BRIDGET BAKER
JAMES BECKETT
MICHAEL BLUM
THEMBINKOSI GONIWE
CINTHIA MARCELLE
JEAN MEERAN
JO O’CONNOR
GREGG SMITH
Very Real Time is a series of interventions and an artists’ exchange that took place in Cape Town in September, 2003. Seven artists, South African and overseas, were invited to spend one month developing projects in the city. The opportunity to organise an event like this first arose at the Rijksakademie van Beeldende Kunsten in Amsterdam. I was working there in 2001 and 2002 and got to know about the RAIN Network which had helped artists’ initiatives to get set up in various parts of the world. I was very keen to work in Cape Town again. Having grown up there I am familiar with the constraints of working there as an artist and the complex issues facing the development of its society.

The opportunity to invite foreign and local artists to develop work in this city is valuable as an exchange on different levels. For one thing I knew the ‘fresh blood’ of new visitors would be welcome. For another it seemed impossible for foreigners to understand this crazy place with such a warped history and psychology in a short time span. I was looking for a way to make the encounters genuine, fun and at times messy. As can be witnessed in these pages, the results had some uncomfortable moments. This publication aims to acknowledge the relevance of the perceptions of all those involved.

The initial premise was to try and create an equal balance between the imprint made by the artist on the place and the imprint made by the place on the artist. To allow for more personal and less generalised responses to the place and to allow for relationships to form outside of the normal cliques of the Cape Town art scene and network.

The focus in Very Real Time has been on projects of a non-gallery (but not anti-gallery) and non-object based nature, preferring to concentrate on forms of exchange which are primarily social and personal. Projects were selected with the desire to promote art of a socially engaged nature, without setting preconditions of large-scale inclusivity or overt moral, political or social relevance in the work. One of the good things of South Africa’s new constitution is that art of a socially engaged nature is well supported, but at risk of meaning being shifted away from the artist’s subjectivity towards more righteous and generalised sentiments, catering to such a broad audience that in the end nothing is left for the individual experience. I hope that projects first of all engaged viewers and participants in their own personal realities in a way that was both insightful and challenging, for both the artists and whoever else happened to be there.
**Very Real Time** (Very Real Time) represents an ambitious attempt to bring together a number of tendencies that characterise artistic practice in the post colonial South Africa. For many South African artists the collapse of the boundary that set things apart under the apartheid regime has necessitated a radical relocation of their work. Whilst a plethora of differences has emerged, these are all not necessarily critical. The more significant art produced under the severe conditions of stricture were notably typified by reactions to the hegemony of Afrikaner nationalism and commonly referred to as ‘struggle art’. These works were mostly material in their representation and both deliberate and direct in their commentary. The thinking and making of art under the transformative agenda of ‘democracy’ suggests altered conditions of production.

**Locating Now**
Prior to the advent of so-called ‘freedom’ in 1994, the cultural boycott was lifted and ideas and people began to travel more freely. One consequence of this has found the world of creative expression caught between global tendencies and local necessities. Put simplistically, this has seen a somewhat dual reaction in South African art production. The resort has been to conceptual expression, through references to cultural identity, history and memory on the one hand, and to a more mundane observation and commentary on the other. The former have been predominantly expressed through abstraction, requiring a conceptual interpretation and educated reading, whilst the latter, subscribing to more traditional means of expression, are more popular and almost directly accessible.

Simultaneously coming from and responding to contemporary conditions, **Very Real Time** presents a project that has attempted to make a more critical contribution to the production of difference within a society seeking an (new) identity. Located almost ten years after the 1994 democratic elections that saw the coming to power of the African National Congress (ANC), it has sought to facilitate the production of difference in a coherent and organised manner. Conceived of by Gregg Smith, **VRT** connected together a number of local and international artists through the challenge of a one month residency to work with socially engaged techniques. Sited in Cape Town, South Africa, the project stressed the construction of personal contact(s) on a meaningful level, whilst operating outside of the norms of conventional artistic codes, techniques and networks. The emphasis was on human exchange, with the desire to realise a series of interventions such as performances, videos and more specifically new relationships within and beyond the projects artistic context.

**Contextualizing Very Real Time**
Freedom is a great concept, however, the consequence of its realisation presents a compelling challenge. This is particularly relevant in South Africa, given the collapse of the conditions that were responsible for the construction of past cultural identities. Despite their restrictions, the cultural boycott and governmental exclusion established a relatively ‘stable’ datum or environment wherein a critical local difference could be produced. The insight and international recognition of ‘struggle’ and ‘township’ art produced in South Africa in the mid to late 20th Century is grounded in that condition. Despite the unique situation wherein art, politics and social conditions were aligned, the promotion of a semi-private and mono-functional approach to art...
predominated in most cases. Consequently, given the relative gravity and extremity of the South African situation, it is inevitable that the recent collapse of boundaries effected local production by promoting a relative unbridled plurality. The immediate post-apartheid period provided a rich terrain for emerging identities incorporating the previously marginalized and their local insurgency. Yet, the simultaneous global collapse of ‘Western certainty’ has provided a stabilizing effect for the initial state of post-modernism by reflecting upon international tendency.

Today, almost ten years after ‘official freedom’ South Africans approach a useful point for reflection. The differences have been more evident in the processes that inform the production of new works. Hybrid practice involving new sites, techniques and modes of production have contributed to the contestation of the art object. Complementary to this there has been a distinct critique of the gallery. As a discrete space it has reinforced and promoted the autonomy and institutionalisation of artwork.

South African artistic practice in the ‘non-gallery’ context is strongly connected with transformation agendas of established institutions. In the struggle years projects such as the Community Arts Project (CAP), the Bag Factory in Johannesburg and later, the BAT Centre in Durban, sought, not only to provide a space for marginalized voices to find and develop their own expression, but also to initiate new modes of production. The group workshop, a valued tool for political conscienciation, not surprisingly found useful application within CAP.

In Cape Town, the ‘non-gallery’ context is situated at the interface of the established formal sector and an emerging set of new public institutions that exist outside of the main stream. Constituted in 1997 Public Eye represents a voluntary group of socially motivated artists who have sought to provide a public platform for enabling the projection of difference. Conceived to contest the autonomy of conventional modes of production it acts as an agent for transformation and the repositioning of art as public engagement. Whereas the measure and meaning of difference in Post-apartheid South Africa has become more associated with race and the empowerment of so-called previously excluded voices, Public Eye focuses in the promotion of a collective cultural expression that transcends the interior/exterior divide of the individual citizen. In a comparatively short time it has catalysed a sustained series of events and operations that have significantly contributed by competing with the normative artistic processes. Significantly contributing to this was Beyond The Gallery/Art in Public Spaces: an international symposium on public art held at the Cape Technikon in March of 2002. Through intellectual debate and public presentation it sought to directly challenge the (uncritical) tendencies that accompanied the ‘post’ period. Homeport (2002), the Spier Sculpture Festival (2001, 2002, 2003) and soft/ server (YDETAG, YDESIRE) represent some major outcomes from this endeavour, each located in major publicically accessible venues.

Public Eye has not been alone in its quest. The outcome of these initiatives has encouraged and spawned numerous individual and group practices throughout South Africa. One significant consequence of these efforts has been an inevitable blurring between art and culture, between the everyday and the celebratory. Cape Town has had a considerable share of these projects, and whose history present an evolving sensibility to working ‘beyond the gallery’. The Cape Town One City Festival was an early major and initiative. It represents the pluralization of both curatorship, content and venue. Reinterpreting the city as gallery, it has run for four successive years and forged new experiences for the city and its inhabitants, notably including exchanges between the spaces of separation that have endured from the apartheid city. In late 2003 this initiative has lead to the establishment of the Cultural Impact forum to debate the interrelations between culture, tourism and the everyday life of a city.

