

## REVIEWS

Darren Newbury, *Defiant Images: Photography and Apartheid South Africa* (Pretoria: UNISA Press, 2009), xxiii + 345 pp., Cloth, ISBN 978-1-86888-523-7.

Tosha Grantham, ed., *Darkroom: Photography and New Media in South Africa since 1950* (Richmond, VA: Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, 2009), x + 150 pp., Cloth, ISBN 978-0-917046-89-6.

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The struggle for change in South Africa was one of the late twentieth century's greatest stories, which coincided with an expansion of media technologies around the world. To call the struggle to mind is to see it: Mandela at the Treason Trial, Pieteron shot in Orlando, voters snaking around polling places. Recent books by Darren Newbury and edited by Tosha Grantham tell the history of photography and its place in the dramas of twentieth century South Africa. The former is an academic monograph, thoroughly sourced and cited, which ranges from the 1930s to the 1980s. Newbury argues that those decades saw the emergence of a discernable South African tradition of engaged documentary, 'a strong sense of photography's value as a means of commenting on issues of social and political importance' (1). Much of Newbury's material is well known; he has two chapters on *Drum*, a chapter on Ernest Cole's *House of Bondage* and a chapter on Afrapix and other anti-apartheid photographic activists in the 1980s. He makes this familiar story new with remarkable empathy, intelligence and panache. Grantham's catalogue is more modest; half the length of Newbury's book, the book is comprised primarily of images organized for a 2010 exhibition at the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, which later travelled to the Birmingham Museum of Art in Alabama. Grantham and her collaborators do not demonstrate Newbury's deep knowledge of twentieth century South African history and photographic practice. Yet their volume manages to achieve something remarkable: rather than retell the story of white supremacy's rise and fall, *Darkroom* demonstrates photography's amazing capacity to, as Newbury puts it, 'interrupt the flow of time' (317) and lay bare the past, in all its strangeness and wonder.

Newbury's study is a smart, engaging account of South African photography – or, at least, of those aspects of South African photographic practice which he claims as part of this 'indigenous tradition' of social comment. Not surprisingly, the narrative of a book called *Defiant Images* is heavily teleological. Newbury's first chapter begins during the era of World War II, with practitioners like Constance Stuart-Larrabee, who first produced stunning images of 'tribal types' – what Newbury calls 'salvage ethnography' (16) – in the spirit of the famed photographer Alfred Duggan-Cronin, but eventually found herself drawn to the emerging urban cultures of Johannesburg and other centres. Rather than rely only on Stuart-Larrabee's published work, Newbury delves into the archives to reproduce her remarkable accounts of life in the shanties that came increasingly to dominate Johannesburg's outskirts by the end of the war. (Newbury's use of unpublished photographs, found in archives, is stimulating throughout.) For Newbury, Stuart-Larrabee was an important ancestor in the

practice of social documentary, but not an ideological forebear; that honour goes instead to Leon Levson, who similarly began photographing 'tribal types' and eventually turned his lens on Johannesburg's unfolding urban cultures. Whereas Stuart-Larrabee's images tended towards the heroic – shebeen queens, mine boys, well lit, almost heroic representatives of the new society – Levson looked into dark interiors, to see the shabby conditions of black life amidst white supremacy. In his work, Newbury sees 'the contours of an oppositional politics,' (48) which would become clearer in subsequent generations.

Newbury's next two chapters turn to *Drum* to demonstrate how this politics coalesced first through the work of Jurgen Schadeberg, Bob Gosani, Alf Kumalo and others. Chapter Two tells the relatively well-known story of the magazine's quick modulation from Cape Town-based and tribally fixated to Johannesburg-centred and unapologetically modern. The next chapter is more interesting; in it Newbury considers how *Drum* photographers began to probe around the edges of political comment through episodic exposés of government practices. Bob Gosani's remarkable 1954 photographs of prisoners being forced by their warders to dance the 'tausa' at the Old Fort stand out here. Photo essays illustrated the magazine's investigative endeavours, demonstrating, as Newbury suggests, that the magazine's editors understood that their audience would respond to such stimulation. Moreover, Newbury shows how during the 1950s both practitioners and subjects were developing a photographic consciousness, as Congress politicians cultivated photographers' loyalties and photographers manipulated reality to maximize an image's impact.

*Drum* never realized its full potential as a visual intervention in South African politics, due especially to government repression in the wake of Sharpeville. Yet, Newbury sees a continuity in the work of the sometimes *Drum* photographer Ernest Cole, whose 1967 *House of Bondage* was a watershed in South Africa's international image, and in the role that photography was to play in apartheid's ultimate denouement. Newbury has many valuable things to say about Cole's life in South Africa, and especially about his collaboration with Joseph Lelyveld, the *New York Times*'s Johannesburg correspondent, whose dispatches Cole illustrated and whose text underlined *House of Bondage*'s didactic purposes. Newbury's most important argument is that Cole's work moved South African photography decisively onto the ground of systemic social critique, privileging dark interiors, fences, over-crowded and airless transport, over *Drum*'s exposés of singularly egregious practices. This meant a shift in audience – from the sophisticated black consumers of Johannesburg to an international audience who read the *Times* and through photography was exposed to the unfolding human crisis in South Africa. This was Cole's intervention: South African photography as social realism and political intervention, via the raised consciousness of an image consuming, and often distant, public.

Following Newbury, then, we might draw a straight line from Cole to *The World's* Sam Nzima (who took the iconic photograph of the dead Hector Pieterse) to the anti-apartheid gallants in the Afrapix collective, who immortalized the violent ravages that marked the regime's dying days. Newbury's narrative closes first with this heyday of documentary intervention, and then with an excellent chapter on photography's role in the memorialization of apartheid. Anyone who has been to the Hector Pieterse Memorial or the Apartheid Museum knows this well. Black and white photographs line the walls at each; to visit is effectively to walk the pages of a photographic essay. The room dedicated to *House of Bondage* in the Apartheid Museum fits

so naturally, it is hard to imagine that Cole's work was little known in South Africa for decades following its publication overseas. This ought to give us pause. Scholars of public memory in South Africa and elsewhere have demonstrated the pitfalls of memorialization and especially how the privileging of certain narratives effectively censors the past. *Defiant Images* is a compelling narrative, which neatly concludes in the museums and memorials that testify to the vital, politicizing and publicizing role of documentary photography in the struggle for change in South Africa. But this is only one story, and there are others, which Newbury has chosen not to tell. For example, save for the discussion of *Drum's* transition to chronicling Johannesburg cultural life, we get no sense of the South African photographic audience, especially the black audience whose demand drove *Drum* from Cape Town to Johannesburg in the first place. What did photography and visual culture mean to them, as opposed to an international audience primed to accept the relentless drumbeat of racial conflict? What other stories about photography were possible?

To his credit, Newbury acknowledges that his is only one story, and thus opens a space for Grantham's *Darkroom* to provide a vital complement. From exile in the late 1960s, Ernest Cole lamented that he had been cast only as the 'chronicler of misery, injustice and callousness', when in fact 'the total man does not live by one experience' (209). These other experiences are evident in *Darkroom*. There is struggle and oppression in its pages – one opens the book to Jurgen Schadeberg's image of Mandela looking through the bars of his cell, for example. But almost immediately, the dominant story is unsettled by images of everyday life, which make clear the limits of Newbury's documentary tradition. Take, for example, David Goldblatt's 1978, 'A not white family in bed on a Sunday morning ...' It shows a family of four in bed, reading a newspaper. After Newbury's unrelenting black and white (the favoured tones of memory), their room is a shock: the wall is green, the blankets blue. The interplay between text and image evokes a shared humanism, a reminder that South Africans lived in colour, even as they were also trapped by it. *Darkroom* is replete with such surprises: weddings, celebrations, dances, amidst the snarling German shepherds and barbed wire.

