the afternoon on the second day of the event. In that short period of time, men and women engaged whole-heartedly in creating pieces of work. They worked individually *and* collaborated with one another. Relay pieces of work were produced, such as a length of knitting created by different participants knitting in a variety of materials, such as wool and ribbon. An impromptu knitting circle emerged. Male workshop members, in particular, were incredibly keen to learn to knit. Other new skills, notably embroidery, were acquired by women and men. One example of this was Friedrich M. Ploch's cross stitch embroidery comment on freedom: 'Wud-Kud-Shud' – two of the words he originally contributed to the brainstorming panels – were stitched across the shoulder panel to customise his own denim jacket, thereby extending his personal presence.

The styled body was always a driver of this workshop. And some components of dress were produced in the session. One example was a mini-skirt. Nkuli Mlangeni believed that the mini-skirt was a symbol of freedom, which she originally declared on a freedom brainstorming panel. In collaboration with Jonna Slappendel, the two women made a kilt-style hipster mini-skirt out of the ubiquitous plaid plastic shopping bag to be found in Johannesburg (image, p. 7). The design was held together with a range of pins. Jonna and Nkuli also made use of a panel of linen emblazoned with the word 'FREEDOM' that had been machine embroidered by Happiness. The embroiderer was engaged by the conference organisers to act as a 'stenographer', taking down text through machine embroidery during the keynote presentations. This skirt, produced so quickly and intuitively, embodied a range of issues about personal freedom. Historically, the mini-skirt was considered by some (globally) as a 'brazen sign of 1960s "generational conflict"' (Diawara 2004:9)¹¹, although for the female wearer at the time it was an empowering move for the independent female self to be in fashion. Today, fashion specialist Erica de Greef has observed, that to wear a mini-skirt in Johannesburg, for example, could warrant unwanted attention.¹² De Greef recounts that in 2008 a "mini-skirt wearing" girl was raped in Johannesburg. During the court case proceedings it was cited that 'mini skirts are not "our culture". This event is "commemorated" annually by the "slut-walk" to bring awareness to women's rights and speaking out about rape.¹³ Mlangeni's choice of the mini-skirt could be said to be her expression of freedom as a defiant act. An issue made more pointedly in Mlangeni's response to pose for the photographic documentation of herself in the mini-skirt. Mlangeni spontaneously raised her hand in a fist¹⁴ (image, p. 7) – the defiant symbol of the Black Power Movement and the African National Congress (ANC) against segregation and apartheid, respectfully, and the forthright act of Black Consciousness for both. In essence, Mlangeni showed her independent self.

The example of Nkuli's mini-skirt summarised, for me, the success of *In the Seams: The Aesthetics of Freedom Expressed*. It brought together so many elements of the event: words taken from the keynote papers; reflection and brainstorming about individual interpretation of the word 'freedom'; the sharing of skills and collaboration on ideas; it illustrated what positive freedom can achieve for the independent self, and we caught a



glimpse of the individual from the inside. What we had here, evocatively put by John, was 'constructive thinking with our hands'¹⁵.

To return to Morrison's reference to seams, that they should not show in the completion of creative work, *In the Seams: The Aesthetics of Freedom Expressed* argued, if subconsciously, that the seams should show as a tribute to the journey individuals and groups have taken to gain personal and political freedom, 'the fact of being free' (*The Oxford English Dictionary*). Seams are crucial construction mechanisms of clothing and accessories, they contribute to the 'many layers of significance' (Wilcox and Mendes 1991:10) of a garment. As the fashion designer Charles James has remarked about his own work, 'all my seams have meaning – they emphasise something about the body' (Wilcox and Mendes 1991:18). The workshop practices of 'Freedom is a Road Seldom Travelled by the Multitude' bore their seams with pride in this initial critical investigation of freedom. The limited time of one-and-a-half days of the open-space conference as a whole could only be the start of exploration, to inspire further research and more 'constructive thinking with our hands'. *In the Seams: The Aesthetics of Freedom Expressed* revealed that freedom has 'many layers of significance' in its contribution to the historical and cultural, social and political dynamics of the African diaspora.

¹ *It Takes a Nation of Millions to Hold Us Back* is the title of Public Enemy's groundbreaking hip hop album, released in 1988. The lyricist and rapper of the group, Chuck D, channeled painful history, struggle and the baffling sense of place for black people in the United States of America.

² These examples were originally included in my keynote presentation at the *In the Seams: The Aesthetics of Freedom Expressed* open-space conference to galvanise contributions from the workshop participants.

³ See also *We Want Freedom: A Life in the Black Panther Party*, and autobiographical account of Mumia Abu-Jamal's role in, and history of, the Black Panther movement. He states that 'Much African American history [is] rooted in this radical understanding that America is not the land of liberty, but a place of the absence of freedom, a realm of repression and insecurity.' (Abu-Jamal 2004:xiv).

⁴ *Nelson Mandela By Himself: The Authorised Book of Quotations* is described as "The first wholly accurate and authorized record of Nelson Mandela's most inspiring and historically important quotations" (Mandela 2011).

⁵ Vukile Zuma made this statement during the music session of the workshop 'Freedom is a Road Seldom Travelled by the Multitude' 8th October 2011, Center for Historical Reenactments, Johannesburg.

⁶ Syd Shelton took the photograph at Tulse Hill Comprehensive School, a working-class area of the South London Borough of Lambeth. Shelton captured the school boy as he walked

passed him, the teenager looked straight at the camera, that is at Shelton, with no fear of either. It was an attitude Shelton had observed as being part of the character of the pupils that attended the comprehensive.

⁷ Sociologist Paul Gilroy said of Rock Against Racism 'The hatred of racism and its organic counterpart – the love of music – were enough to hold together a dynamic anti-racist movement of young people. RAR's audience, the anti-racist crowd, was conceived not only as consumers of the various youth cultures and styles but as a powerful force for change which, in its diversity, created something more than the simple sum of its constitutive elements.' (Gilroy 1987:122).

⁸ <http://www.wattstax.com/backstory/production.html> Wattstax The Living Word: Wattstax 1972 Production Notes. Accessed 1st October 2011. The music festival was a showcase of African-American culture.

⁹ Johnny outlined this during the music session on 8th October 2011, Center for Historical Reenactments, Johannesburg.

¹⁰ Kemang Walehulere and Vukile Zuma explained during the music session of the workshop 'Freedom is a Road Seldom Travelled by the Multitude' that Spaza is a South African form of hip hop. Due to South Africa's vast range of vernaculars, different provinces came up with their own versions of hip hop to suit their languages. The isiXhosa version was named 'Spaza'. Spaza/hip hop references 'moments of resistance'. One of the founding members of the Spaza Movement, Driemanskap of Cape Town, who blend isiXhosa, with English and Cape Flats slang, understands that hip hop, more than any other musical art form, is about addressing important issues and representing where you're from.' (<http://pioneerunit.com/driemanskap/>). "Spaza' means 'hidden' in Zulu'. The term gained cultural significance when Spaza shops emerged during the Apartheid era to boycott white shops, and opposed the restrictions that were placed on black people to run their own businesses. Spaza outlets were, and still are, small shops found in the townships of South Africa. Some operate in homes, others as separate spaces (Bear et al. 2005:9). Residents can buy commodities such as bread, milk, rice, paraffin, sugar, etc., without having to go to the retail stores in town (Vukile Zuma in email correspondence with Carol Tulloch, 29 November 2011).