During 1999, Emma Bedford, of the South African National Gallery (SANG) curated Staking Claims — confronting Cape Town as a major component of the One City Festival. This project sought to restore the body’s relation with the city by interrogating an interrelation between people through the medium of space. Despite being exhibited in the Granary in Cape Town, it provided the ground for individual artists to symbolically stake claims of different communities within the city. In his catalogue essay, Edgar Pieterse elaborates on this in his identification of ‘going into the past in the direction of the future through the door of everyday practice’. As a participant in this project, Gregg Smith sought to identify an erased past though the simultaneous construction of history and memory. Located in Cape Town’s oldest ‘black’ township of Langa, his intervention sought to cross personal and cultural boundaries. Utilising public space, written communication and mutual reliance, he established realms of co-operation and his project brought the unfamiliar together in ordinary ways. The experience and results of this work seem to have provided an impetus and insight for VRT.

More recently, Tom Mulcaire, the director of the Institute for Contemporary Art in Cape Town, (ICA) curated Zip Zap Circus/ Angela Ferreira. This project saw the realisation of a part of the design for a circus school by architect Pancho Guedes in the wasteland of the city’s Foreshore. Whilst the project was nearly aborted due to the inflexibility of City regulations, it was ultimately installed as a film-shoot. Consequently it brought together numerous ‘dissimilar’ citizens in a brief encounter on an urban wasteland. Its critical location projected it as a mediator for ephemeral exchanges between suburban commuters, the homeless, sailors, city authorities and the everyday user of the city.

2001 saw soft serve, the Public Eye sponsored event, condense numerous art installations into the SA National Gallery for a single nights exhibition. Taking the form of a highly intense, yet somewhat traditional exhibition, it crossed some boundaries. In 2002, in collaboration with Young Designers Emporium (YDE) Public Eye conceptualised a new public art project. YDETAG provided a platform to bring together cultural workers from all walks of city life. Workshopped by Andrew Putter and James Webb over a period of about three months, it was installed in the SA National Gallery for one night and was complemented by performances and bars in the adjacent city gardens and an after party in the nearby Rhodes House. Intensity was simply re-programmed in multiple sites. 2003 invented YDESIRE which realised a collapse between art and life. Following in the steps of the Mother City Queer Project’s (MCQP) use of the colonial Castle of Good Hope as a venue for their annual party, YDESIRE staged a party event in which art was all but marginalized, and human exchange privileged.

Despite what may appear to the uninitiated outsider a haphazard agglomeration of attempts to contest convention, there exists a healthy struggle for the expression of a critical difference. By engaging in a practice of inter-subjectivity we are beginning to come to terms with the gravity of our past, whilst slowly constructing an identity for the artistic practice and expression that is seemingly fitting with the exigencies of our condition.
Nyanga
Interpreting Very Real Time

By extending the practice initiated by projects such as Staking Claims, VRT attempts to amplify and expand the ideas proposed at the beyond the gallery conference. However, with VRT the necessity of locating oneself assumes an added dimension given the openness of both its investigation and its final representation. There are very few fixes, and no final destination or gallery exhibition. Space/Time/Medium are each open to individual interpretation.

Having submitted a proposal for VRT the imperative of each participant was to translate their intention first by establishing a particular terms of reference. The challenge of constituting personal contact on a meaningful level demands the setting up of grounds that facilitate the exchange between self and other, between inside and outside, between artist and participant. Given the a-contextual situation, and the significant absence of prescription, except that implicit in the project is some form of (embodied) encounter, the primary task was to establish a terms of reference. Initially located in the project proposal, this became more public in the first of informal group sessions, where artists situated themselves relative to each other and the city. The common desire seems in the search for a new set of inter-relationships that transcend conventional boundaries, whilst in doing so brought about relations that are neither utilitarian nor simply social, but reside in an reinterpreted representation of the art through (very real) exchange.

Locating the project demanded a thoughtful translation of ideas through practice in real time/space. Initial readings of context by individual participants was not neutral. Foremost, these projects appear to each be located in the subjectivity and cumulative experience of the individual artist. In her Charles Elliot Norton Lectures, Nadine Gordimer, the South African 1992 Nobel Prize Laureate in Literature identifies the dialectic relations between autobiography and literature. Entitled Writing and Being it identifies the tension between the art of fiction and the art of life for the creative individual. Whilst this exemplifies the situation of the participant artists, the subjective stance has been contested by rigours of everyday exigencies. Common to each project is a struggle around questions of specificity: of how to collapse boundaries, to engage difference, and more challengingly, of how to bring spectators into the ambit of participant. How to move beyond the autobiographical and differentiate critically, without abandoning ones inner sensibility to a reduced rationality of purpose. To operate under conditions of change, establish meaningful exchange implies participation in the construction of a commons without resorting to a new form of convention.

In the absence of a meta-programme, these questions were necessarily incomplete and ambiguous, however their critical engagement by participants presented the opportunity. The confrontation of time and space in conjunction with the choice of medium is what set projects off against each other.

Given the nature of the project, its time 5 by these artists were not co-ordinated, the means of identifying projects from each other is necessarily through the means chosen to deploy their respective artistic intentions. The mediation of self with other demands an intermediary mechanism and building from Gordimer’s thesis, it is logical that the body becomes a primary instrument. Both Cinthia Marcelle and Jo O’Connor have projected their bodies in the public realm. As an ‘outsider’ Marcelle has sought to ground herself through the intermediary of cloth. Commenting on the origins of craft and the fashion industry in Cape Town she has been photographed by Jean Meenan in a number of selected sights that permit the gradual incorporation of her body/self into the everyday fabric of Cape Town life. The scenographical subtlety of composition — in terms of careful juxtapositions of body and site and in terms of choice of materials and draping of the body — demonstrates an insight into the location of self/other that is often only possible by outsiders. The resulting photo sequence presents a provocative and compelling interpretation where the ordinary has been made strange.

In a similar vane, O’Connor’s Contact has utilised the public medium of the advertising page to solicit encounters. In ‘rolling the dice’ Contact postulates an ultimate condition in prospecting within the fertile seam of life’s primary strategy, that of seeking out ‘The One’. Relying on the medium of the newspaper and the Internet meant conversing with the unknown. However, the prospect of embodied encounters heightened stakes on both sides. O’Connor’s vulnerability, in engaging people she’d never met, revealed the hidden face of the unpredictability of the everyday lived experience and the sudden withdrawal and disappearance of a suitor present some measure of performativity within the projects brief. Consequently, O’Connor’s experiences narrate stories of the somewhat uncomfortable collision between Intimacy and The Public Domain.

With 17 Aandbloem Street Michael Blum has initiated a dialogue with Cape Town and its inhabitants from the genus loci of Meeran’s home in Vredehoek where he and Marcelle were living during September month. Commencing from his front room in the house where he is staying, he embarks on a quest to unearth memory and narratives from the past. The front room opens to a stoep which opens on to the green patch which in turn opens to the city. This critical alignment of space is typical of the Victorian terrace houses that characterise the neighbourhood. The clear alliance of space, of private leading to public establishes a supportive trajectory for an outsider seeking to uncover a hidden past.

The culmination of his work in the Green Patch Party, counters Thembinkosi Goniwe’s township exchanges and realised the meeting of diverse differences. In this sense valency of the work parallels Angela Ferreira’s Zip Zap Circus drawing in performers, township people, neighbours, invited guests, artists, passers-by, and hangers on; representing people from various classes, racial groupings, professional backgrounds, and ages, etc.