The most effective surprises are the portraits. Primed by social exposé – which privileges the audience's ability to see – *Darkroom's* most intellectually challenging images are those in which South Africans look directly at the audience, and force us to ask what they hoped to get out of their encounter with the camera. Newbury dismissed the practice of 'vernacular portraiture', (3) which other critics have offered as a distinctively African photographic practice. Yet *Darkroom* powerfully demonstrates that black South Africans stood for and consumed portraits themselves. Grantham's volume includes a number of selections from the studio of Sukhdeo Mohanlall, whose Durban portrait studio catered to the region's urban youth in the late 1960s to 1970s. The images show young men and women posed in beads, takkies and sharply cut trousers, all standing before a red curtain and most posing with a basket of fake flowers. How do these young people's self-presentations fit into the world of their contemporary, Ernest Cole? *Darkroom* pushes the portraiture tradition back in time, by including various selections from Afrapix veteran Santu Mofokeng's *Black Photo Album/Look At Me*. Mofokeng displays portraits from African families' private collections – well dressed men and women, gazing assuredly at the camera, and at us. Mofokeng's collection powerfully challenges us to consider how black audiences engaged with cameras on their own terms, from as early as the late nineteenth and early twentieth century.

Elsewhere, Mofokeng has written that he became interested in photography in the 1970s because ‘everyone who had a camera seemed more popular than I was.’<sup>1</sup> His peers loved to have their picture taken, and he wanted to oblige. (Newbury notes that Stuart-Larrabee encountered the same enthusiasm in the 1940s.) The setting was more casual than that of Mohanlall’s studio, or those of the photographers in *Black Photo Album*, but people’s interest in having their pictures taken was the same. They valued the product of photographic technology; the visual representation meant something to do them, and as such, was theirs. In *Defiant Images* Newbury has given us a thorough explication of a form of visual culture in the struggle against apartheid in South Africa. South Africans, represented on film, were the subjects of one of the greatest stories of late modernity. *Darkroom* offers another story, which goes beyond the black and white of what Okwui Enwezor calls ‘strugglism’. In his contribution to the catalogue, Tumelo Mosaka asks what the spread of cell phone cameras portends for the future of photography, for the unique power of the photographer to compose and represent reality. We might ask that question of the past as well. The struggle is a good story, but it can only be told so many times before it loses its vitality. That South Africans posed themselves, that amidst deprivation and violence they composed their selves and represented their reality – that they were historical subjects, not just the subjects of history – is a clarion call for further research into South Africa’s visual history. Every time someone stood before a camera and looked it in the eye, time stopped, and with a click, the past was made fertile again.

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1 Santu Mofokeng, *Chasing Shadows* (New York: Prestel Publishing, 2011), 9.

*There are portraits and still-lives.  
And there is paring the apple.*

Charles Tomlinson<sup>1</sup>

In this volume of photographs published in 2012 by Prestel, Guy Tillim presents two new bodies of work, both subsumed under the title *Second Nature*. The first, a series of landscapes photographed in Tahiti, is followed by a second series of urban cityscapes photographed in Sao Paulo. The motivation to juxtapose these two series is not immediately apparent, and it seems from his text that Els Barents, Director of the Huis Marseille Museum for Photography in Amsterdam where these images were first shown remained baffled by this decision. Neither Barent's afterword nor Tillim's brief artist's statement give the viewer much of a lead-in to the work.

Tillim's very impressive earlier work – the derelict apartment blocks of *Jo'burg*, the Congolese child militia of *Soldiers* and his various explorations of African colonial and postcolonial regimes of power and abuse in *Leopold and Mobutu*, *Congo democratic*, *Avenue Patrice Lumumba* amongst others – leaves no doubt that there must be more to the juxtaposition of the landscapes of Tahiti and Sao Paulo than a simple rural/urban dichotomy.

It is intriguing that the Tahiti images refer to – were even inspired by – much earlier painterly representations of Tahiti made by the artist William Hodges who accompanied Captain James Cook on his second voyage to the Pacific islands between 1772 and 1775. Hodges' paintings in turn draw on the grand classical European landscape tradition exemplified by Claude Lorrain (1604-1682). Engaging with a painterly tradition seems to have prompted a new departure for Tillim, and at first glance these images don't have an easy 'fit' with his previous output. It is clear that Tillim is confronting the deeply entrenched artistic conventions of the landscape genre, conventions of imaging so internalised as to seem natural or given. *Second Nature*. The way we look at nature has been determined by a myriad of images produced over centuries – so in looking at and representing nature we seek out a view, a frame that produces the familiar effects of pleasure, calm, balance, harmony or stillness. Such a frame might include uninterrupted vistas visually contained by the sharp close-up detail of foliage or trees at left and right – visual buffers that lead the eye into the far distance, following a serpentine lake at the foot of majestic hills or mountains, leading towards a distant hazy luminosity in the skies, producing an image of an unspoilt Eden; of paradise. These views of faraway places have constructed, and continue to construct and reinforce, images of undeveloped, untouched, raw environments. And there are a few Tillim images of Tahiti that present such views – 'Tahiti' and then 'Opunohu – Rotui – Cook's Bay'; grand, majestic, moody, romantic

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<sup>1</sup> Charles Tomlinson, *Selected Poems* (Toronto: Exile Editions, 1989), 12.

images of remote rugged beauty. But there is ambivalence too in his take on Tahiti. Whilst Tillim is an attentive and investigative traveller following in the footsteps of Cook, Gauguin and others, his representation of Tahiti both embraces and resists the notion of paradise that is so powerfully connected in the public imagination to exotic isolated places like the island of Tahiti.

What made a photographer like Tillim embark on a voyage to Tahiti, and what was he looking for? Was he looking for, hoping for, paradise? Or was he rather seeking to expose the myth and so distance himself from entrenched romantic conceptions and idyllic representations of the landscape? Was he attempting to resist and work outside of artistic, painterly conventions? Certainly, many of the photographs in this body of work show an unglamourised – perhaps even deliberately banal – view of Tahiti: flat light, grey, damp tonality, windy, cloudy, littered beaches, abandoned and derelict Peugeots, or manicured lawns and rockeries circa 1950. These photographs of ordinary spaces seem curiously dated, with an almost hand-coloured effect. Tillim's view of Tahiti is melancholic and his images communicate a difficult kind of emptiness that works against the possibility that he is seeing beauty in the ordinary. The sharp focus and the fact that these images were printed to very large scale halts the impulse to read the images as arbitrary, and prompts the questions: What *is* it that I am looking at, or for, in this image? And what was *he* looking at, or for?

In the end, I keep going back to Tomlinson's observation that there are the great genres – portraiture and still-life – and he might just as well have included landscape – and then there is paring the apple; the small details, the slow preparation of food, and the repetitive but meaningful, ongoing nature of everyday activities. Perhaps more than anything Guy Tillim's *Second Nature* is a meditation on rhythm, on time, on imbibed modes of being, and on paying attention, being attentive, but most of all just on being, and perhaps on being there particularly.

This makes sense in the context of Tillim's other work, where his attitude to making photographs has always been about being in the moment – shifting from being in the right moment at the right time in his journalistic days to being able to permeate boundaries, to disappear as the outsider with the camera, to slip into the lives, the scenes, the moments he is recording. But unlike the bank of Tillim's images that capture moments of turmoil, violence, danger, horror, or the meditative yet nonetheless desolate and desperate stillness of the immediate or distant aftermath, the images of Tahiti seem to signal a different kind of 'being there'.