¹¹ This was quoted by Leslie W. Rabine in 'Fashionable Photography in Mid-Twentieth-Century Senegal' (2010).

¹² Erica de Greef discussed this in her exhibition *What is Your Dress Heritage?: Diversity in Identity* held at Museum Africa, Johannesburg, 2009. The exhibition developed out of a project initiated by de Greef for her third-year fashion students at the Fashion Institution LISOF, Johannesburg. She explained that: 'Third-year fashion design students ... were asked to investigate contemporary notions of identity and belonging, and how these notions relate to individual, shared and collective pasts. This collaborative research and public presentation initiative between LISOF and Museum Africa resulted in researched essays and visual narratives, with forty posters chosen for an exhibition; showcasing some of the cross-cultural, hybrid and transitional identities which reflect some of the broader social contexts of a post-apartheid South Africa.' (De Greef 2010).

¹³ Erica de Greef in email correspondence with Carol Tulloch, 30 November 2011. In 'Semantics of the Slut Walk' Gillian Schutte, explained that 'In 2008 hundreds of South African women donned their miniskirts and protested at the taxi rank where a young girl was brutally accosted by taxi drivers and hawkers for wearing a short denim skirt.' <http://iaj.org.za/semantics-of-the-slut-walk-but-gillian-schutte/>. See also 'Do Men Hold the Key to Fighting Rape in South Africa?' <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-15110750>.

¹⁴ Syd Shelton took this photograph of Nkuli Mlangeni. He recalls that she raised her arm and formed the fist immediately and voluntarily. In conversation with the writer 18th November 2011, Hove, England.

¹⁵ John in conversation with Carol Tulloch, 8th October 2011, Center for Historical Reenactments, Johannesburg.

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In the Seams: The Aesthetics of Freedom Expressed

Raél Jero Salley

In October 2011 the *Institute for Foreign Cultural Relations* (ifa) hosted a workshop in Johannesburg entitled: “In the Seams: The Aesthetics of Freedom Expressed”. The ifa stimulates and supports activities in the field of culture and arts by funding and promoting intercultural exchange. Adopting a broad and dynamic approach to visual culture, ifa advances active processes that promote new cultural meaning in local contexts. On this occasion, artists, arts professionals, students, and other local residents of South Africa were brought together at the *Center for Historical Reenactments*.

This venture is animated by the contemporary situation of South Africa, where post-1994 the formal achievement of democracy has opened battles between legal equality and everyday cultural challenges. Many of these struggles are about maintaining spaces in which all voices may be heard.¹ The legislatively established freedoms of artistic creativity and the ability to impart ideas raise intriguing questions about the meanings and shapes freedom should assume, particularly in the wake of formal victories. With the possibilities of increased representation in the arenas of formal politics, we may ask: What kinds of relationships will be established among actors in the realms of artistic and cultural production? In which territories and in what forms may artistic and political practices intersect? What visual forms will cultural desires translate? Specifically, to what extent might there be new poetics of freedom, ones that affirm the roles and voices of individual citizen actors?

Over two days of discussions, “In the Seams” participants investigated aspects of art, fashion, and style, in relation to concepts of personal expression and freedom. The workshop addressed various artistic forms, including the visual, musical, and performing arts. The activities were opened by

research presentations that introduced relevant themes, including: fabric and narrative; selfhood and otherness; styling and freedom. Hands-on art making activities were introduced in the context of self-presentation in order to demonstrate ways in which styling, fashion and dress are relevant, lively and integral aspects of expressing freedom.

My reflections in this brief commentary are shaped by the themes, which address the reality that in general, realms of socio-political activity and cultural expression join in the making of society. Specifically, if forms of black and Africana expression are to constitute aesthetics of freedom, such expressions need contextualization, and the implications of their constitution must be understood. The “In the Seams” workshop is an opportunity to make sometimes uneasy, yet productive forms of expression possible, while offering some context and reflection. Along the way, issues emerge from intersections of cultural production and power. This text is limited to outlining some possible challenges and offering a few examples of how artists are engaging the issues.

This essay, then, is sensitive to the ambivalences of “freedom”: its social effects, and opportunities produced by the idea. The first section links *style*, *fashion* and *dress* to *Africana thought*; the second approaches *aesthetics*, *expression* and *freedom*; the third notes connections between *Identity*, *Selfhood* and *Otherness*.

Style, Fashion and Dress

“In the Seams: The Aesthetics of Freedom Expressed” offered presentations by Elke aus dem Moore, Khwezi Gule, Leora Farber, Carol Tulloch, Jamika Ajalon, Philip Metz, and Unathi Sigenu, all of which engaged the aesthetics of freedom. The welcome address by Elke aus dem Moore, Head of the Art Department at ifa, emphasized a spirit of interchange between Europe and Africa, turning the spotlight on African talent, knowledge and expertise. Aus dem Moore paid tribute to collaborations such as “IMBUZI”² and “In the Seams” that give shape and life to contemporary visual production. Khwezi Gule, Chief Curator of the Hector Peterson Museum, Soweto both moderated discussion and made observations about the global circulation of fabric and fashion. Gule offered a series of conceptual frames through which African stylistic movements may be observed.³ The examples offer a way of thinking together Style, Fashion, Dress and the demands of *Africana*.⁴

Africana here refers to a multitude of geographical, historical, socio-political, and cultural differences and complexities that have defined and continue to define the realities of life of the many individuals and people identified as “African” and “of African descent” in locales throughout the



world. Gule finds an instance of this in the 19th-century British waistcoat, which changed stylistically in response to encounters with African styles. By linking Dress and Africana thought, Gule reminds us that fashions appear in social, historical and economic context, thereby making the activities of tailoring, image circulation and image display work as strategies of cultural interchange and personal expression. Gule reminds us that with the collapse of (neo) colonial institutions intended to shape values and practices, local African, Arab and Indian institutions and practices have been revived and new niches have opened up.