This work has prompted more than the unexpected ‘social engagement’ in the form of a commentary by Sunday Times columnist Lin Sampson. As a neighbour, Blum had engaged her early in the project, and the vitriol of her En Passant column belies the frailty of a columnist is in search of her weekly fix. It seems littered with the prejudices of someone who is clearly out of touch with what is occurring about her neighbourhoood. Ms. Sampson’s conclusion that ‘Until he (Mr. Blum) turned up we were all living together quite happily’ speaks of the myopia of the continued privilege that she seems so desperate to deny. From the fluidity of my privileged position as observer/writer, Michael Blum’s project, of all the VRT projects, brought together the most difference in terms of social engagement across a number of scales and boundaries, who sustained an almost ten hour period of social experiences between somewhat strangers.

James Beckett and Bridget Baker resort to the city as a site for the staging of choreography. Hovering between film-shoot and street theatre these works confront the city stroller in new and unexpected ways. Most particularly it is the sidewalk, the street and the site of everyday that coincides with the invented property such as Baker’s footprints and Beck-
ett’s blankets. Their strategy relies on the coincidence of site, user and instrument to conjure engagements which, despite these specifics, are not necessarily manageable. With limited means and minimal artistic intervention, the arbitrariness of the raw encounter is provoked, with little control as to outcome. With both of these projects, reality and fiction become intentionally entwined and ones imagination is moved toward the wonder of the unknown. In this instance documentation of city users reactions to artistic messages becomes not just a means of recording, but more so of constructing narrative.

Thembinkosi Goniwe and Gregg Smith’s trajectories lead to interior spaces. Their means are different, but their outcomes intimately related. The challenge Thembi set for himself is a ‘performance piece’ that traversing different communities, facilitating human contact and social experience through ‘partying’. Goniwe’s claim that ‘to live art is to experience it, directly in non-institutionalised space’ leads him to sight his interventions in the planes of his everyday experience. In this manner personal memory and everyday life, self and other, become fused and produce new and unexpected encounters.

One of the underlying dimensions in Goniwe’s work is an innate critique of ‘apartheid’ spatiality. The spatial construct of ‘set apart’ was the mechanism to prevent human contact and social experience through ‘partying’. Goniwe’s claim that ‘to live art is to experience it, directly in non-institutionalised space’ leads him to sight his interventions in the planes of his everyday experience. In this manner personal memory and everyday life, self and other, become fused and produce new and unexpected encounters.

One of the underlaying dimensions in Goniwe’s work is an innate critique of ‘apartheid’ spatiality. The spatial construct of ‘set apart’ was the mechanism to prevent human contact and social experience through ‘partying’. Goniwe’s claim that ‘to live art is to experience it, directly in non-institutionalised space’ leads him to sight his interventions in the planes of his everyday experience. In this manner personal memory and everyday life, self and other, become fused and produce new and unexpected encounters.

Offering a three-course meal, the Barnato Bar becomes a destination for many of the less wealthy who patronise the Main Road bars. Consequently it brings together strangers with a commons. The permutations of interactions of an almost palpable tension between these strangers, regular patrons, the Tango dancers, the VRT crew and the bar attendants evoked a series of commentaries spanning from the resurrection of memories to the request for replay of the Tango music which had surreptitiously interrupted the surface of the earth (township) becomes a differentiated but fluid surface through which one traverses. This condition affords new and unique experiences for the uninitiated. Documentation of these visitations reveals the subservience of the regular structure of the colonial order whereby human experience and social interaction has become primary to form.

Reminiscent of Gregg Smith’s Staking Claims project, Goniwe’s township traverse further connects with the choreography of dance explored by Smith in VRT Love, jealousy and wanting to be in two places at once explores the dislocation of the body in space. The project, scheduled simultaneously in two venues, approximately one kilometre apart in the centre of Cape Town, provokes the effects of chance encounter through the orchestration of precision. The swapping of Tango partners at two selected ‘public interiors’ at the immediate periphery of the CBD for this simultaneous scheduling of two performances between 11.30 and noon on 28 September 2003 was deliberate. Marking the last day of the VRT project, this intervention brought the apparent and the real into focus affording a number of crossings between people of difference. Besides the usual rapport between the project participants, it seemed to spawn a number of real and virtual social encounters.

Despite the iconoclasm of these venues, the power of this performance resides in the immovable, in the exchanges of those moments and not in physical space. In a different sense, we had come full circle and the positive energy and exchange of township was somehow now luminary resident in the city.

Under conditions of transformation and change the prospect for the construction of difference is potentially unlimited. This has particular relevance in situations such as South Africa where communities are moving from a situation of radical control toward freedom under conditions of democracy. In contributing a further dimension to the debates around art practice in the emerging SA situation VRT has afforded the opportunity for the building of new identity. In ‘having no bars’ it has fostered a level of freedom that is intended to produce new and unforeseen.

In this respect, the project is perhaps lacking in the absence of a clear conclusion. Significant however is that none of these artists resorted to an exercise in ‘branding’ that would presumably have brought greater and lasting attention to both artist and product.

Not dissimilar to the academy, artist practice needs to resist the global tendency toward the commodification of both its production and product. This seems to have emerged as a predominant default under conditions of freedom that have accompanied the general collapse of boundaries we enjoy in contemporary society today.

In a sense the grounds establishing the project precluded this, yet, whilst the catalogue provides a useful survey summary, it is the consequence of the projects ripples and their temporal effects that this form of experimentation will eventually be measured by.

Ultimately VRT represents an extremely bold and ambitious project. Not only are the works located ‘beyond the gallery’ but,
Jean Meeran, Current Tenant

I’m Jean Meeran and I live in this house, 17 Aandbloem Street in Vredehoek and I think it’s a charming place. I used to live in Greenpoint, on the other side of the city. That place was being sold but they didn’t want to sell it to us so we had to move out.

We phoned and went round the same day. We came in and we saw an old white woman, the agent. There were slim chances we were going to get this place. Normally, when it’s us against white customers and a white agent, there’s no way we’re going to win. But the agent was friendly and nice. The other people weren’t sure if they wanted it; that’s how we got it. She just wanted a deposit right away and we happened to have the money.

We don’t know the neighbours. The people in the other semi-detached part of the house are very nice, they don’t mind what we do, even when we have parties and make noise. The woman across Clive Street (Lin) complains all the time when we have parties, but at the same time she seems intrigued and comes to talk to us.

The homeless people we get along with. There’s an old guy who sits in a wheelchair. I think he used to be an old prison gangster, because the other homeless people seem to congregate around him, he’s like a Don. I like him, he doesn’t bug me. Even if he’s crossing the road, dragging the wheelchair along, and you come to help him but he goes ‘No!’; he wants to do it himself. I like his spirit.

Then, there’s the flower seller, I know him too. One day, I dropped my keys and the flower sellers picked them up and his boss told the boy ‘Give the keys to the Charra’. So I asked him ‘What’s a Charra and why is your boss calling me a Charra? Is he white or what?’ He said ‘No, he’s a Muslim.’ So I said ‘Well, I’m Muslim too, so why is he making these distinctions? In any case, thanks for the keys and tell your boss to go fuck himself.’

The house was on sale a few months ago but we didn’t have the money. New owners bought it and they let us stay. Actually, it’s a lesbian couple. They’re living together at the moment but they still want separate houses.