That Tillim decided to buy a boat and sail from Fort Lauderdale to Tahiti, in order to arrive slowly, to see the islands emerging, drawing closer, coming gradually into focus, seems to affirm his pursuit of an entirely different rhythm. The red STOP sign at the centre point of 'Papetoai, Moorea', a photograph of an intersection in this slow town, with an empty café and a painfully thin hound in the foreground, seems also to affirm this deep breath, this embrace of the sluggish humid coastal pace.

Resisting the entrenched visual conventions of composition is also to be found in the Sao Paulo series. And the same melancholic, bleak, bleached, somewhat arbitrary, or just ordinary instances of the city are also there. Without having to focus on a specific monument or event or view, one is freed in some senses to move in the spaces, to be there. Sao Paulo is a dense urban metropolis of seventeen million inhabitants and would most probably have been experienced by Tillim as an exaggerated version of Johannesburg with its mad combinations of the extremely lavish and the dire, and Tillim would have been well disposed to slip into this city with a pre-existing level of

familiarity. He was certainly able to bypass the obvious representations of the city and move directly into an exploration of it that produced his particular, and distinctive, brand of nonjudgmental imagery, that offers a view, or an experience, of one person's route through the spaces of the city, one idiosyncratic and in-between view.

The juxtaposition of the two series finally makes sense for me, in the perhaps radical shift in Tillim's work from an urgent sense of time and timing, from an impulse to capture the right moment or to produce or track a particular narrative, to a quieter – and quite profound – sense of time out of time.

Reflection on this new volume brings to mind Virginia Woolf's powerful question which first appeared in her critical essay on Daniel Defoe's novel, *Robinson Crusoe*:

And is there any reason, we ask as we shut the book, why the perspective that a plain earthenware pot exacts, should not satisfy us as completely, once we grasp it, as man himself in all his sublimity standing against a background of broken mountains and tumbling oceans with stars flaming in the sky?<sup>2</sup>

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2 Virginia Woolf, 'Robinson Crusoe' (1932) in *The Second Common Reader* (USA: Harvest, 1986), 50.

Pieter Hugo, *Permanent Error* (contributions by Federica Angelucci and Jim Puckett) (Munich: Prestel, 2011), 110 pp., 30£ cloth, ISBN 978-3-7913-4520-8.

Pieter Hugo, *This Must Be the Place* (contributions by TJ Demos and Aaron Schuman) (Munich: Prestel, 2012), 227 pp., 35£ cloth, ISBN 978-3-7913-4689-2.

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*Permanent Error*, a catalogue of Pieter Hugo's photographs taken at Agbobloshie dump near Accra, Ghana, is accompanied by an introduction by Federica Angelucci and short essay on technotrash and e-waste by Jim Puckett. The exhibition catalogue *This Must Be the Place* accompanied Hugo's solo show at The Hague Museum of Photography and the Musée de l'Elysée, Lausanne. *This Must Be the Place* features a range of Hugo's projects from 2005-2012 taken in a few African locations; though published only a year later, it reprises a large portion of the *Permanent Error* portfolio.

Agbobloshie, populated by grimy men and women, is a place conveyed by Hugo as the apocalyptic graveyard of digital obsolescence. Chemical smoke rises from burning piles of computers, scorched floppy disks, flaming appliances. Men gather wires and cords and prod fires with iron bars, their faces are smeared by the fumes. Hugo's few, most powerful, direct portraits of men, their names registered at the end of the volume, give a grim stare. Hugo's projects have come to be known for the gaze which unnerves us. Puckett's essay illuminates the appalling effects of the global divide, situating the scene, one of many sites of 'recycling' e-trash from the north.

As editorial piece, 'Permanent Error' is long on images, so much so that one quickly notices the flatness and limitations of the content. The large-format makes for vivid handling of the scale of the land, its tonal flames and greys. Formally, this is terrifically arresting. Hugo's portraits are interspersed with surveys of the acrid landscape. His subjects angle slightly in a solid square format. Their stoic gazes give away absolutely nothing of the interior of these individuals. It makes wrenching news copy, driven by a powerful and rarely-illustrated idea: the waste and destruction of the north, sent away to someplace most people living outside of Africa have not heard of, cannot fathom. It's a dead-end tale, it was never meant to illuminate the complex exchanges of waste management, global exchanges, and tough guys surviving on the margins of post-industrial slagheaps.

The scope of Hugo's career, nearing ten years, has garnered a lofty level of institutional recognition in Europe and the US as well as South Africa, one at the time of writing arguably unparalleled among young photographers based on the African continent. His work is increasingly collected in Europe and the US, featured reliably in lists of young photographers to watch, gaining press prizes and accolades in the mainstream arts press. Demand for South African photography continues to grow from institutions in the UK, Europe, and the US, particularly exhibitions featuring these fascinating (and comparatively wealthy) microcosms of artistic support and production. Thus far, Hugo's broadest appeal and patronage in the US, the UK, France, The Netherlands and Germany coincided with the reception of his work at Bamako's biennial photography *Rencontres*, where in 2009 and 2011 the prominently mounted *Nollywood* and *Permanent Error* series induced a particular fervor among the European curators in attendance. The immediacy of the formats, combined with

Hugo's technical mastery and the size and scope of his exhibitions at Bamako, geared for maximum impact, hit the mark. In an era where there are unprecedented numbers of young photographers working on the continent, with an astonishing array of subjects and with very little resources at their disposal, artists must choose their subjects carefully, with an eye to these external audiences. Hugo's prominence in an era of burgeoning demand for 'African photography' by European and American audiences (from both media and art-world) signals the limits of this zeitgeist.

Hugo's engagement with subjects across sub-Saharan Africa, according to the essays by Schuman and Demos, configure a kind of reverberation between South African 'home' audiences and those less knowledgeable ones overseas. By drawing on conversations and a number of interviews with Hugo, Schuman and Demos point to the ambiguities, conflicts, and economic distances exemplified in these projects. They suggest that Hugo takes direct aim at photography's presumed qualities and purveyances of veracity. When the images fail to convey information (working under the assumption that gaps in knowledge are just too vast to convey 'African' material to non-African audiences), what keeps the eye glued to his work are the senses of discomfort, the marks of violence, and an eye for exaggeration. Whether his fabulist projects (Nollywood) or his more straight-ahead family portraits (Messina/Musina South Africa), Hugo is less interested in people than in what his depiction of them can do to you.

Thus his portraits – of families, of judges, of his friends – amount to a particular quality of photographic portraiture's gaps and fissures. Detailing the lace collars and machined edges of grey wigs, such as that worn by Miss Esine Okudzeto of the Supreme Court of Ghana, we reroute from the erstwhile subject of professional accomplishment or individual stance, to the received, possibly antiquated conventions of the British legal system in the former colonies. The series of portraits of judges and justices suggest something unresolved or incomplete, and Hugo's critique of institutions becomes instead a visual treatment borne by his subjects.

In the series 'There's a Place in Hell for Me and My Friends' Hugo's portraits reveal, among other things, the preoccupation with portrait conventions and inherited ideas – in this instance of race. According to the artist, image files of colour portraits were changed to black and white, 'while keeping the colour channels active. ... One can manipulate the colour channels and emphasise certain colours within the grey scale ... the red and yellow colour channels were darkened to a point where nearly all of the information is rendered as blacks and dark greys' (*This Must Be The Place*, 221). Theoretically, both projects suggest formal questions about the fictions and received notions that circulate – around race, or indeed what happens when eyes can rest, unflinchingly, on an unfamiliar person's face. The viewer in Cape Town, in London, in New York will each have a personal response. But these questions posed are so vague and so atomized, that these two series are less liable to hold a viewer's attention for more than a few moments.