Visual practices open the spaces in which new values⁵ may be formed. For example, Kay Hassan's series of photographs depict shreds of clothing washed up on beaches in Mozambique. Best known for his large scale 'constructions' made of torn, reconfigured, and pasted pieces of printed billboard posters, Hassan works in numerous mediums to explore themes that include time, accumulation, rituals, trade, and waste. The Mozambique series of photographs are colorful abstract compositions that resemble several images simultaneously: Abstract Expressionist drip paintings, landscapes, and rubbish heaps. Such references raise issues of overproduction, urban life, poverty, distribution and globalization, but they also document a Mozambican ritual in which individuals throw clothes of a deceased person into the ocean. In artistic expression, Hassan mines a particular custom or fact of life that revolves around clothing and styling but weaves it into a larger narrative with universal implications.⁶

In the context of post-apartheid South Africa, Hudita Mura Mustafa argues that fashion features by illuminating struggles for individual expression, race and class equity, for the revival of African sources for South African identity, and for engagement with global economic and cultural arenas.⁷ Mustafa describes the design scene as having strengths and challenges. It is made up of both established and emerging designers, and their main challenge is in overcoming segregation by race, clientele and style of production. One guiding principle is the struggle to affirm individuality and African-ness, in addition to business survival. Mustafa writes:

For Africans, any individual revival has to be coupled with a reconstruction of the African identity as well as a transformation from a culture of protest to a culture of national reconstruction. The search for an affirmation of Africanness has long been mediated by the appropriation of other African cultures.⁸

Mustafa describes African and African diasporic influences from international markets and adaptations to the South African context and the development of ethnic traditions. Carol Tulloch, one of the "In the Seams" keynote speakers and workshop coordinators, addresses African diasporic influences. Tulloch argues that the terms of African diaspora, including "black" and "blackness", offer perspectives on significance, belonging and contribution. For Tulloch, "black" diasporic visual practices allow individuals to construct "a sincere self": the 'genuine feeling' an individual expresses in an autobiography as the way that individual wishes to present themselves to the public.⁹ What distinguishes the points of view put forward by "In the Seams," is the quality of attention to *Africana styling* as a way of approaching individual belonging.

Arguments about how to characterize the relationship between self-presentation and visual practices go back to antiquity. What is common to the debates is the belief that visual images play an essential role in social life. The imagined divides between selves and others; subjects and objects; and spectators and artworks work to shape social behavior. But they also confuse and disorient visual understanding. By the 18th century, such visual ideas are synthesized into worldviews animating the European intellectual movement called the Enlightenment. Enlightenment thought maintained vision as a primary tool for understanding reality. For these thinkers, vision requires a limited set of ideas that can be used for understanding. Enlightenment frameworks for looking intersected with debates over the body, and it is in this context that personal and cultural identity has been constructed, and issues of race, gender and sexuality emerge in tandem with the rise of science and optics. In the social, political, economic and cultural arenas, such ideas of difference became primary systems for knowledge.

One result is that the image of the black body as 'other' has long played an emblematic role for artists and theorists. Dubious hypotheses about vision became established categories that include fixed raced, gendered, sexual and cultural identities, and the legacy of such politics still persists today. I mention the history here only to point out that race, gender and sexuality are only a few modes of knowledge production among many modes available to perception. A broad range of methods cannot be discussed here because it would bring the essay around to historical visions of race, gender, sexuality and authority. However, it is important to note a disproportionate influence of a historical past that creeps forward to speak in the present's voice, and visions that understand this past in terms of both limitations imposed and freedoms won.¹⁰

Leora Farber's workshop presentation specifically addresses identity politics and the construction and representation of selfhood and otherness. "Beyond Self vs. Other: 'New' Ways of Conceptualising Selfhood and Otherness in the Artwork of Selected Young South African Artists" analyzes South African artistic production over the past decade. Farber identifies ways in which selfhood may be conceptualized through tropes of masquerade, mimicry and performance. Farber argues the artists Laurence Lemaona, Mary Sibande, Athi-Patra Ruga and Zanele Muholi are engaged in presenting the specifics of their South African identities. This visual presentation is a form of self-knowledge. Self-knowledge is the understanding of particular mental states, including one's beliefs, desires, and sensations. It also refers to knowledge about a persisting self – its ontological nature, identity conditions, or character traits.

We use our bodily senses to identify – after all, our daily activities are dependent on our bodily perceptions. When we look, our visual senses apprehend things and people as somehow relative to our own bodies. To maintain a sense of individual distinction, we wrestle the viewed thing to conceptual submission. We want visible things to work as signifiers, to represent, to stand as symbols for something familiar and well known. But identification perpetuates division. The labeling process creates an imagined divide between Self and Other. To reconsider the "Other," be it a person, thing or idea, is to consider what remains once a thing has been imaginatively separated out. Unusual phenomena are conscripted into organized structures that bind our bodies, memories and imaginations. These are, from start to finish, processes of separation, dismantling and construction. They produce fantastic divides, but through their designs artists and designers re-invent and re-imagine communities.

Aesthetics, Expression and Freedom

New imaginings and innovative styling work in cultural restructurings and contestations. Radical visions can produce new knowledge about historical legacies and ongoing power struggles. Hudita Nura Mustafa links such contestations to the transformations of the modern epoch: commodification, urbanization and globalization. Connections made between local ideals, institutions and material constraints shape the conditions by which global media impact society. It is by means of personal appearance that public and private selves are shaped.¹¹

Sarah Hughes provides an example of this shaping. An artist who explores personas in public and personal spaces, Hughes has traveled the globe over the span of more than 10 years, documenting people in one outfit in which they feel safe and comfortable and one in which they feel sexy. The “Safe and Sexy” project are photographs accompanied by audio interviews in which predominately women, and some men, answer questions about themselves and what makes them feel safe, sexy, vulnerable and powerful. Hughes has taken the project to Canada, Sweden, Brazil, South Africa and Swaziland. The project is a personal one: “I chose about six different personas and they got progressively provocative,” says Hughes. “If I was dressed as a business woman, I felt like there was a lot of eye contact, a lot of respect, everyone looked at me. And then with the sexy outfit or rather slutty outfit, I could see men spotting me with their families a block away, staring right at me. And then, when they would get close to me they would move as far as they could and try to, like, not look.”¹² Hughes attempts to look at society as a whole through portraiture and interviews that reveal the individual persona. Fashion and styling become domains for the negotiation of social relations, forums with potential to reassess issues of freedom and personal survival.

The observation that realms of formal political activity and cultural expression are joined in the making of society presupposes a conception of politics in which certain actors and sorts of practices are identified with the *making* of politics, and freedom itself. This is an unconventional understanding of politics that bypasses elected officials.¹³ In a richly interactive project, called *IMBUZI*, a term used in different ways to search for independence and access, Jamika Ajalon, Philip Metz and Unathi Sigenu negotiated the demands of art, politics and expression by engaging artists, and citizens in interactive performances, visual projects, and public interventions. The concept of performance offers a way to think together art, style, aesthetics and freedom and is a central one in aesthetics. Performance pertains to virtually every aspect of art, from its production and presentation, to the appreciation, understanding, and evaluation of particular works of art, and, ultimately, to our understanding of what a work of art is.¹⁴

Generally speaking, the concept of performance can refer to the execution of a range of human actions that can be understood and appreciated as aesthetic expressions. In this context, Sinethemba Twalo, Tulo Pule and Xiluva Khosa’s re-visioning of the second-hand clothing market in downtown Johannesburg as a site for research may be understood. Twalo, Pule and Khosa analyze the aesthetics of dress within alternative subcultures, and through their street-level intervention, relate to consumption and identity as expressed through both dress and the utilization and appropriation of second-hand clothing by local communities. The performance asks viewers to consider fluid and shifting meanings attached to dress, and debate ways in which they govern the body and shape desires. For Twalo, Pule and Khosa, ideas of transgression and self-stylization become key sites for agency and empowerment.