Alex Smuts and Lorraine Griessel

Alex: We know that house is there, on the other side of the wall. But it doesn’t really affect us; we have little contact with our neighbours. They like having parties and it’s nice to see them enjoy life. There are other neighbours who tried to prevent them from having the parties, but we don’t mind …

Lorraine: I don’t actually know the people next door. There have been a lot of people and a lot of change, and identities got lost in the comings and the goings. Before them, there was Alexa, a model, she was very well known and highly thought of. Alex once recognized her, but he thought that she had aged and wasn’t as glamorous as she used to be.

The flower seller … it’s lovely to see the flowers, but I think there’s a bit of a drug business. A car comes past, the flower seller, the little boy, runs and there’s an exchange.

The man in the wheelchair … I’ve built quite a hatred for this man, because he urinates, drinks spirits, smokes dope — which is fine with me — but everything is so dirty. I feel I have compassion for this man, even though I dislike him tremendously. The other day, I stopped and said: ‘Can’t I get you into a sheltered home?’ He said he preferred to be where he was. I feel sorry for him, but as I said I have ambiguous feelings.

Lin Sampson, Neighbour, 1 Clive Street

I’m always anxious about the house across the street. It used to be a girl who lived there, a friend of mine, called Alexa, a very famous New York model.

But you know, when I was in Sudan I had meningitis, and I have a condition of my ears that makes me hear everything double. So I’m kind of phobic about noise.

The first terrible awakening to Jean and his brother — Zenade, I think his name is — was when they had a party. I actually didn’t even know they were there. They got a sound-system and made that noise … (boom boom boom) … and I started crying, it hurt my ears so much. I called the police, they turned it down when the police came, but up again when the police left. Then I thought, I’ve got to meet them and talk to them about this. Their house is facing mine, even though its address is Aandbloem Street. They probably think I’m very nasty right-wing and old. So my relationship with the house is slightly edgy, I would say.

I’ve often lived in council estates, where poor and rich live together, and this end of Vredehoek has that sort of feeling. But having said that, I’m very irritated with an old man in a wheelchair, I want to kill him … I’ve found him a place to stay. I’ve even paid for it but he wouldn’t go, he prefers to live in the street. The law is on his side, any vagrant is allowed to live in the street now, it’s in the Constitution. What we’re dealing with in South Africa now is a complete opposite of apartheid. They’ve just changed it around and it’s irritating to me sometimes. You can imagine, from apartheid, where Blacks were not allowed in your sight, they now changed it to a system where Blacks are rulers and they can say what they want. So it’s quite an extraordinary and fragile situation, there are all these little bubbles of fractures around.

Michael, The Man In The Wheelchair

You talk about number 17? I know that house … it was a gintu-place there (a brothel), in the Sixties … a dgikidgiki-place … Sailors used to come from the docks …

Michael Blum: Do you know the woman who lives in the corner house? (Lin)

If I had a gun, I would kill her, assassinate her. Every time she wants to call the police, but the police doesn’t care. She hates me because I’m black. She told me one day: ‘I hate black people.’ I’m black but my soul is white, and you’re white but your soul is black …

The pastor gave me permission to sleep here, so she can do nothing. Now she just greets me, and I greet her. But I don’t greet her with my right hand, I greet her with my bad hand, go and pass with your black soul …
**Talking with the Black Noise Guys**

A man called Michael Blum turned up in our street, staying in the house opposite. He is a French-speaking Israeli who lives in Vienna. He said he was doing a ‘project’ on the house and the area. He had a grant from somewhere and asked if he could come and talk to me. He was an energetic little mesomorph who arrived and immediately set up video equipment — something I was not expecting.

I remember thinking at what a disadvantage I was as I shuffled into the sofa and he asked me all the expected questions, slowly building to what he really wanted to ask. Would the people who live in the house have been able to live there during the years of apartheid? And what had I thought when they first moved in? I said, ‘noise’, which is always my horror. I explained that I had had meningitis and it had damaged cranial nerves that amplified sound in my head. Busy Mr. Blum video-ed away.

He then organized a sort of halfhearted party on a patch of lawn that abuts the street, which he importantly called The Green Patch Party. There were some breakdancers, some students, a few peripatetic vagrants whom we had never seen before — and of course Mr. Blum batting about with a video camera. Mr. Blum went away and our street returned to its normal old slightly low-rent atmosphere. However, searching through the Internet for something, I came across Michael Blum’s name again as being the author of something called Very Real Time and there I was — as usual — the colonial racially biased person.

He described the flaky party on the grass as becoming ‘a milestone in Cape Town’s par-tiring history’. ‘It aimed,’ wrote Blum, in his lefty join-the-numbers prose with its self-congratulatory subtext, at ‘squating’ the patch of grass in front of the house. Well thank you Mr. Blum, we as residents in the area, have spent a long time trying to ‘unsquat’ the grass in front of our houses. He went on to say ‘The appropriation of the small piece of land in front of the house can be seen as a natural extension of the private sphere.’

This sort of thinking, this lauding of the underdog, this ecstasy over anything disadvantaged, ill, poor, mad or homeless and this thoughtless beating down of anyone who earns a living by actually going to work is big business in the art world of Europe. Grants can be got with a flick of the finger, if the projects come sashed with kneejerk words like Aids, apartheid, Robben Island.

Mr. Blum is a true journeyman of this type of thinking; his other work is a ‘book designed for waiting rooms’, which purports to be ‘following the visual paradigm of loss and exploring related issues through imagery’.

In South Africa we have always been victims of a foreign eye, often attached to a camera, filtering across our lives with ease. Many of us have given up time to try to explain this country; few of us have been rewarded. And the harder we tried to explain, the more subtle the thought, the easier the whole thing was to misunderstand. When I said to Mr. Blum that whenever I saw new neighbours I was worried about noise, he conveniently saw it as racial, because what would his principals think if he came back without some white boegyman?

His report states, ‘Lin Sampson, despite her political opinions, sat with the Black Noise guys and talked with them’. Once in the thick of apartheid, a British TV station asked to interview me. They took me to someone else’s house and posed me beside a pool with a drink with a little umbrella in it. It appeared with a voice-over that went, ‘While Lin Sampson sits beside her pool sipping a drink, her maid lives less than five kilometres away in a cardboard box.’ I didn’t even have a maid. But the real irony of Mr. Blum’s essay is that until he turned up we were all living together quite happily.

---

**Interview**

Gregg Smith: Why did you think of Cape Town?

Michael Blum: A lot of work and parties — efficient combination. Thanks to Jean, I felt comfortable right away but it took me a week to grasp where I was. I landed with a project about apartheid architecture (Schizo-Buildings), far too ambitious. Then, I decided to start from where I was: the house and its surroundings, which led me to an ultra-local investigation. Politics came back into the picture, but on a micro-scale ...
Larson Keys, 1966
Larson was born on Tuesday 15th February in Dumfries, Scotland to parents Jock Keys and Zahra Reuter. Jock was a modest man of poetic nature, and mother Zahra a humble hard working woman who had spent much of her life before twenty on an island off the North German coast, near Hamburg. Both quite reclusive, his parents’ characteristics had rubbed off on Larson. From an early age he applied endless hours to numerous hobbies: cataloguing stamps, balancing pH levels of various water samples, and among other activities, scraping off and solvent-dissolving build-up from the interior walls of his father’s Volvo V6 exhaust pipe.

He was later to take interest in the natural sciences, which resulted in a prosperous five-year study of geology at the University of Mysore, India, a premier institution for the earth sciences. Under the tutorial leadership of the distinguished geology-educationist, Prof. M.N.Vishwanathaiah, Larson succeeded in being one of few foreigners in decades to be awarded a full degree in sedimentology and experimental mineralogy.