The 'Nollywood' series confirms Hugo's penchant for collaborating with his subjects. In this case he capitalizes on film actors and their characters to distill an essence of visceral, almost archetypal characters. The Nigerian film industry's roll-call of diabolical fellows are familiar to Nollywood audiences but even more riveting for unschooled spectators; with them, Hugo taps into a terribly fraught notion of terrifying public image-memory. Whose memories? Which publics? These are questions for us. The imaginarium of collective horror (masked hachetmen, devils with respectable

wives, murderous schoolgirls, a man holding a bull's vital organs over its barely dead carcass) sears the eye.

The splashy intensity of the content does suggest more about Hugo's subjects and their appeal than it might about Hugo himself. The artist clearly has a canny connection to his sitters, and his engagement and their collaboration with them are obvious. In much of these works, the most salient characteristic is their flatness, vivid and formally uncomplicated nature. There is little risk of getting bogged down by complex elements internal to the frame, fussy narratives driving the series, or political obscurities. His approach, however, may be moving in a new direction, if we consider the last section of his most recent work, 'Kin South Africa' from 2012. The portraits of Hugo's family, blood and otherwise, and images of the land that Hugo is tied to, are more lush; they offer the viewer a more compelling and sustained narrative. Given the lavish resources and support that the publication of these two volumes signal, we can only hope that sophisticated audiences, presented with layered and challenging material from artists, will spark new critical directions.

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Tamar Garb, *Figures & Fictions: Contemporary South African Photography* (Göttingen, Germany: Steidl and V&A Publishing, 2011), 312 pp., R581.00, Hardback, ISBN 978-3-86930-266-9.

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*Figures & Fictions: Contemporary South African Photography* was published to coincide with an exhibition in the Porter Gallery at the Victoria and Albert Museum in London. The book is divided into four sections: an essay by Tamar Garb, over 150 pages of colour plates, a compilation of interviews and artists' statements, and a round-table discussion with Achille Mbembe, Sarah Nuttall, Riason Naidoo and Colin Richards titled 'Thinking from the South: Reflections on Image and Place'.

As an exhibition catalogue, *Figures & Fictions* presents a beautiful collection of photographs by seventeen contemporary artists based in South Africa who produced photographic works between the years 2000 and 2010. The artists chosen to participate in the exhibition are largely predictable: Jodi Bieber, Kudzanai Chiurai, Husain and Hasan Essop, David Goldblatt, Pieter Hugo, Terry Kurgan, Sabelo Mlangeni, Santu Mofekeng, Zwelethu Mthethwa, Zanele Muholi, Jo Ratcliffe, Berni Searle, Mikhael Subotzky, Guy Tillim, Roelof Petrus van Wyk, Nontsikeleko Veleko and Graeme Williams.

Perhaps the least predictable, but a very fruitful inclusion, is the *Park Pictures* series by Terry Kurgan, in which the artist produces portraits of Joubert Park photographers, juxtaposing an image-making process in a cosmopolitan yet contested outdoor space with the often insular image-viewing process in the adjacent Johannesburg Art Gallery. An interesting addition would have been Michael MacGarry, a recent Standard Bank Young Artist winner who uses photography to explore, amongst other things, China-Africa relations. Although his photographs taken in South Africa, Nigeria, Angola and China are not entirely problem-free, they touch on one of the most critical socio-economic issues in Africa and the world today.

In her essay, 'Figures and Fictions: South African Photography in the Perfect Tense', Tamar Garb analyses three 'filters of figuration' (12): ethnography, documentary and portraiture, arguing that these pictorial traditions 'continuously jostle and rub against one another' (13). While the stories of these photographic conventions are very familiar, the most significant contribution of this essay is Garb's analysis of the ways in which images can be more complex than their instrumental function (22) when these seemingly discrete filters have to be negotiated within the same image (21).

As an example, she compares Zanele Muholi's *Beulah* series, which references historical pseudo-scientific conventions, to Gustav Fritsch's photographs of ethnographic 'types' that isolate sitters like 'biological specimens' (18). As Muholi makes clear in her interview, all of her subjects are people that she knows: 'My principal over the past few years has been to capture those who I know; people who I know by names and surnames' (289). These photographs, she adds, 'are about me ... Zanele celebrating my community...' (288). While this personal relationship between the photographer and the sitter in Muholi's photographs differs starkly to conventions of ethnographic photography, Garb argues that one can read an 'exquisite particularity' in some of Fritsch's nineteenth century photographs, for the language of portraiture,

which emphasizes the individual is, in certain photographs, more powerful than the flattening function of typology. Although rare, it is possible for images of ethnographic 'types' to 'exceed the imperatives of classification' by taking on 'the language of portraiture' (18). On these rare occasions, interpretation can be opened up beyond the 'conventional post-colonial critique to which they have more routinely been subjected' (22).

What Garb points to here, is the tension between the 'typical and the unique' (21), which, she says, has always been a part of photography. While Garb's essay considers this tension in terms of ethnographic 'types' versus known individuals, more could have been done with this tension in relation to place, a tension that would bring to her essay contemporary issues of globalisation and the 'Global South'. While this is discussed in the roundtable, 'Thinking from the South', it is unfortunate that this conversation, arguably the most theoretically exciting part of the book, is reproduced in small print and placed right at the end. Similarly, the interviews, also printed in small type, are at times very rich expressions of the artists' own voices.

Just as there is comfort, knowledge and specificity to a photographer photographing his or her own community, there is a certain specificity to 'thinking from the South', although this specificity needs to rigorously maintain the tensions, interfaces and contradictions of these spatial explorations. While Mbembe stresses the 'interface of the multiple worlds we inhabit' and Nuttall suggests turning the north-south axis sideways (301), there is general consensus in this conversation that the slippages between the familiar and the unfamiliar, the specific and the general, the homeliness and the homelessness, or the proximity and the distance ought to be treasured.

Garb could have gone further in relating this productive tension with regard to place to the slippage between the 'typical' and the 'unique' in photography and the related ongoing debate about the 'insider' and the 'outsider' in the process of image-making. As she points out, an 'insider's' view is not necessarily exempt from 'allegations of voyeurism, prurience or exploitation' (27), just as it is not impossible for a photograph taken by an 'outsider' to reveal real empathy 'despite the display of difference and the play of power that exposure to the camera entailed' (21).

Nonetheless, in the interviews, Garb continues to press artists to discuss their assumed 'outsider' or 'insider' status. For example, she asks David Goldblatt whether there is something about his Jewishness that is relevant to the representation of human catastrophe in his photograph, 'Refugees from Zimbabwe Sheltering in the Central Methodist Church on Pritchard Street, in the city, 22 March 2009' (273). She asks Pieter Hugo if we are 'in the realm of anthropological or ethnographic photography' when his photographs tell stories from the 'outside' (275). She asks Jo Ratcliffe if she was 'uncomfortable as an observer' in Angola (291) and regarding his photographs taken in Mozambique she asks Zwelethu Mthethwa: 'Do you feel that you are working from within communities, or are you an outsider who visits the communities you portray?' (284).