In short, visual expression offers incredible cultural promise. Despite differences across Africana contexts, the workshop “In the Seams: The Aesthetics of Freedom Expressed” offers critical understanding of artistic and stylistic agency. South Africa is the site for collaboration and interchange and a space to expand the languages of style, fashion and dress and produce new and innovative understandings of aesthetics and freedom. One discussant made the links this way: “There can only be style when there is peace.” “In the Seams: The Aesthetics of Freedom Expressed” claims the right for artists to speak for themselves and to present their selves and communities with confidence.

¹ For further discussion of the challenges of cultural production in South Africa, see the introduction to *Positions: Contemporary Artists in South Africa* Peter Anders and Matthew Krouse, eds. (Göttingen, Germany: Steidl Verlag 2010)

² “IMBUZI” was a workshop in the context of the travelling exhibition “prêt-à-partager – a transcultural exchange in art, fashion and sports” organised by the Institute for Foreign Cultural Relations (ifa) held in Capetown in 2010.

³ Khwezi Gule “The Stories that Fabric Tells”

⁴ See Outlaw, Jr., Lucius T., “Africana Philosophy”, *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (Winter 2010 Edition)*, Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL = <<http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2010/entries/africana/>>.

⁵ For a discussion of style in African social and economic context, see Hudita Nura Mustafa “Sartorial Ecumenes: African Styles in a Social and Economic Context” in *The Art of African Fashion*, Els van der Plas and Marlous Willemsen eds. (Prince Claus Fund and African World Press: The Netherlands, Eritrea, 1998).

⁶ Hassan writes: “Our lives have always been torn and put together and torn – people have always been pushed around. You see it in the streets, in the kids begging, those eyes, the way they look at you. Imagine being a parent, and having kids that have to be fed, but you have no money, – so what do you do – you have to commit a crime. But I don’t only reflect what is happening in South Africa, it’s a reflection of what is happening in this world.” <http://www.jackshainman.com/exhibition49.html>

⁷ Hudita Nura Mustafa “Sartorial Ecumenes: African Styles in a Social and Economic Context” in *The Art of African Fashion*, Els van der Plas and Marlous Willemsen eds. (Prince Claus Fund and African World Press: The Netherlands, Eritrea, 1998), 40

⁸ *Ibid.*, 41

⁹ Carol Tulloch “Style-Fashion-Dress: From Black to Post-Black” in *Fashion Theory* (Vol 14:3), pp 273–304

¹⁰ For introduction of the black body as “other,” in visual representation, see Michael D. Harris *Colored Pictures: Race and Visual Representation* (Chapel Hill: Duke University Press, 2003); In relation to visual and art history, see Darby English *How to See a Work of Art in Total Darkness* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2007); In philosophy and politics, see Robert Gooding-Williams *Look, A Negro: Philosophical Essays on Race, Culture and Politics* (New York: Routledge, 2006)

¹¹ Mustafa describes this shaping activity as “sartorial ecumene.” This is productive terminology: “ecumene” comes from the Greek *oikoumenē*, which means inhabited (pres. part. middle of *oikein* to inhabit), from *oikos* or house, habitation and vicinity. Mustafa uses the definition of “sartorial ecumenes” to examine diverse cosmopolitanisms and identify modern, African fashion systems. For our purposes, reference to permanently inhabited areas of the earth offers a local specificity in the context of South Africa. <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/ecumene>

¹² <http://www.pbs.org/wnet/need-to-know/culture/video-safe-and-sexy-the-persona-project/8755/>

¹³ Richard Iton describes contrasts between popular politics and a Rustinian model. Bayard Rustin is the American Civil Rights organizer who championed a vision of politics as operating through formal, organizationally supported and institutional channels wherein social and economic welfare gets to be inextricably linked with civil rights. See Richard Iton *In Search of the Black Fantastic* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010), 5, 82; See also

¹⁴ RoseLee Goldberg. “Performance art.” *Grove Art Online. Oxford Art Online*. Nov. 22, 2011 <<http://www.oxfordartonline.com/subscriber/article/grove/art/T066355>>.

Hey You Second-hand !!!!!

Reflections on Post-Apartheid Identities and Consumption

Sinethemba Twalo

FANTASY IS IN VOGUE BECAUSE THE BLACK REALITY IS FAR TOO UNBEARABLE TO CONFRONT TRUTHFULLY

– *Andile Mngxitama*

As the brief had alluded to, this particular segment of the conference, or rather this particular workshop attempted to be both a visual documentation of, and in some form a theoretical inquiry into the construction of post-apartheid black identities. Bear in mind that what is referred to within the paper, and what was exhibited both through conduct of the workshop and through the preliminary work, was and is subjective. Before execution of the workshop, preliminary work was undertaken by the “Archive Collective” to begin discussion into the heterogeneity of meanings and signs attached to a second-hand garment. Initially the impetus of the project itself was influenced by how creative classes interacted with unregulated but demarcated spaces or precincts within the city.

The second-hand market on Devilliers Street, which is located between the Noord Street taxi rank and a second alternative entrance to Park Station, was of interest precisely because of its seemingly unregulated features. The precinct itself is about five blocks and with regards to gender composition of the space, initial research had found that a majority of the traders were black males. Interestingly enough though, consumers of the said apparel were mostly black females. In terms of racial composition, the market predominantly caters to black working-class communities. The intent of the intervention was to contravene the logic governing these demarcated spaces. We imagined the idea of an open-space conference opening up and allowing for there to be a brief interaction of divergent experiences, and we felt that the fleeting temporality of artistic intervention would allow for that desired engagement to organically occur.

With reference in particular to second-hand clothing, a feature or element of second-hand clothing that interested us were the series of exchanges and meanings a garment goes through, before and after appropriation by these said creative classes. Our research as a collective initially got us interested in the various stages or life cycles of a garment. We were interested in the politics surrounding garment production and the trading of that said apparel. So we were looking at the initial conceptualisation of a garment by a design firm or merchandiser, its production phase and the politics surrounding that (for instance the outsourcing of cheaper and precarious forms of labour in developing countries). We were also interested in the phenomenon of consumption and its implications in a late modernist African context.

The workshop sought to interrogate, to some degree, how consumption had decreased the viability of individuals constructing and designing

their own apparel. Also of interest was and is the diversity of values attached to a garment. The garment having a use value which ultimately has a functionality and aesthetic value. We sought to analyse the meanings attached to a garment as a mode of expression and also how this related to the performative nature of styling that garment and the concomitant implications for the body. Of interest was the variety of emotions that said garment induced from the dresser as the signifier and to the audience or signified you were or are consciously or subconsciously speaking to. We felt that any study into or theorization about identities needed to express or understand, as its starting point, the complex and often multiple identities the self appropriates and performs, and how people can utilise clothing to reflect a multiplicity of selves. With the work we under-





took, the intent was premised on reflecting on artistic praxis as a complex negotiation between the individual and structure. The work sought to elucidate through imaging and intervention the temporality and fleeting nature of our interactions within the city.