Considered to be of mostly pragmatic nature in profiling new ground fit for industrial development, the sedimentology division of geology had come into conflict with Larson’s base passion for nature. Although having been offered numerous positions in the field, he chose to abstain and, with his parents’ blessing and financial backing, turned instead to study towards becoming a maritime engineer in his native Scotland.

Intimately involved in the prototyping of a cross section of tugboats, Keys had held the post of head engineer at the Scottish Maritime Engineering Society for three consecutive years from 1994 to 1997. In particular contribution toward the evolution of tugs toward new efficiency was his work on the central pistons of the Bolton range of tugs.

A school famous for their handling ability in bad sea conditions, the Bolton range are called upon in times of crisis and salvation such as large scale oil spills; moments of potential life loss and environmental damage. In justification of his interest, Larson had found the study and application of engineering to be a helping hand in a resistance against what he was increasingly experiencing as a situation of ecological detriment on a global scale. His involvement in safety and environmental health enforcement provided the moral spine he had so long desired.

Keys’ vocation spurred much wealth and esteem, which he took lightly. Having steadily progressed to a position of quite some influence, he took on several responsibilities for both the development of a new range, as well as (and more importantly) the propagation of the present Bolton range of engines. His position increasingly took the form of a public relations secretary. Through his ability to sell the idea of stronger and faster tugboats he had travelled to many of the world’s choppiest seas in collaboration with many different countries. The Tokyo Bay contract (as well as those of Cape Town, South Africa and Marseille, France) was the source of his steady income and pride. Conversely, they were also the birth of pressure and stress.

He had initially moved to South Africa for professional reason, that of monitoring his work in practice, the tugboat John Ross, operating the choppy coastline of Cape Town. Much diplomatic work was necessary; networking in order to justify the costs involved in the acquisition of the S.A. Maritime Board. Keys was talented in these entries, he was fluent in several languages and had a deep grasp of the complex infrastructure. Nevertheless, it was always clear that he would require a partner in operation. He had chosen to work with respected conservationist Shama Tudoit: a young French woman who had already been busy with the Cape Coast Maritime Environmental Commission for quite some years.

The shared responsibility of this partnership helped relieve much of the associated stress of his vocation. Nevertheless, Keys retained habit of several consecutive courses of antibiotics in futile attempt to boost his weak immune system, a move which would later lead to a dense build-up of sulphonamides in his skin.

His stress was not helped by the obsessive nature of his approach. He found his work to become integral only if it were close by, 24 hours a day. The desire to wake up and see what he had been doing the night before was in effect the preparation of thread for the construction of a cocoon. Figures and design, pioneering engineering and its manifestation in profit were his temporal fix and at home he found he could feed his obsessions without any external comment or judgement. This would also mean that aside from his networking activities, he would not get out of the house much.
Stress to Skin
Polymorphous Light Eruption
This is a skin eruption, and is commonly known as Sun Poisoning. It occurs in susceptible individuals when they are exposed to solar radiation that is more intense than usual, i.e. the first time a body part that has had no prior UV exposure is in the sun in a given season. It may also occur when the person travels to higher or lower latitude. The skin-rash reaction usually heals within seven to ten days if additional sun exposure is avoided.

Some PLE are due to the presence of hormones, drugs or heavy metals in the individual's skin. Photo-allergies may also result when light rays interact with certain chemicals. Photo-contact allergens include: Phenothiazine (a type of tranquilizer) and Hexachlorophene, as well as certain Sulphonamides (a type of antibiotic).

For Larson this would mean more than just staying out of the sun; constant rest and a special diet consisting of little more than fruit and milk became necessary. Up to fourteen hours of sleep a day would also come to mean a complete paralysis of his usual work mode. All his efforts of a return to normality would only become effective in the long-term, in conjunction with a wide variety of sunscreens.

Already quite frustrated with his slow rehabilitation, Larson had peaked over several of the tangent marketing ploys of the lotions he was researching for personal use. Although still in his shopping basket, the ‘bronzers’ were of particular irritation. To develop a sub-culture of sorts, the sunscreen company had claimed the existence of several different levels of experience in tanners, and targeted their product range as such. Larson was not an 'experienced tanner' and had no ambitions of becoming one. In his case Polymorphous Light Eruption was something to be taken seriously.

This all became too much for Larson. His concentration wavered, and his passion for his work phased out. Previously his home was familiar as a work place, it was now his lot to be indoors, or at least in the shade at most times of the day. This would mean he was further confined to the walls of his home, with the intermittent excursion into his narrow suburb. The space he had earned through years of dedication and focus had begun to describe its own shape more that ever. High walls and a constant retreated public were even more distant and alienating than his native Dumfries.

The problem was in that people were not communicating with each other, and it was not that he had been able to stop what he was doing long enough to take notice before. This became the space which he despised. He longed for a community like a polar bear would snow.

Shama had kept a close watch over Larson. She could see the cynicism leaking out in all his mutterings and found the clutter of his home to reflect the disdain with which he was interacting with the world. It became too much. She decided to make a concerted effort to get Larson out of the house more often, to offer him an alternative to his navel gazing, a characteristic which had begun to spell out his demise. This would mean quite some sacrifice on her part, and a respective level of tolerance on his. In Shama's plan, a series of scenic drives would offer such an alternative.

In the beginning the drives were quite enlightening for Larson. He had never the time to view the beautiful coastline without the pressure of a destination; he was, to some measure, lulled by Shamas’ slow swaying through the undulating landscapes. After a week of such amateur therapy an incident struck a deep chord within Larson. While driving with Shama down quite a steep hill, at around 10:30 one morning, a young black man ran into the middle of the street, through a gap in the traffic. He was retrieving a raggged old blanket which appeared to come from a construction site near the section of road they were entering. While the man’s clothing hinted that he was working on the site, he could just as easily have been a passer-by making opportunity of a lost rag. The interpretations were open yet the nature of the retrieval was clear. The receptor was poor.

It was not so much the incident in isolation as it was the significance of the blanket in the equation. Larson had an almost identical one at home, a blanket his dog usually slept on. Never before had a single moment spat so much sense into Larson's existence. It was at this point that Larson decided to dig a hole.

In return to his days as a refined geology scholar, Larson prepared his kit fit for excavation. Appropriated from his selection of garden tools stored in the corner of the garage above his home, the kit was comprised of several spades, a large fork and a smaller shovel. This prepared, he then covered the majority of his skin with one of his darkest suits, the tail-end of his home, and, upon finding a suitable spot, he began to dig.

At first, with quite some haste and fervour, he managed to clear a surface area of approximately one metre squared. The deeper he managed to penetrate, the more rocks he crossed and successively the more difficulty he encountered in clearing away material. Within eight hours and with much strain he managed to reach a depth of around one metre, at which point he began to clear away all trace of loose soil and obstructing rocks from what he deemed the significant body of his hole. With a dustpan and brush, and then finer paintbrushes, he managed to clean up the surfaces of the exposed stones to a point where he was ready to begin profiling the layers and variety of rocks. With tedious detail he had, within three days, completed the study and duly presented his synopsis to Shama for her approval.