While such questions are not irrelevant, it seems incongruent for an author to press artists to talk about their supposed insider or outsider status when a key theoretical point in her essay is the potentially redemptive slippage between photographic conventions that may result in unexpected empathy or even intersubjectivity. Surely this slippage indicates that images potentially have the power to exceed the imperatives of our photographic legacies, especially the weighty legacy of colonialism and ethnographic photography. While power imbalances are still very real, and while

many of these imbalances continue to be framed in racialised terms, it is imperative in contemporary South Africa to read the potential power of the photograph as well as the potential power of the photographic subject in nuanced ways. As Pieter Hugo suggests, we should not assume a lack of agency in the person being photographed: ‘... I question whether there’s no reciprocity between subject and portraitist. In a way it’s a recording of a collaborative event. So you can’t assume that the subject of a photograph is passive and has no agency’ (275).

In a number of interviews Garb asks the photographer to what degree he or she allows the photographic subjects to create their own poses, and often the answer is that the subjects are free to project themselves as they wish, suggesting that they are active players who participate in the process of image-making. Terry Kurgen says, for example, that she did not dictate her sitters’ poses, but rather ‘tried to get the photographers to collaborate with ... [her] in the representation of themselves’ (277).

Pertinently, the interviews reveal that contemporary South African artists are acutely aware of issues of power in the process of taking photographs and they carefully navigate this minefield in different ways. Jo Ratcliffe, for example, stresses that she avoids making human subjects central to her work because ‘the relationship is just too complex’ (291). Zwelethu Mthethwa says, ‘I think if you look at yourself as an outsider it becomes just too difficult because you are very conscious of the fact that you are coming from the outside’ (284). Complicating the notion of a photographer being an ‘insider’ or ‘outsider’, Roelof Petrus van Wyk argues that by using such language we would have to call Goldblatt an outsider when he produced *Some Afrikaners* (206), even though his photographs reveal some empathy. He describes his own experience of looking, as a white Afrikaner, at media photographs of khaki-wearing AWB members and thinking, ‘I am also an outsider when I look at these images. I wonder, “Who are these people?”’ (296). Pushing the legacy of ethnographic photography up against the conventions of portraiture, Van Wyk merges both his identity and the sitter’s identity with the notion of a ‘type’ (young Afrikaners) through his labeling of photographs, such as ‘Young Afrikaner – A Self Portrait, Koos Groenewald’ or ‘Young Afrikaner – A Self Portrait, Natasja Fourie’. This strategy, along with Muholi’s statement that her photographs of other people are ‘Zanele celebrating my community...’ (288), allude to the notion of *Ubuntu* – the idea that I am who I am because of who you are. Both van Wyk and Muholi reveal themselves as photographers directly in relation to who their respective sitters and respective communities are.

As is demonstrated in a number of interviews, the time that can be afforded the post-apartheid photographer to build trust with a photographic subject is critical to contemporary South African photography, and does not have to be dictated to by colonialist or apartheid classifications. The best example of this in *Figures & Fictions* is Sabelo Mlangeni’s discussion of the making of his stunning 2006 photographic series ‘Invisible Women’. While these sensitive, intimate photographs reveal what Garb calls a ‘corporeal connectedness’ (27), Mlangeni was not automatically an ‘insider’, but describes how these works were only achieved after eight months of building a relationship with the women who swept the streets of Johannesburg at night. At first the women did not want to talk to him, and he engaged with these women for two or three months before he even started to take photographs. Obviously this is a starkly different context from the urgency that was required of social documentary photography during apartheid, but it is important for writers to recognise this way of

image-making that has the potential to move beyond our legacy of past photographic conventions, regardless of classifications of 'race', gender, sexual orientation or class. Although, as Nuttall and Garb suggest, we are not yet entirely over the 'weighty legacy of objectification and ethnographic essentialism that permeates the long history of colonialism' (305), Mlangeni's approach to his subjects reveals enormous potential for the creation of a new legacy of respectfully figuring photographic subjects.

**Ruth Simbao**

*Fine Art Department, Rhodes University*

An art critic for New York's *Village Voice* wrote the following description of Mthethwa's practice:

He takes the documentary model and combines it with the studio *mise-en-scène* scenario. Then he blows it up into Düsseldorf/Vancouver School scale, in color, and plugs in popular African portrait photo-motifs: shallow space, painterly juxtaposition of patterns and colors, double portraits in which two people dress alike. (Before *in vitro* fertilization, sub-Saharan Africa had the highest incidence of twins in the world – and a raft of *doppelgänger* philosophies to go with it).<sup>1</sup>

It is the latter phrase and thought that is intriguing; the terms double portraits, twins, *doppelgänger* presumably refer to the cover photograph of two young men seated on a bench and dressed in tweed jackets and felt hats. The art critic assumes that the photographer has staged this pairing and that the young men are playing at or actually are twins. These assumptions point to one of the obvious problems with the international reception of Mthethwa's work: he photographs African subjects and by definition African subjects invite ethnographic curiosity. From a local South African perspective the young men represent a ritual that precedes Mthethwa's camera whereas for the critic they represent a Lacanian mirror imaging. The young men are dressed alike because they are 'blood brothers'; circumcised by the same ritual specialist and cut with the same knife. What they are reflecting to the viewer is the modern innovation that this passage to manhood is expressed sartorially in a dress code that involves tailored jackets and paperboy peak hats. Rather than being staged, the young men are a common sight in South Africa and their presence in the Mthethwa's work points to his awareness of their quotidian place in the ritual landscape of African beliefs.

Beyond these quibbles with the art critic's misinterpretation, there is the other question of what his photographs mean for a post-apartheid South African audience. At one level, Enwezor is correct to point out that Mthethwa's photographic work does not have the gaudy vibrancy of his early paintings and therefore will not readily adorn the walls of the *nouveau riches* black elite (note 6, 114). But, herein lies another complexity in interpretation. The images that Mthethwa brings to an international audience are everyday realities and what many South Africans look for in visual art is escapism not confrontation. This is not surprising in a country where many black South Africans were forced to live in close proximity to each other regardless of class, education, religious affiliation, gender and so on. In other words, while the images may bring an unknown world to the attention of the outside observer, they are simply

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1 Full article available at: <http://www.villagevoice.com/2010-07-27/art/david-goldblatt-zwelethu-mthethwa-and-retratos-pintados/>.

too intimate and close to the bone for many South Africans and thus the aversion to regarding them as 'art'. This is obviously an oversimplification but it is an attempt to explain why Mthethwa's photographic work does not have the same 'popular' appeal as his paintings.

The popular opinion should not however define the significance of the work. For intellectuals and other cultural workers in South Africa, Mthethwa's work is essential, which is why this monograph is a welcome publication. To begin with Mthethwa's biography speaks volumes about the predicaments of the black artist. In the 1970s, the only way in which he could study photography at the prestigious Michaelis School of Fine Art was by special permission from the Minister of Education. Today, the same institution is producing some of South Africa's leading artists and yet judging by recent controversies over the meaning of art and artistic expression, there is still a disjuncture between the artist and the common man and woman. This seems to re-stage the myth that the apartheid state attempted to make real: the educated, artistic African is a 'detrIALIZED' anomaly who is a threat to the enduring values of the patriarchal social order. Thus, even while elite institutions such as Michaelis produce brilliant young artists – especially black artists – the society itself may still be stuck in a time zone where the only relevant art is political art. One of the possible ways in which the gap between the artist and the ordinary citizen may be closed is through the use of Mthethwa's photographs to make connection between the past and the present. Nearly all of Mthethwa's photographs point to or imply a narrative that supersedes the subject of the photograph. It is possible, for example, to read the Interiors series not just in terms of the burgeoning of informal settlements and the consequences thereof, but also in terms of the migration of young people from rural to urban areas. Again, although Enwezor is correct to underscore the historical connection between apartheid influx control laws and the condition of abjection that cannot be ignored when viewing the Interiors pictures, it is also equally true that the South African city was attractive to migrants beyond just its allure of modernity and potential citizenship (103-5).