Another aspect of interest was the Foucauldian (2000) notion of social control and its relation to social institutions. In our case we were interested in the idea of the garment as a mode or avenue of social control, and how it could be used to reflect the interests of particular social institutions, for instance educational institutions. We are interested in how something as seemingly apolitical as a uniform can work as a form of policing or regulation of action: we are also interested in how clothing can then be utilised to disseminate and perpetuate a particular ideology.

We also sought to look at the garment's having an exchange value, the garment as signifier, as a form of fast fashion if it may be and the garment as charitable exchange – noting also that normally that charitable exchange is mediated within an environment that offers some form of incentive. Furthermore of importance is analysing the nature of social relations as these series of exchanges occur. We are interested in the semiotics of apparel and in particular the semiotics of the second-hand garment.

Inspiration was derived from the work of theorist and semiologist Roland Barthes: we were seeking to interrogate the variety of signs and symbols attached to the language of a second-hand garment both by those who trade it and by the communities who consume it. Barthes (1983), in his seminal work, entitled *The Fashion System*, alludes to how a garment and its associated meanings can be transformed into representation by means

of certain operators which he alludes to as shifters. His work attempts to analyse how the garment changes meaning as it shifts from the real (the tangible) to image (how it is portrayed and perceived), from the real (the tangible) to language (how people speak about it and its representation in text), from image (how it is portrayed) to language (how it is spoken about and represented in text). We are intrigued by what experiences the signifier – in this case, the individual wearing the garment – attempts to relate.

We are fully reflexive of the fact that these signs are not a given, they occur and are produced in particular institutional settings and are governed by particular processes which are geographical, socio-economic and cultural in orientation. Looking more into the idea of the signifier and signified, and how it relates to language, we were interested in the various terms utilised to confer meaning to second-hand garments in an African setting, and how these phrases and names in themselves had some political connotation that could be attached to them. For instance in Nigeria second-hand clothing is referred to as *okrinka* – or bend-down boutique; in Mozambique, initially they were termed *roupes Reagan* and the name changed to *roupes de calamidades*. That naming in itself has some political connotation especially when you historically locate the proliferation of second-hand clothing in Africa in the 80s, and its relation to development aid and also socio-economic policies proposed by international financial institutions (ifi). In Tanzania they are referred to as *kafa ulaya* which translates as 'the clothes of the dead whites'; in Zimbabwe they are called *mupedzanhamo*, which means 'where all problems end'; they are known as *friperie* in Mali, *mivumba* in Uganda, *salaula* in Zambia, and so on.

With regard to identity we had envisioned articulating a 21st-century afro-intellectual dandyism which subverted and re-articulated historically constructed stereotypical notions about the black other. The impetus for the work is premised on foregrounding those narratives of the South African black experience that remain marginal within popular cultural discourses. Our work is informed by a recurring theme of presence and invisibility, which is derived from the movie *Space Is the Place* featuring the musician Sun Ra. One particular quote caught our interest, where Sun Ra asserts to a group of black youth:

'I'm not real, I'm just like you. [I]... don't exist in this society. ... [W]e are both myths. I do not come to you as a reality, I come to you as [a] myth because that is what black people are: myths. ... I'm actually a presence sent to you by your ancestors.'

Inspiration is also derived from a multitude of African expressive forms, whether it be through the image, or new forms of post-colonial African orality as expressed through words, music and performance. Individuals such as Credo Mutwa, Fela Kuti, Papa Wemba, Thomas Sankara, Cheik Anta Diop, and others who fashioned new ways of relating to and analysing diverse African realities inspire us. Of importance for us is looking into how the transgressive and performative nature of self-stylisation can be articulated into a new form of cultural ritual particularly in relation to the black experience.

Furthermore, through documentation, performance, intervention and parody, an attempt is made to critique how black bodies are represented in discourse within the South African cultural context. The work is in opposition to a popular cultural discourse constantly alluding to conspicuous consumption as its driving force. We are however fully reflexive and aware of the fact that marginalisation of alternative creative classes is in some sense reified by this opposition to a public discourse, which is often static and narrow in its imagination of the so-called black experience

With the preliminary shoots undertaken, which were an attempt to begin discussion into the themes we were engaging with in the workshop, we sought to document a colourful world of pastiche in opposition to a cacophony of rhetoric used to justify the increasing gentrification of the inner city. The shoots were in some form an artistic critique of how the city is represented within dominant discourses as advanced by the variety of development agencies, public-private partnerships and private investors with a vested interest in creating fortified exclusive enclaves of creativity. As a collective we are interested in archiving, visually and aurally, Johannesburg as it is before gentrification. Of importance is looking at how in their present form these spaces we utilise reflect a beauty in their dilapidation which is often unacknowledged. We also sought, through intervention, to disestablish normative and idealised ways of interacting with these particular spaces.

The work is an interrogation into how commercially mediated cultural groupings or environments are appropriating spaces within the city. We envisioned in some form the workshop as a parody of the weird and a critical questioning of this present juncture. The work attempts to be a re-imagination of identity and of how the utilisation of marginal space is informed by a praxis which attempts to foreground these parochial narratives as an avenue to lament against the ever-increasing dystopia created by both corruption and ineptitude.

The idea of holding shoots and interventions in marginal and derelict spaces, and utilising second-hand apparel is informed by the notion of attempting to re-imagine how these buildings, spaces and clothing can be

utilised creatively to offer possibilities and new representations. Another important aspect the workshop sought to discern was looking into how consumption has become an important signifier for identity construction, and how consumption has come to dictate various aspects of social life. Within this present conjuncture it is rare to imagine activities that are not governed with the intent of monetary exchange or under the dictate of the market.

To conclude, the workshop is understood as a site for action, style, pedagogical collaborative intervention and research. The intent was for it to be non-hierarchical. The idea was to facilitate collaboration between participants and the guides. Processes included brainstorming of the initial idea, the purchasing and redesigning of garments sourced from the market. The intention was also to have some form of intervention that would be organised in collaboration with the participants.

This included the creation of a banner with the words 'clothes of the dead whites'. Participants would then march from the Center of Historical Reenactments to the market. When in the market, the participants then engaged and interacted with traders and shoppers. Although transient, the intervention was successful at disestablishing during that short time the normative regulations that governed that particular space. The intent was never to prescribe a particular way of doing things; it was premised on allowing for active engagement and reflection on the political nature of the second-hand clothing chain and also how creatives utilise and appropriate spaces within the city. An important issue for us was documenting the space in its current state.