Shama realized there were no differences between the rocks Larson had numbered; his profile was fictitious. Consulting a psychologist about how best to deal with the awkward situation, she was advised to relay that he should take up a musical instrument or frequently attempt crossword puzzles in order to keep the inconsistencies at bay.
**DIARY EXCERPT**

**Meeting #1**

After a flurry of postponed arrangements, we met on Tuesday, 2nd September 2003 at The Obz Cafe (initial plans were for Radisson’s, his suggestion) in Observatory at 7.30pm. When I arrived, he was halfway through an Amstel Lager and smoking a Gouloise Blonde from a new packet. He was wearing a dark blue suit and an open necked white shirt whilst I was wearing corduroys, a yellow polo-neck and a blue fleece jacket. I recognised his face immediately from the photograph he had posted on the website. I gave him an ‘air kiss’ greeting, which surprised us both. He apologised for his formal attire, saying that he had just been in a business meeting. I asked him about his meeting and ordered a Hunter’s Dry.

Having been extremely nervous earlier I was surprised to find myself feeling moderately relaxed and confident. His body language was very open and self-assured. We talked about his work — what he did and what he wanted to do. He spoke about his life at the moment and his interest in art. Strangely, he had no curiosity for my involvement in this field. He offered information about his relationship status and that he was using the Internet site as a short experiment.

Time passed fairly quickly and there were no awkward moments, as long as I had questions to ask him. I felt, however, from the start of our meeting that I was too unsophisticated in appearance for his liking. He had came across in our email correspondence as being astute, straight-forward, comfortable with himself, sensitive and idealistic. In the flesh he was confident but distant as well as somewhat self-absorbed, and I got the feeling that conversation and connectivity was the last thing on his mind.

Since the meeting I emailed him with some information he asked for. He replied curtly.

---

**Meeting #3**

This man replied to two different newspaper advertisements. Our correspondence focused mainly on a question he posed about life-after-death and a discussion about ‘truth’. I had not found him easy to correspond with so I was surprised when he said he wanted to meet and wondered to what extent I was obliged to comply ... But I was curious and he sent me his number so I called him to make the arrangement, which he amended a few times via SMS.

Our meeting was at the Cape Grace (his suggestion) at 2pm on Wednesday, 1st October 2003. I waited until 2.25pm and then sent him an SMS. He phoned back immediately to say that he thought our meeting was on Saturday, which was news to me as I was busy then. I was disappointed rather than relieved, partly because of the psyching up that I had to do prior to 2pm and partly because I had had to organise a lift for myself as my car had been ‘redistributed’ earlier in the week. Unfortunately I let this slip and he began to apologise repeatedly. He suggested coming past before his meeting at 3pm so I waited and ordered myself a cup of tea.

A little later he arrived wearing black suit pants, a dark grey tie and a black shirt (I was wearing grey in general). He carried on apologising, although I assured him that our miscommunication was really not that important; but he remained agitated and visibly stressed. I tried to be as relaxed and friendly as possible. He left minutes after he arrived, promising to make another arrangement to meet properly.

I found the whole incident quite depressing and I did not hear from him again.
BRIEF ENCOUNTER

hi lovely profile . in short im a seperated guy looking for short term(?) friend . Pse reply.

Hi Mallow, Thanks for your mail. I think I should mention this though: from your profile / advert it’s clear that you are looking for a shag(s). I’m using this site as some kind of free-association way to make contact with strangers and develop an exchange of sorts more in terms of making a friend than anything else. Despite our different intentions, if you’d still like to correspond that would be cool … otherwise thanks for your interest, and good luck.

thnx for reply — point taken no problem . ps: archipelago?

Cool. What do you mean:

ps archipelago? ps mallow?

what exactly does archipelago? ps mallow?

An Archipelago is a collection of islands in a large body of water (like the Galapogos) … a fitting analogy. I thought, to this Internet thing

very well thought out . saw the word a few times but never really bothered checking it out . after your explanation it all makes sense . what about ‘mallow’?

Why thank you. ‘mallow’ could be: — as in ‘marsh ...’ which means that you consider yourself to be soft and sweet and sticky when burnt. — as in some plant form (I have a murky recollection of a plant with a purple flower) which means whatever. — as in a (hopefully purposeful) mis-spelling of the word ‘mellow’, which means you are well-matured and also permanently partially intoxicated.

!?

good interpretation but no where close . spelling in this case is actually correct. ‘mal-low’ is actually a product brand that I import from the USA. you have a good response from matchmaker? you sound special.

Well what are my chances of knowing that, hey? A brand for what product? Btw, thanks (I think) for the compliment.

hi a, ‘mallow’ is the brand of a door handle that we import from the far east via the u.s. very popular and at a reasonable price, what suburb do you stay in and how do you spend your time? asking much I suppose.

Yes, you are asking much! At the moment I am spending my time trying to recuperate from a very late night. Brain cell count is low. I don’t think you need to know where I stay!

now that’s the type of message i need on a monday morning! didn’t want to know EXACT-LY where, but anyway. had a very quiet weekend — contrary to yours it seems.

A virtual misunderstanding, hey? Well, I can be a bit cagey about my space, and grumpy when hungover …

[No reply]

INTERVIEW

Gregg Smith: Tell me a bit about your project?

Jo O’Connor: I placed adverts for myself and corresponded with the people who responded to them. The correspondents became more than just participants in the project. I let them drive it. At the same time I took my adverts seriously, in order for the process to be ‘real’.

GS: You had ever done it before?

JOC: No, I’d never considered it. But it intrigues me and I suppose I wanted to know more about it. It has been interesting and bizarre. Sometimes tiresome. These days so much communication is through some interface, it’s easy to hide. It gets really interesting when people seem to feel hidden already, and are hoping to make contact because of that.

GS: So you place an advert in a newspaper. They write back to you via the agent and then you receive this letter a week or two later, sometimes a month. It’s quite old fashioned, no?

JOC: And very slow, especially the newspaper side. It’s really quite something to receive a letter when all you’ve done is place an advert. And I’ve received some really long letters. I’ve tried to reply to everyone who gave a return address. Correspondence has usually fizzled out naturally or just stopped. The Internet adverts produced faster results.

GS: Tell me more about the adverts?

JOC: I started off with a non-descriptive ‘Artist seeks contact on a meaningful level.’ The adverts developed as the project progressed, saying more about myself without prescribing who I’m looking for. The first ads didn’t get much response because they didn’t say much. The one that had the most replies was the ‘Young female artist keen to meet broad minded people who are interested in life and open to possibilities.’

GS: Did it change your look on the city, this project?

JOC: Well … Cape Town is a small place. But then, when all these people came crawling out of the woodwork, I realised that it’s not. Meeting people and making some kind of contact is not that difficult, but Cape Town is known to be a hard place to make friends — people are in their cliques and are cautious with newcomers. Maybe because it’s a beautiful place and people are precious about their space? Maybe that attitude is really a ‘small town’ thing.
NYANGA

It’s some time ago now, this trip, but some images are still quite fresh. The drive by minibus taxi from the taxi rank on the roof of Central Station, through the suburbs and out to the townships. I think we had to change taxi’s when we got to Nyanga, it was getting dark, we were passing through small roads, busy with strollers. At one point Thembi saw someone in the street and turned frantically to get his head out of the window and call to him. His action was so fast that as a joke I asked him if the guy owed him money, but he laughed and said no, it was a friend who he wanted to invite to meet us.

Eventually we had to walk a bit to get to the first shebeen, it was the small front room of someone’s home, a wobbly board for a table, pumping soul music, lots of smoke and dust. It was very intense. The place was filling up, one had to escape the yard now and then. It felt like everyone wanted to tell you something quite urgently. Like there was a huge gap across which we were communicating so that everyone had to shout. In a way it was fun and stressful at the same time.