The other series of photographs that opens up yet unexplored connections between past and present is the Sugar Cane series. Here Enwezor heaps apropos praise when he states that this series is a 'tour de force of portraiture' in which, '[t]he sugarcane fields and the surrounding landscape are ... no ordinary aspects of nature; they represent deeply entangled notions of dwelling, history, memory, myth, ideology' (109). Although not explored in his essay, this apt summation of the meaning of sugarcane fields can be elaborated further since sugarcane is not only 'alien vegetation', it was brought to South Africa to introduce a 'plantation culture' which colonists and colonial administrators thought was lacking. The cultivation of sugarcane led to the introduction of indentured Indian labourers in the 1860s since the labour of the indigenous Zulus was not consistently forthcoming. In the *Illustrated Official Handbook of the Cape and South Africa* published in 1896, for example, a photograph was printed with the telling label 'Coolies Cutting the Sugar Cane'. Although shot for the purpose of illustrating the success of the sugar industry in Natal, this historical photograph points to the fact that Mthethwa's subjects are the inheritors of a role that was historically played by someone else. Moreover, this alternation between 'indentured' and 'indigenous' labour repeated itself again on the diamond and gold mines as indentured Chinese labourers were brought in to counter shortages in the aftermath of the South African War (1899-1902). In other words, Mthethwa's subjects are

contemporary iterations of one of South Africa's enduring dilemmas of how to create a labouring or working class.

The Sugar Cane series is compelling for another reason. Mthethwa deliberately chose to photograph only men. This absence of women highlights the fact that many of the photographed subjects are dressed – mainly, for protective reasons – in skirts and aprons that are layered on top of other kinds of clothing. The predominance of male subjects is perhaps an echo of the emergence of studies of masculinities as typified in book titles such as Robert Morrell's *From Boys to Gentlemen: Settler Masculinity in Colonial Natal, 1880-1920* (2001). However, judging by the recent exhibition of Mthethwa's work in Cape Town's iArt Gallery,<sup>2</sup> the selection of male subjects may be a permanent feature of his work. In this latest series titled 'The Brave Ones', Mthethwa follows young members of the Shembe church and seems to give them license to be photographed leaning on each other in friendship poses. What seems to fascinate Mthethwa are the pleated gingham and tartan skirts – with the occasional pith helmet thrown in – that these young acolytes wear as part of their uniform. In the absence of the subjects' names or titles to the photographs, it seems fair to conclude that their gender-bending is the sole source of *frisson* for the photographer. The rich history and longevity of this indigenous and independent Christian church are obscured and neutralized by this singular focus on the male members of the sect. This again is the place where South Africa's historians and intellectuals can contribute to the fuller interpretation of the photographs by supplying the context, theology and sartorial play that Mthethwa cannot capture in a single snap.

### **Hlonipha Mokoena**

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<sup>2</sup> Images available at: <http://www.iart.co.za/all-images-archive/zwelethu-mthethwa-new-works/>.

Sabelo Mlangeni, *Country Girls* (Cape Town: Michael Stevenson, 2010), 44 pp., Paperback. Catalogue (Michael Stevenson Gallery), No. 52. R90.

Sabelo Mlangeni, *Men Only* (Cape Town: Michael Stevenson, 2009), 37 pp., Paperback. Catalogue (Michael Stevenson Gallery), No. 46. R90.

Zanele Muholi, *Faces and Phases* (Munich: Prestel, 2010), 104 pp., Cloth, ISBN 978-3-7913-4495-9. ISBN: 978-3-7913-4495-9. US \$35.

Zanele Muholi, *No.1 Zanele Muholi Fotografías Africanas/African Women Photographers* (Madrid: Casa África/La Fabrica, 2011), 108 pp., Cloth, ISBN 978-84-15303-46-6.

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These books carry on the project of outing black South African gays and lesbians, or to be more precise, providing public visibility to non-normative sexualities and gender identities among black people in South Africa. They do so in fresh, moving ways, not least of all by allowing the people themselves to speak more directly to the observer than is the norm in academic studies. Through the medium of (mostly) black and white photography, they challenge some harmful stereotypes along the way with often intimate depictions of daily life and affection.

The 'girls' in the title of Sabelo Mlangeni's book are not, in fact, physically female. Rather, they are male or intersexed (transsexual seems unlikely given the costs of transitioning, but this kind of detail is not revealed or discussed). They are identified in the foreword by anthropologist Graeme Reid as 'gay' and 'men', with some thoughtful reflections on the tensions and ambiguities embedded in such terms. 'Country' is meanwhile defined as small towns and rural areas in Mpumalanga province. While it is hard to see any actual rural areas depicted (Ermelo and Piet Retief have populations of twelve to thirteen thousand), the photographs do make a very important point in documenting the fact that 'gay life' is not something confined to the big, cosmopolitan cities of South Africa. Here we can see gay men not only visible but seemingly for the most part rather happy and self-confident on the streets, in nightclubs, in parks and other public places of small towns and townships. These are spaces where, so goes the general assumption, the majority culture strongly disapproves of gays, and homophobia is supposed to drive same-sex practicing people underground.

To be sure, there are no shots of the subjects directly interacting with the non-gay population. Reid's introduction simply informs us that some of the venues depicted are indeed gay-friendly, where 'the presence of queens is not only unremarkable but appreciated and clearly enjoyed by the straight local patrons'. Reid acknowledges that there is violence and backlash against gays and lesbians in contemporary South Africa (something that is not even hinted at in the photos). But he interprets Mlangeni's subjects' comfortable presence in small town South Africa as a triumph of the equality clause of the constitution. Those who see the constitution as elitist are, by the evidence of these clearly non-elite men, wrong.

*Men Only* is more subtle. The focus here is on one of the remaining migrant men's hostels in the Johannesburg area. Such hostels were once a lynchpin of South Africa's industrial system but since the advent of democracy most have been demolished or converted to family apartments. The George Goch remains to provide lodging for taxi

drivers, security guards and other precariously employed migrants to the city. Far from home, lacking the financial wherewithal to date or to wed girlfriends, and often sharing rooms and showers with other men, hostel-dwellers earned notoriety from even before the apartheid years for their sometimes violent tribal culture and homosexual relationships. The photos here barely hint at the former with a single shot of a derogatory graffiti against the president. The latter, however, is fairly strongly suggested, although in ways that confound the stereotypes of what a homosexual man is supposed to look like.

Mlangeni lived in the hostel for several months, and the men there clearly came to trust him and to feel comfortable with his prying camera. It takes us throughout the dreary building and its mostly decrepit surroundings, depicting the men in a wide range of daily activities in various states of dress and undress. Mlangeni does really not betray any secrets – the public space and the performance of masculinity is almost resolutely heteronormative. But the men's frequent intimacy with each other raises the possibility of a different private life. The men sit closely together, often touching, urinating together, and in one case, laughingly snuggling together under a blanket.

*Men Only* offers a window into how masculinity plays out away from the gaze of women in an institution that helped to shape contemporary South African culture. In sharp contrast to *Country Girls*, almost nothing here is recognizably gay in the usual sense of the word. But this masculinity likely contributed to the constitution that makes the *Country Girls* subculture possible. It bears thinking about.