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The International Trade in Second-Hand Clothing

Olumide Abimbola

From the West to West Africa

A normal day of clothes shopping for many families in Lagos, Nigeria, involves a trip to the Yaba market, one of the numerous second-hand clothing markets in the city. Stalls made of wood and corrugated iron sheets house rows and bundles of second-hand clothing. Many of the items of clothing are carefully laundered and hung on racks; others are piled on the floor of the stalls. In front of the stalls stand young men and women, pieces of second-hand clothing on hangers in hand, calling on potential customers to come and patronise their wares. Nearby, in another section of the market, there are stalls where rucksacks, small purses and all sorts of bags are sold. In still another section, shoes of varying life stages are either paired up in neat rows or are stacked together. Like the clothing, the ones that are neatly set in rows are usually of better quality than the ones in stacks. In many cases, they are designer labels: this market is one place where one can pick up a Hugo Boss shirt – 'original', as one is often reminded by the vendors – for less than a fraction of what it would cost in a shop in a European city. But more often than not, they are simply imported Western cast-offs.

In most cases, the pieces of clothing found in the market in Lagos start their journey in the homes of European and American families. In Germany, items of clothing that are no longer wanted by their owners are packed into bags that are then deposited into roadside boxes. From there, they are taken to warehouses where they will be cleaned and sorted. Some of them are sold in the second-hand clothing shops that dot the streets of many German cities, but a large percentage are baled and exported to developing countries.

In Britain, the competition for this trade is fierce. Quite a number of charity organisations cover a large share of their operating costs from donations of second-hand clothing. Some rely on walk-ins – whereby donors of second-hand clothing take their pieces of clothing into a charity store. Needless to say, not all of the clothing that is taken into a charity shop is sold there. A large percentage ends up being sold off to those who are described in the textile recycling industry as "commercial textile recyclers". These are commercial organisations that collect, sort, bale and export second-hand clothing.

Some charities actually award franchises to 'charity fundraisers'. These organisations collect second-hand clothing on behalf of charities, and pay the charities a certain percentage of the value of what they collect. The most sophisticated charities make collections by themselves and have their own sorting and exporting firms. They sell some of their collections – usually a relatively small amount – in their shops. The rest is sent to their processing factories, where the pieces of clothing are packed together and

baled for exportation. Commercial textile recyclers, who buy clothing that charities without their own sorting firms cannot sell in their shops, also make collections in places which English municipalities have designated as recycling areas. Bales of second-hand clothing are exported to East European, South Asian and African countries.

In Nigeria, Togo and Benin – and in some other West African countries – Igbo traders from South-eastern Nigeria dominate the second-hand clothing trade. Some of them are importers who have established and maintained trading connections with European and American second-hand clothing firms; others are retailers who sell bales of second-hand clothing to other Igbo traders who then retail these items of second-hand clothing. Because the importation of second-hand clothing is banned in Nigeria, most of the customers of the Igbo traders based in Cotonou, Benin, are Nigerians. They cross the border to buy bales of second-hand clothing which are then smuggled into Nigeria. Therefore, most of the second-hand clothing that is found in Nigeria is smuggled into the country.

The trade connects Western families with their counterparts in developing countries in an intricate web of desire and aspiration. Most of the time, on the part of the Westerner, this takes the form of a desire to help people who are less fortunate. Some assume that these less fortunate people are poor people in the country of the donors. Others assume that the less fortunate people are citizens in the developing world. Most people do not know that there is an active international trade in second-hand clothing. One could argue, and some have, that this is a more sustainable and fruitful relationship than one of pure donation, where the consumers simply receive the clothing for free. For, as it is at the moment, there is a wide network of traders that is built around donated second-hand clothing. This network includes different actors, ranging from family-owned commercial textile recycling firms to small second-hand clothing-importing companies, and extends to individually-owned second-hand clothing stalls. The industry provides a livelihood for them, one that would not exist if the clothing were given for free. Besides, it is definitely more dignified to purchase what one needs than to receive it as a handout.

The clothing also satisfies the clothing desires of consumers. The reasons for this are not limited to affordability. To be sure, there are a lot of people who consume second-hand clothing because they cannot afford to buy new clothing. There are, however, others who go to shop for second-hand clothing because they believe that this is where they can find 'original' designer labels. In a country like Nigeria, where most of the ready-made clothing is imported from China, a lot of the clothes available in the market are cheap Chinese knock-offs. Many people therefore prefer to buy designer labels from second-hand clothing shops because they can be sure that what they obtain there is original and good-quality clothing. One

could call them slaves of fashion, in search of authenticity – much like Americans and Europeans who go to second-hand clothing stores to buy vintage clothing.

To do or not to do

Often, when people learn that I wrote a Ph.D. dissertation on the trade in second-hand clothing, I am asked whether second-hand clothing is good or bad. There really is no simple answer to this question. When I dig deeper to find out where this question comes from, I often get an economic argument, one that assumes that second-hand clothing ruins the textile industry in African countries. I also find that this sometimes stems from the assumption that second-hand clothing is given away for free in poor African nations. If these assumptions are true, it stands to reason to further assume that local textile makers could not compete with whatever is given for free. During my research into the trade, I have not found anybody who has made any convincing economic argument for how the trade harms local textile industries. In fact, what I have found is that in the past decade, since China became a dominant global force in the textile industry, second-hand clothing traders have been complaining that cheap, low quality Chinese products have been killing the trade in second-hand clothing. In other words, if competing commodities are killing the local textile industry, cheap Chinese-manufactured clothing seems to be a more realistic culprit than second-hand clothing.

The point is really that there is no one single factor responsible for the decline in the textile sector in a lot of countries. However, two chief contributors to that decline are subsidies for the production of cotton in the United States of America, and incentives that amount to subsidies which Chinese central and regional governments offer producers and exporters. These two factors make it extremely difficult for local textile manufacturers that do not enjoy such luxuries to compete against products from manufacturers that do. And, in the world of the World Trade Organisation, where only those who have economic and political clout can afford to flout WTO rules, poor countries can do very little to protect themselves from imported commodities. In addition, the acceptance of neo-liberal restructuring policies often results in the hollowing out of the state on the one hand, and the removal of barriers to trade on the other. These barriers are usually incentives that could be and were given to local manufacturers and measures that were taken to protect local industries. In other words, the state of the textile industries is a result of a complex mix of factors. However, just so it does not seem as if I am externalising all the blame, mismanagement of local textile factories, poor oversight, and other problems within countries have also contributed to the decline in textile industries in different countries.

One way in which I try to answer the question regarding whether the trade in second-hand clothing is good or bad is by referring to the livelihoods that are created around it. The traders who handle it are able to derive economic value from it and make an income that give them the economic tools to care for their family, send their children to school, and very often provide some of the things that one could argue that a modern state should. This, though, is not intended to present a rosy picture, for there is something that makes the consumption of clothing that has been used by someone else somewhat less desirable than the consumption of new clothing. It becomes even more difficult to fully accept second-hand clothing when one thinks of the pride that comes from the use of a commodity

that is acquired when it is new. Of course, as I wrote above, some of those who consume used clothing do so because of the assumption that this is how they can get high-quality designer products. Most of those who patronise second-hand clothing actually do aspire to the consumption of new, good-quality products. This is often seen in the way in which consumers quickly abandon buying used clothing once they are able to afford new clothing. Those who used to buy second-hand clothing talk with pride about the fact that they no longer buy it. It ties in with a comment that was made to me, in an interview, by an officer in Nigeria's Ministry for Commerce. When I asked him why he thought Nigeria should never lift the ban on the importation of second-hand clothing (he had earlier said he thought the ban should never be lifted), he replied that Nigerians should not be clothed in the wastes of others. For him, the issue was the fact that one loses a certain kind of pride when one accepts hand-me-downs, even if one has paid for them. That, I think, is a more useful premise for critiquing the consumption of second-hand clothing. It takes the argument away from the economic realm, where issues are quickly reduced to cost and benefit, and where lofty things like pride are often not accounted for.