Later we were walking through the streets in the dark to the second shebeen, our group was about ten or twelve people and it was difficult to keep all together in the dark and the crowds. I wondered if every night was like this there. I was walking with Marx, we were talking, mostly he was talking and in all the confusion I thought we were both drunk, but then he said something like: ‘The problem for us and our new government is how to deal with a society which is still traumatised by the past.’ And then I realised we were both still quite sober.

GREGG SMITH

Dear Thembi,

In Nyanga, after drinking some beer, I asked the woman who lives in the house for a bathroom. She answered, as if telling a secret, that there isn’t one. I asked her to show another possible place. So she touched my arm and led me into her house. There she gave me a bucket and I peed in the middle of the only room, feeling the relief of the solution so intimate. In Brasil, the name of the chicken on this postcard is Galinha d’Angola. I hope to see you soon, Cinthia

CINTHIA MARCELLE
New situations always fascinate me; the sensation of the unknown, of how you know things and the meaning created around those.

I met Jean without taking note of his colour. My colour is more natural to me than I thought. The discovery took place in a very real time. Jean recognized my mixture and I realized how important that encounter was.

Only Jean can see me all the time. He is the one who shapes my stay. My presence is not a disguise — it is converted into the city. I am revealed as a wall and the colours come out. I am blended into things; mestizo me to the crowd.

CINTHIA MARCELLE

Obsessed as I am with Creole culture, mulattoism, mestizas and mixedness, I was chuffed to hear that Cinthia Marcelle from Brazil was coming to stay with me for a Very Real Time.

My identity-obsessed mind kicked into gear. To me Cinthia looks totally like a Cape Town girl. She is a mixed breed, just like us here. But of course looking like a group of people hardly makes you one of them. Looking like a wall hardly makes you a wall either. But, the initial, and powerful, confrontation with the unfamiliar is the visual. And if you can blend in visually you can blend in visually.

But the environment will suss you out in a second. Cinthia walked around town with me, and people called out to her, asking her where she was from. They knew. The walls also knew. Our work is not camouflage; it is a blending that retained the distinctness of Cinthia and her one-month cityscape.

As soon as Cinthia was in position and covered up, she was at the mercy of the environment, including me. Progressively Cinthia would be swaddled in layers of fabric until her head would finally disappear. After the vague shape was formed would begin the excruciating task of precisely aligning the lines of the different blocks of colour of fabric with the lines of the walls. I would then take position to snap, and then sigh and walk back to adjust. Many to and fros later, as the lines began to coincide, Cinthia would begin to merge with the background. Inside that cocoon, it was humid, oxygen was low, and the pain of the positions was dazzling. After snapping away, I would unveil Cinthia, to face her audience of chatterring people, or quiet buildings, or unconcerned cars.

The onlookers were appreciative. We were so well received that we were even stoned, in the best of Old Testament tradition. Cinthia was crouching in hat, shirt, skirt and socks in front of a public toilet wall at The Grand Parade. A semicircle of observers were checking us out, intrigued. Suddenly stones rained down on us. But nice discrete pebbles, not head busters.

I turned to the crowd; hands raised to the heavens, and in best Aaron (if not Moses) voice, boomed ‘Who Here, Is Throwing Stones?’

The crowd gave me a baleful look. Then an older man pointed out the perpetrator, a gawky, grinning, attention-seeker.

‘It was him!’ said the fingerer.

The attention-seeker chirped in his defence that he is friends with me, and so what of it if he throws stones? Friends because of a bit of banter we had earlier were he tuned me, ‘Ja, I checked you, you got no spool in that camera bradther.’

So the stone thrower was hustled away by the fingerer. The whole time hat, shirt, skirt and socks wearing Cinthia was crouching, muscles shivering, in front of the toilet wall.

JEAN MEERAN
Gregg Smith: What did you think about Cape Town when you got here? Did you have a good feeling about it?
Cinthia Marcelle: I do now. But the experience is so different from everything I was used to. When I first saw Jean’s house, that looks like somewhere in my hometown, like my grandmother’s house, I already felt there was some interesting in this city. During my stay that good impression confirmed my feelings: people from Cape Town are really friendly, quite similar to Brazil.

When I arrived I didn’t know anything about my project. During the second week I was having lunch with you and the other guys of VRT. One moment I looked at James and I saw myself disappearing in his image. That’s what it felt like, because I couldn’t communicate very well with people. Invisible but in a humorous kind of way. To make this project I needed to find a person who could take the photos. When I came to the house I saw Jean with his camera in the pictures on the wall, before I even met him. I invited him to work with me, while we were becoming friends. He said he was afraid to be part of this project because of the responsibility. Since he started working with me I haven’t stop laughing at it.

GS: What did you do together?
CM: The idea started as finding places in the city where I could start a conversation. I took Jean into these places and he covered me with fabrics in the same colours as the background. Then he documented me in this situation. At the end he would remove the fabric allowing me see again. It was funny because he made everything: he composed the scene for me. The second part was wearing clothes, still merging into the background, but clothes for sale on the market. During this time I became totally involved with people. It ended with a picture of me at the train in the middle of the coloured people in Cape Town. One day Jean said: ‘You look like the coloured people from Cape Town.’ And when I saw them I discovered myself in South Africa. I think this work is about the process of getting to know new things; a new city, a new language, a new person.

GS: Is there anything else you want to say?
CM: I am confused that the word is so big. I’ve met people I like and now I am going back to my country without knowing when I will see them again.
Gregg Smith: How is it going with the film industry?
Bridget Baker: It’s becoming a bigger and bigger industry; you don’t know when it’s real life or if it’s a film shoot happening on everybody’s street corner in town. And I am heavily involved in it as a stylist. I dress people. It’s my job, it’s how I earn money. I am a worker, complete worker. I relate to workers in Cape Town, perhaps more than being an artist a lot of the time. This influenced my reason behind using people who have jobs for my projects — who might not necessarily be inspired by their work — but who do have other thoughts.

GS: How did you find the actors you worked with?
BB: Since I was doing a job during the time of the project I had to employ someone to find the extra’s; work that I would have rather done myself, had I not had this movie to do. Archie, the gardener, who became the business man, you actually never even see him. You see his feet and legs. I could have used anybody, but I quite liked the idea of having him there. It was great. They were just there to do something for me quickly and get out of there. It was interesting. And I also quite liked the fact that we just worked really fast instead of doing a laborious ‘Is this angle going to work?’ shoot. It was all shot in three hours.

I want to do a voice-over that gives the viewer the idea that the documenter is the one who is really stuck in his life and job. The momentary kind of effect the messages have on him. They don’t sink in, they don’t really work at all. I think it makes him realise more and more that he’s stuck. He’s very very stuck. I also enjoyed taking images of the cityscape, specifically around Thibault Square. I’m looking forward to see how that can be incorporated in the footage, the architecture of the city. Working class architecture for the blue and white collar worker. That area of the city where workers go at lunchtime to pick up energy: have an hour off to eat a toasted sandwich and drink a coke, and then go back to the office — a long cigarette break.
At this point I was completely consumed with finding more, I just started moving, moving, moving, like a robot, I kept looking at the pavement, for more messages, while my body was moving with such speed. Peg, I know this sounds completely lame, but it really happened (which sounds even more lame!) I haven’t even got to the most bizarre part.

I’m running, not able to see any messages; going too fast to see anything. I don’t know how long this carried on for. Then I felt something bump into me and I was on the ground. (The footage shows the back of a bald black head in a suit moving away from me and that weird satellite dish structure next at the Civic Centre, but I don’t remember this happening.)