Zanele Muholi's first book by contrast focuses on black lesbians and transmen (that is, female-bodied people who identify as men or masculine). The introduction allows that they were captured in urban spaces, including renowned gay centres like Cape Town and outside of Africa, but also in sprawling, impoverished, and presumably unwelcoming black townships like Khayelitsha. Few of the photos, however, give exact location away. Rather, they are portraits with the sky, cracked plaster, curtains and other could-be-anywhere backgrounds. Instead of allowing the juxtaposition of identity and place to make a theoretical/political point, Muholi focuses on the force of character expressed in her subjects' eyes, dress and demeanour. They are, in a word, intense.

Muholi has acquired a global reputation for her art (not just photography, but documentary film as well), with shows in Lagos, Kassel (Germany), Johannesburg, Amsterdam and Bamako, among others. At the latter (Les Rencontres de Bamako biennial of African photography in 2009) she earned not one but two prizes, including best female photographer living in Africa. Her work has launched a new series of books that will celebrate the diversity and excellence of African women photographers. The final book under review here reproduces some of her best work, including photos from *Faces and Phases*. There are also three interpretive essays including one by Muholi herself and others that contextualize Muholi's 'visual activism' in the history of photography in Africa and in South Africa's fraught democracy. As Gail Smith notes, her art was denounced in 2009 as 'offensive' and 'crude misrepresentations' by no less than the country's Minister of Culture.

It is easy to see why people are moved by Muholi's work. In *Faces and Phases*, her subjects speak to us with a powerful sense of self. In a fascinating contrast to the playfulness of Mlangeni's subjects, Muholi's subjects show a sternness that allows only the occasional muted smile. There is an urgency here driven by Muholi's obvious solidarity with women and transmen victimized by homophobia and rape. Indeed, her introductory essay brims with an unusual clarity and passion, informed by a strong African feminist, anti-colonial/anti-racism critique. Her erudite essay in *African Women*

*Photographers* expounds on her motivations and her engagement with the cutting edge of African and African diasporic queer theory.

*African Women Photographers* has much of the same anger against homophobic stereotypes and violence as *Faces and Phases*. Yet it is also often playful and celebratory of the physical beauty and eroticism of African queers (Muholi does not shy from depicting nudity and overt expressions of sexuality). This book also includes some quite stylish young men or transwomen. I found one pose is especially striking both for the dignity of the subject's face and for the complexity of the image: the subject has natty hair and wears a 'traditional' beaded skirt with red high heels, sitting in an effeminate manner against a background of rubbish-strewn grass, a scintillating winter sky and just a hint of city skyline.

In an ideal world, the photos would constitute the final nail in the coffin of the prejudice that lesbians or queers more generally are 'un-African'. No one is attired in skins and furs in *Faces and Phases*, but the range of clothing presents all the wide range of professional and socio-economic niche found in almost any contemporary African city: from business to glamour to sporty to middle-class respectable and Christian minister.

Of course it is not an ideal world, and some of the contradictions in the struggle for sexual minority rights in Africa are evident in the work of both these photographers. Above all is the highly gendered nature of the identities most of the subjects express. In Mlangeni's work, effeminate men refer to themselves as queens and ladies, and their partners as gents; the men who have sex with men (we presume) in the hostel for the most part hold their bodies in highly masculinist, even macho ways. In Muholi's photographs, the majority of women and transwomen present themselves as masculine, often in a stereotypically butch manner. One is tempted to say, hurrah! This is democracy and the constitution has enabled people to come out and to freely express their sense of identity and dignity as people.

The problem for me, however, is that these gendered identities are deeply implicated in the violence and ill-health which make life so dangerous for sexual minorities and gender non-conforming people. The demonstrated existence of black gays, lesbians, transmen and transwomen here may thus strike some as a radical departure from traditional norms. But the identities they express imply quite conservative and fundamentally unequal relationships. This is worrisome from the perspective of those who are working to end gender-based violence including so-called corrective or curative rapes (a particular source of anger in Muholi's writing) and high rates of HIV among men who have sex with men (something you would not know about from Mlangeni's books).

That last silence may be deliberate. In a context where black male sexuality and gender identity are so often pathologized, it is also arguably a welcome change. One photo in *Country Girls*, however, more than hints at a troubling level of inter-personal violence. This is a *ménage-à-trois* which Reid suggests is focused on a *sangoma* or traditional healer with his 'ancestral wives' firmly under his control. It is a problematic vision of liberation.

All told, these striking books provide important and powerful testimony to a moment in the history of cultural change in South Africa that resonates with scholarship emerging from elsewhere on the continent.

**Marc Epprecht**

*Department of Global Development Studies, Queen's University*

This co-production of two companion volumes puts David Goldblatt's photographic documentary work into an intricate dialogue with the fictional prose of Ivan Vladislavic. In an effort to appreciate the prose and images of these connected volumes, historian Marijke du Toit (MdT) and documentary photographer Jenny Gordon (JG) embark on a discussion about the work of two individuals who have long been concerned with the South African politics of memory, place and identity and who have both produced a substantial body of work about the city of Johannesburg.

**MdT:** *TJ/Double Negative* has an unusual format – two books combined into a slipcase. In the novel, a young man whose father is concerned that he has given up his academic studies is persuaded to meet Auerbach, a Goldblatt-like photographer. Ivan Vladislavic foregrounds the two-dimensionality of the photographs and the materiality of photographic books. The protagonist props the book against his knees, flips through it, tilts it the wrong way as he tries to expose 'some pinhole to the air', so that they 'might burst into their proper dimensions' (26).

**JG:** I have always admired David Goldblatt's design in his various books. Compared to other photographic books that I have seen over the years, the design – the layout of the book, the placement of the text in relation to the photographs, the choice of plain fonts – does not get in the way of, or take attention from, the photographs but rather adds to the whole experience. Goldblatt's captions have also long been a very important part of his work, and an integral part of the overall presentation and design. As an example, the caption of the cover photograph, '[s]he said to him, 'You be the driver and I'll be the madam,' then they picked up the fender and posed, Hillbrow, 1975' adds humour and meaning. It shows that the woman took control of how she wanted to be photographed and her very serious expression adds to the role of the 'madam' that she was pretending to be. Unusually for this period of South African photography, Goldblatt's captions identify many of the people photographed by name.

But the details of place and living circumstance also make people into subjects. As I see it, this is part of Goldblatt's practice as a humanist photographer. As a retrospective of some six decades by one of South Africa's most famous and influential photographers, *TJ* is extremely valuable to me both as a practicing photographer and as a teacher of photography. Goldblatt has made a profound impact on how I and many others in my profession engage with the language of photography. But this is also specifically a much anticipated book about Johannesburg. Several years ago Rory Bester commented that many of Goldblatt's books had 'in varying degrees alluded to, referenced, and engaged Johannesburg', but that this South African city, 'most marked by the shift between past and present ... sits in moments in Goldblatt's archive, waiting to be loosened into book form'.<sup>1</sup> This is that book. I can only review

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1 Rory Bester, 'David Goldblatt, One Book at a Time' in *David Goldblatt: Photographs* (Contrasto Roma, 2006), 24.

the book from a very personal perspective. I was born and grew up in apartheid-era Johannesburg and for me some of the images are loaded with the feeling of the time. If I had to explain to someone from a very different context and country my personal upbringing in what was a very narrow world, I would show them a copy of this book because it embodies that particular time and place. The cover photograph foregrounds the power and the layered meanings of the portraiture contained in this volume. The man and woman who are posing for the camera, hold a bumper with an old 'TJ' number plate that designates Transvaal, Johannesburg and which any South African old enough would immediately recognise. This is a complex photograph, and some of the details that draw the eye include the woman's relatively smart clothing, next to the man's dirty coat. Their pose is formal, which combines oddly with the fact that they hold the front bumper with the number-plate. Read together with the caption the photograph refers to the excluded majority and conveys the subjects' humorous comment on the harsh reality of life for black persons in 1975, in the inner city suburb of Hillbrow, Johannesburg.