The Stories that Fabric Tells

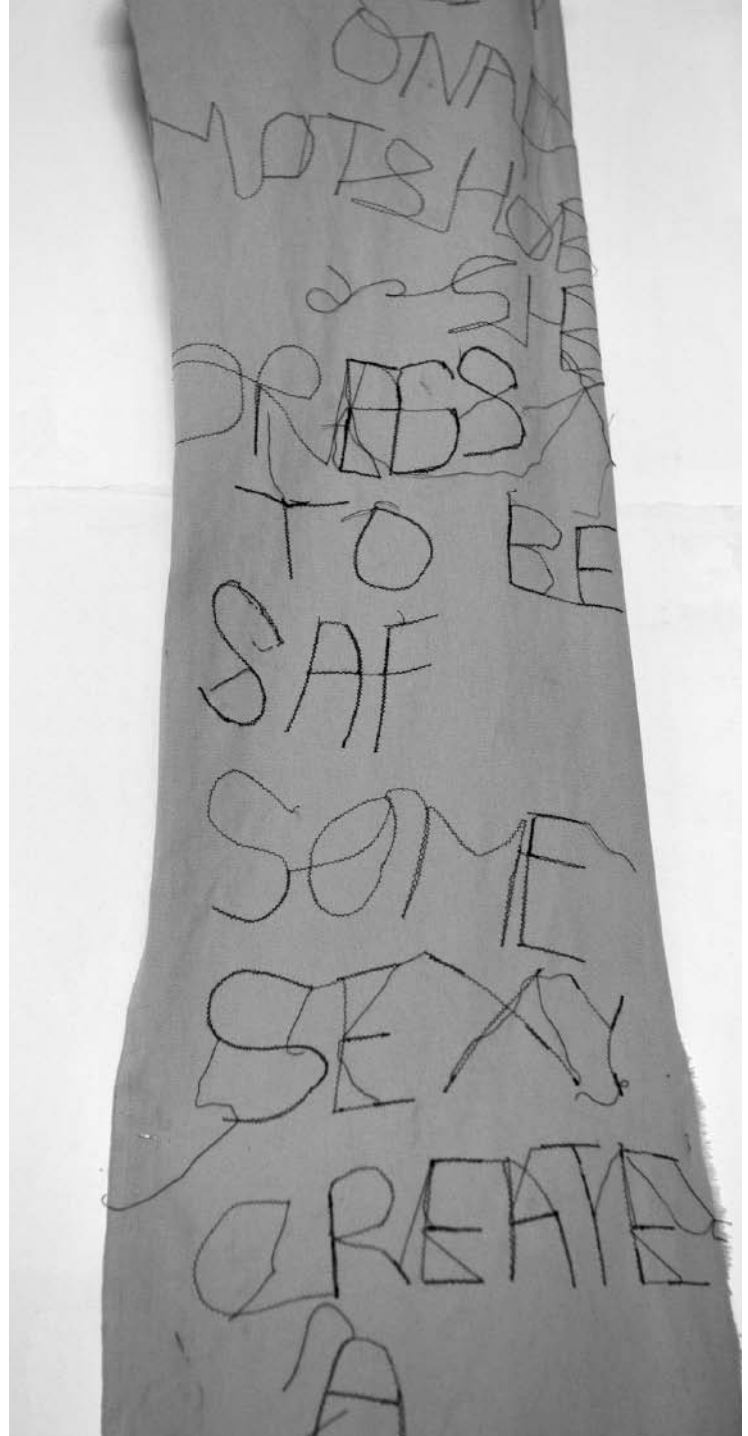
Khwezi Gule

I entitled my text *the stories that fabric tells* because I could not find a unifying theme that could tie up all of the fragments that I wanted to write about. This text focuses on some of the ways in which clothes, textiles and adornments speak about much more than the limited range of functions they are originally intended for and how they move from one place to another.

By now we are quite familiar with the complex narrative around the 'African' fabrics that Yinka Shonibare¹ uses in his work. For some time the Atlantic trade routes formed a sinister triangle that became the backbone of, in particular, the British Empire. The triangle involved on the one side the transportation of slaves from the west coast of Africa to the Americas and the Caribbean². The second side of the triangle involved the transportation of raw materials to Europe and in the case of cotton, to Britain where these raw materials were transformed into textiles and consumer goods and then sold to domestic consumers but also increasingly to expatriates, colonisers and settlers and increasingly natives in the colonies as well. Thus the three sides of the triangle were: the middle passage, taking raw materials from Africa to Europe and manufactured goods from Europe to Africa. Without this triangle the venture of mercantile economies of the colonial era would have been unprofitable. That is the first fragment.

The second fragment has to do with the role of Christianity and missionaries as well as the introduction of natives in the colonies to the cash economy, allowing them to be consumers of these products, including imported fabrics. The beaded waistcoat could be one example. With the British annexation of Zululand in 1897 and the introduction of the head tax (ukhandampondo as it was called in isiZulu³) which had to be paid in pounds, many Zulu men were forced to go to seek employment. Many went to the mining towns like Johannesburg, others went to the port city of Durban to work in the shipyards and as domestic workers for the settlers. As domestic servants the men's traditional Zulu dress was perceived by their Christian masters as showing too much skin and so they were given waistcoats to cover up. These western clothes they would wear with their beadwork or what has been called Zulu love letters⁴. Gradually these were incorporated into the design of the waistcoats, producing a hybrid form of clothing. Thus some of the things we often think about as being traditional can more accurately be described as modern objects.

Another example is the fabric that is worn in many parts of South Africa and is mostly associated with Sotho traditional dress. The fabric called isiShoeshoe was introduced to South Africa by the Germans. In the 1840s it was presented to King Moshoeshoe of the baSotho⁵ by French missionaries. The fabric was first manufactured in what was then Czechoslovakia and then shipped to South Africa. Later on the factory that produced this fabric moved to Manchester in England. Another factor that encouraged



the use of Western fabrics by the African population was their availability and the fact that they were cheap. And even though these fabrics had a European origin, they became an integral part of African life.

The third thread in this story involves beadwork that is so much a part of the material culture of many African societies especially in countries along the eastern coast of Africa. The trade on the Indian Ocean is one that has not received as much attention as the more recent trade on the Atlantic coast of Sub-Saharan Africa. This earlier trade, often referred to as the Arab trade, dates as far back as the 9th century AD and is responsible for the advent of a number of city-states along the eastern seaboard. It was this trade that introduced glass beads to Southern Africa. Prior to that, beads in this region had been made of primarily of stones, ostrich egg shells and bone, and this trade eventually led to the kind of complex variety of patterns, designs and uses in beadwork that we see today.