I woke up on a red-bricked area, still on the ground, very groggy, could barely make out where I was. I just wanted to lie there. I was completely exhausted. I was lying down, curled up on my side, people staring at me. I turned over to get up and came face to face with someone’s ass. A woman picking up vegetables from the ground that she must have dropped. Suddenly I knew that we bumped into each other.

She was there long enough for me to work out that she was a kitchen hand, she had the chef’s outfit on and a blue and white checkered kitchen towel in her back pocket. She stretched over for some broccoli and I caught a glimpse of the underside of her sneakers. The text was in mirror version but I immediately recognized the message: © Cindy says © Only you can.

I went back to my spot, it was already past lunchtime. From a local vendor I heard that Mahmood had been looking for me, the guy said he sounded very irritated. I must report to the office asap to hand in the camera and footage if I want to be paid.

I think I might not go in to town tomorrow... Feel quite fragile.

---Original Message---
From: Hangingout@hotmail.com
To: Peg@tripod.com
Sent: Tuesday, September 30, 2003 19:45
Subject: Today

Peg, so you know I’m not a flaky type, I pride myself in not believing in very much, and not getting too excited by anything. But what happened to me today... you just won’t believe it. I know you’ll laugh, think I’ve gone deranged ‘cause of the job maybe, but it actually happened, I have the footage to prove it!

Okay, so I’m sitting at my usual spot, pointing the camera at the same manhole and the pavement, waiting for the hours to go by. People walk past, minding their own business, I don’t look at them and in return they leave me alone. It’s about 10h30, and I’m droning away, numbed by everything around me and my own boredom, my eyes start watering ‘cause I’m staring so much at the pavement and the cut-off legs.

I start seeing things on the pavement more clearly after a while, and I don’t know how to explain it but the surface is covered with writing that I know was never there before! I feel heavy all the time, and everything is a struggle, but I manage to get the camera off the tripod. I go closer to the marks on the ground, they’re like prints on the pavement, not hand-written, it’s not sprayed on, wet watery prints on the ground (It hadn’t rained in the last hour, and the surface around the prints was bone-dry!)

It wasn’t always easy to make out what they were saying, the wet letters kind of bled into each other, but here and there I could make out the words — © Only you can — © Rocco says — © Only you can — © Archie says — © Cindy says — © Only you can. They were multiplying themselves, but they were always the same messages, and it looked like they were made by shoes! I had to find more, or I had to find where they came from, I just wanted to know more. Now that I think about it clearly I must have been the only one to notice these messages, it felt like that anyway, as if they were only there for me, God!
1. It was my wife’s idea, not mine. My wife is the supreme pragmatist. If there is a problem between us she confronts it head-on. Even pulls the car over on the side of a busy highway and switches off the engine if there is something she wants to discuss.

Myself I am much more easy-going. She said we had been together too long. That she had become a piece of furniture to me. This I contested, but in a half-hearted manner which she seized upon as the incriminating evidence. But the evidence was not her target. She cares about me more than to see it. And with growing apprehension wait till she has reached her end point. Invariably it’s beautifully thought through and she presents me with a range of solutions. They are always both ingenious and terrifying. This one was no exception.

2. She said we needed to rediscover one another, but in order to appreciate each other again we had to risk losing each other.

With this finality in mind, it may be interesting to sketch how we first met: on the dance floor. Our speciality is the Tango. There was a time when we both danced competitively. At one point we were both looking for partners and someone introduced us. We married three years later. Slowly we danced less and less. Professional life, starting a family, TV dinners, things took their toll.

Her solution was to rekindle our passion through the Tango. But not by dancing with each other. By finding other couples who also danced Tango and arranging to swap partners with them. We would meet with our new partners in different parts of the city at a given time. We would dance with our new partners imagining the other moving simultaneously in time with another body in another part of town. The Tango is a very special dance. No two couples dance it in the same way. It is the ultimate expression of love if it is danced in the right way.

3. It feels like my wife has always had the upper hand in our relationship, knowing that I fell in love with her long before she began to love me. For me it was almost immediate, something in the warmth of her eyes and slightly animal severity with which she moved through life. As if she always knows she wants, turning her attention this way and that in a flash and bringing the world before her to life in manner which seemed both naive and unsentimental. Sometimes I watch her at a party, moving around the room.

My devoted attention seemed disposable but eventually I realised that she needs it. To be able to rely on my consistency, after all her goings about and getting into all kinds of exciting things, fast and frivolous.

Once she was away on business. She had been gone for about two weeks and was due back quite soon. I was having supper alone in the living room and was suddenly overcome with a feeling that something was wrong. I thought of my wife and realised that I couldn’t visualise her, I went to look at her picture and even then, looking at her face, she seemed unrecognisable. Completely separate from my reality. It made me angry and I put the photo face down somewhere so that I couldn’t see it. And with growing apprehension waited for her return. When she came back we went out to dinner and sure enough she confessed that she had been unfaithful. I was devastated. I left the table without saying a word and took the metro to a friend’s house. We had some strong drinks together and I told him everything. He didn’t know what to say. He kept shaking his head and saying it was terrible.

The next morning I returned home and found her in the kitchen feeding the cat. She turned to me still kneeling on the floor with the tin of cat food in one hand and a fork in the other, the cat calling impatiently and patting at the fork. Tears started to come into her eyes. Slowly we worked it out. It took a while, in fact I don’t think we were ever complete again after that.

I developed a strategy of tempering my affection for her, pretending to be nonchalant and preoccupied. Now and then I’d be rewarded with a desperate backward glance from her and that would be the signal that it was time to take her warmly in my arms again, or kiss her extravagantly. But these games also have their price.

4. It’s funny the reactions we get from people when we call them up and propose our little scenario. Some of them we know, some of them we have never met before, maybe one of us saw them dancing somewhere once. Some find the idea perverse, others fun.

Today is a blind date. My partner will be recognisable by a pale blue ribbon in her hair. There’s always a bit of planning involved. I arrived here about 45 minutes early. There is a strange beauty in sitting here and surveying the room, watching our private drama unfolding. The room is an abstract chaos of strangers moving about, and out of this our little scene gradually crystallises.

I always need a few drinks to calm down. If I am not mistaken my partner for today has already arrived, about ten minutes ago. She sits across the room, glancing about impatiently, now she checks the time. Lights a cigarette. Now she’s making a call on her phone. It’s unsuccessful, no answer. It looks like she’s getting up to leave, I guess it’s now or never.
COLOPHON

Very Real Time
Curated and organised by Gregg Smith
September 2003

Catalogue published in September 2004
Edited by Gregg Smith and Sara De Bondt
Designed by Sara De Bondt
Printed by Die Keure, Belgium

© 2004 The authors and artists
This work is subject to copyright. All rights are reserved, whether the whole or part of the material is concerned, specifically the rights of translation, reprinting, re-use of illustrations, recitation, broadcasting, reproduction on microfilms or in other ways, and storage in databases. For any kind of use, permission of the copyright owner must be obtained.

Website: www.veryrealtime.co.za
Contact: gregghallo@yahoo.com

Very Real Time has been hosted by the Association for Visual Arts Gallery and made possible by support from The National Arts Council, The Royal Netherlands Embassy, the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs/Development Cooperation and the RAIN Artists’ Initiatives Network.

Thanks to Gertrude Flentge and Pinque Beuters at RAIN, Estelle Jacobs at the AVA Gallery, Margriet Leemhuis and Dale Dodgins at the Royal Netherlands Embassy, Funiwe Kubalo at the National Arts Council, Carmen Perez, Jane Alexander, Julia Carke, Zayd Minty, Ed Young, Andrew Lambrecht and Cameron Platter.