The fourth fragment is inspired by the work of the artist Kay Hassan⁶. In the exhibition 'Urbanation' that was held in Johannesburg in 2008, Hassan presented a series of photographs that he had taken in Isle de Mozambique where an amalgamation of thousands of bits of cloth are constantly washed up along the coast of the island. These fragments are the remnants of clothes that people have thrown into the sea. As the artist explained, when clothes get used up, many people residing on the mainland throw these old clothes into the sea, and when a person dies their relatives also throw the deceased person's clothes into the sea. These clothes are then carried by ocean currents and deposited on the coast of the island and are constantly dragged out to sea and brought back by the rising and falling tides.

A similar story pertains to some interesting uses of thousands of flip-flops or beach sandals that have been found washed up on the coastal areas in northern Kenya. These beach sandals are part of a global problem of garbage that is forever floating on the world's oceans because of over-production and waste. Some of these beach sandals are carried by ocean currents from as far away as Malaysia. Beach sandals, because of their cheap production costs, are worn by many people who cannot afford shoes, but also by throngs of tourists. But they are made from the plastic PVC and are not biodegradable. Thus, they end up in landfills and increasingly on the oceans. Some environmental groups have introduced projects to deal with this phenomenon by transforming the colourful beach sandals into a variety of products including mats and key rings.

The final thread came about as I watched the news on TV about a demonstration that happened in Durban and Cape Town called the *Slut Walk*. The slut walk had been initiated in Toronto and has taken place in other cities across the world. The Slut Walk was intended to protest against the idea that the way women dress is an invitation to sexual violence. This reminded me of a project by the artist Sarah Hughes who asked women to dress alternately in a 'safe' outfit and a 'sexy' outfit. What I found interesting about some of the photographs that she took was that it was not clear to me which was the safe and which was the sexy, and at times it seemed as if the sexy was the safe and vice versa. What it also raised was the idea that policing of behaviour and bodies does not necessarily only happen from the outside and that self-policing is as much a part of our self-expression and our identity.

And this leads me to some of the questions that the workshop 'In the Seams' raises around the idea of freedom.

Is the idea of freedom on a grand scale as it was seen in modernity still relevant? Or have the apparent failure of ideology, the triumphalism of capital and the fragmentation of society limited our notion of freedom to

personal survival strategies and personal creative expression such as fashion? If this is so, what are the larger social implications of these personal freedoms that seem to permeate youth culture?

¹ The fabrics are used in Shonibare's installations such as *The Scramble for Africa* (2003), where mannequins are seated around a table alluding to the Berlin Conference of 1884, where parts of Africa were partitioned to the major European powers of the time. The figures are dressed in Dutch cloth styled according to Victorian dress. However what is normally referred to as Dutch cloth owes its designs to batik cloth that is Indonesian in origin, but it was largely marketed to Africans and illustrates the tangled histories of colonial manufacturing, labour and commerce.

² In the journey that took slaves to the Americas hundreds of slaves were shackled to one another in unsanitary conditions, many dying of disease and starvation along the way. The perilous journey has come to be known as middle-passage.

³ isiZulu is the language that is mostly spoken by the Zulu people of South Africa whose kingdom was located around the eastern seaboard and further inland of South Africa now called KwaZulu-Natal.

⁴ 'Zulu loveletters', as they are now called, are beaded ornaments worn by men; they were traditionally given to the young men by their young maidens. These beaded messages have a complex system of meaning depending on a combination of shapes and colours to produce a variety of meanings and thus functioned not just as adornments but also as letters of sorts.

⁵ The baSotho area people whose kingdom is located in today's country of Lesotho whose founding monarch was King Moshoeshe (c. 1786–1870).

⁶ Kay Hassan is a multimedia artist from South Africa whose work deals mostly with the effects of migrant labour, urban squalor and forced migration.

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Authors

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completed a Ph.D. at the Max Planck Institute for Social Anthropology, Germany. During his doctoral research he followed, documented and analysed the international trade in second-hand clothing, with special focus on the British-West Africa circuit. He has an MA in Development Studies from Uppsala University, Sweden, and a BA in Communication Studies from the University of Ibadan, Nigeria.

Elke aus dem Moore

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Khwezi Gule

is a curator and writer based in Johannesburg. He currently heads the Hector Pieterse Memorial and Museum and the Kliptown Open Air Museum. Prior to that Gule held the position of curator: contemporary collections at the Johannesburg Art Gallery where he worked on a number of exhibitions, speaking engagements, writing for publications such as exhibition catalogues, newspapers and magazines.

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is an artist and curator. She has worked on a number of different projects such as the exhibition and workshop 'prêt-à-partager' (ifa 2008 / 2009), the interdisciplinary program series 'Re/Positioning – Critical Whiteness / Perspectives of Color' (NGBK, 2009) and the exhibition 'Making Mirrors – of Body and Gaze' (NGBK, 2011). Micossé-Aikins is also a PH.D. candidate at the Muthesius Academy of Fine Arts and Design in Kiel, Germany.

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Sinethemba Twalo

is a writer, stylist, dj and artist living and working between Johannesburg and Pretoria, South Africa. He is a member of the Johannesburg based artist collective *ARCHIVE*. His work as a member of the now defunct collective 'The Mothership Arts Collective' was nominated for a South African Music Award (SAMA) in 2011 for best album packaging for Nomsa Mazwai's debut album "NOMIUPASTA"

Publisher

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Elke aus dem Moore, 2012

This multidisciplinary conference took place on the 7th and 8th of October 2011 at the Center for Historical Reenactments in Johannesburg as part of the exhibition "prêt-à-partager – a transcultural exchange in art, fashion and sports" and was organised by the Institute for Foreign Cultural Relations (ifa).

www.ifa.de

In the Seams: The Aesthetics of Freedom Expressed

Concept: Sandrine Micossé-Aikins, Jamika Ajalon, Philip Metz, Unathi Sigenu

Talks

Address of Welcome

by *Elke aus dem Moore, Head of the Art Department at the Institute of Foreign Cultural Relations (ifa), Stuttgart*

'In the Seams: The Stories that Fabric Tells'

by *Khwezi Gule, Chief Curator of the Hector Pieterse Museum, Soweto*

'Beyond Self vs. Other: "New" Ways of Conceptualising Selfhood and Otherness in the Artwork of Selected Young South African Artists'

by *Leora Farber, Director of the Research Centre Visual Identities in Art and Design, Johannesburg*

'Freedom is a Road Seldom Travelled by the Multitude'

by *Carol Tulloch, Reader in Visual, Material and Diaspora Studies at the CCW Graduate School*

Moderator: Khwezi Gule

Workshops

'Hey you Second-Hand!!!!!! Reflections on Post-Apartheid Identities and Consumption'

A Workshop by *Sinethemba Twalo, Tulo Pule, Xiluva Khosa*

'Freedom is a Road Seldom Travelled by the Multitude'

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