**MdT:** Ivan Vladislavic's *Double Negative* also strikes a personal note because of the way the narrator expresses an uncertainty of identity and the discomfort of being white and middle-class in South Africa of the 1980s, unsure of how he can exercise any real agency.

**JG:** Vladislavic's prose is in fact intensely visual, which is one of the reasons why there is such a strong sense of dialogue between these companion volumes. But more important, perhaps, is the fact that Goldblatt and Vladislavic are both engaged observers, who found creative ways to critically examine and to chronicle apartheid South Africa, and in fact have continued to do so with the advent of democratic rule. For me, both of these books convey a feeling of having grown up in a society or perhaps a community with which one could not fully identify. Certainly, Goldblatt as photographer and Vladislavic as novelist are self-aware and critical commentators on their society. This reminds me of the recent debate that grew out of the paper by Rhodes University academic Samantha Vice, 'How do I live in this Strange Place? Whiteness and Violence in South Africa.'<sup>1</sup> Although I found that article very thought-provoking, I did not agree with her argument that white South Africans should recognize 'their damaging presence' by 'making themselves invisible and unheard,' particularly as this seems to presuppose that all white South Africans are similarly implicated in 'whiteness' and 'shame' because of white privilege, regardless of past actions.<sup>2</sup> Goldblatt and Vladislavic found an honourable way of being white in South Africa, as outspoken public intellectuals in their different mediums of expression, and in fact, they have continued to do so after the demise of apartheid.

**MdT:** In *Double Negative*, the narrator pages through one of the photographer's books, commenting that '[t]he images were familiar and strange. I kept looking at a hand or a foot, a shoe, the edge of a sheet turned back, the street name painted on a kerb. Have I been there? Is this someone I'm going to meet?' He also wonders whether one could 'be dispassionate and deeply engaged at the same time?' (26-27).

**JG:** Goldblatt has dedicated *TJ* to Nadine Gordimer and in memory of Lionel Abrahams and Barney Simons. In fact, Abrahams contributed an essay to an earlier retrospective volume of Goldblatt's photographs, in which he wrote that Goldblatt's

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1 Samantha Vice, 'How do I live in this Strange Place? Whiteness and Violence in South Africa', *Journal of Social Philosophy*, 41(3), 323-342.

2 *Ibid.*, 335.

'awareness goes far and subtly beyond the notorious features of our society, into the textures and range of experience. He can see into the intimate and innocent centres of personal life without losing his vision of our history and its accusations.'<sup>3</sup> This book is of immense historical value. As Abrahams puts it, Goldblatt's work does not constitute 'a record of crisis'. He preferred to 'render visible the quieter phases of existence, resorting at times even to a constructed stillness.'<sup>4</sup> Take, for example, the photograph captioned 'Lunch-hour, Pretoria Street, Hillbrow. 1966' (36). A street cleaner is having his lunch on the pavement, looking at his watch. White people are eating at tables in a restaurant, served by black waiters. The sign on a dustbin trolley exhorts people to 'HOU ASB U STAD SKOON' (Please keep your city clean), using the respectful phrasing reserved for whites at this time so that the viewer is prompted to reflect on questions of ownership and belonging. Compare this very busy photograph to one captioned 'In a butchery in Randburg. First of August 1969', that frames a utilitarian space empty of people and that contains very few objects (57). A wall with off-white tiles dominates the middle of the image, with patterned lino floor tiles below. A stark black and white sign is propped on a narrow metal rail towards the top of the photograph advertising '4 pounds servant meat R1.00'. This is a very familiar space from my childhood, and the photograph conveys the strange, often bizarre, emptiness and tension that was such a strong aspect of apartheid's whites-only spaces, yet was hard to explain.

**MdT:** In *Double Negative*, the narrator recounts how he worked as an assistant to a racist man who spray-painted road-markings for a living, using an 'unambiguous library of signs', before he spends a day watching the photographer Auerbach at work while he takes photographs in Johannesburg's streets and suburban backyards.

**JG:** I've always used David Goldblatt's photographs when teaching photography. You could say that his photographs often employ a library of ambiguous signs. The photograph of 'Harry Oppenheimer, chairman of the Anglo American Corporation, in his office at the company's headquarters, 1966' (49) is a great example of how a photograph taken from a particular angle can convey multi-faceted meaning. Because Goldblatt took the photograph from above he has made a very powerful man look powerless, so that this is an intriguing comment on a moment in the history of the mining industry in South Africa.

**MdT:** Many of the portraits in the book, including those from the section on 'Soweto, 1970s', also present people who were denied their citizenship at this time in ways very different from the images that circulated in the visual economy of apartheid.

**JG:** Photographs that stand out for me in this regard are his portraits of women. In the portrait of 'Miriam Diale at home, 5357 Orlando East, 18 October 1972' (79), she is sitting on her bed, looking straight towards the viewer. The wall behind Miriam Diale has a bare and uneven surface, but her gaze and posture convey self-possession and a contained sensuality. The photograph on the opposite page presents another section of her bedroom, with only the edge of the bed where she is sitting included within the frame. In this photograph, the arrangement of personal possessions and also text convey more layers of Miriam Diale's individuality, such as the notice on the wall pointed out by the caption to 'Please keep this house clean' and 'Behave

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3 Lionel Abrahams, 'The Spirit of David Goldblatt' in *David Goldblatt: Photographs* (Contrasto Roma, 2006), 7.

4 *Ibid.*, 8.

yourselves'. This is a woman who is holding her own, and Goldblatt really captured something of her self-identity despite his very different subject position as a white man in apartheid society. Consider also the portrait of 'Margaret Mcingana – at home on a Sunday afternoon, Zola. As "Margaret Singana" she became a famous singer.' She reclines on her bed, her gaze inward, casually holding a cigarette. Again, Goldblatt's image is of a woman with a sensuality that is bubbling under the surface (111).

**MdT:** So these are neither the subservient black women portrayed by dominant white society nor perhaps, the cover girls presented for the enjoyment of male viewers of *Drum* magazine.

**JG:** In this second portrait, the photograph is framed so that the figure of the singer, forefronted by a spare and stylish arrangement of personal possessions, is positioned in the bottom third of the photograph. Above her is a large expanse of rough brick wall. The texture and empty space makes you think in a subtle way about the issues of apartheid and individual experience of its inhumanity. Intimate space isolates her. She's very introspective. She is also almost oppressed by this big textured space above her.

**MdT:** Other photographs in this collection that stand out for me also convey closeness and affection between men and women, or between young men, as with the photograph of two young men posing, leaning gently against each other, one cradling a *dompas*, the reference book that inscribed their official identity and that was used to regulate black South Africans' entry into urban spaces (120).

**JG:** The next section in the book, 'City and Suburbs, 1970s' opens with photographs that I can only look at with difficulty. I had the same problem when I looked at Goldblatt's images from *South Africa: The Structure of Things Then*. These two images are completely bleak. In 'A wedding on Pullinger Kop, with Highrise under construction, Hillbrow, February, 1971' I had to really, really search for the wedding which is totally overshadowed not by the artificial waterfall and ineffectual park but also by the construction on top of the hill. The foreground shows people standing next to the Shell garage sign – they are also completely minimised by the cranes and tall buildings. In the 1970s I spent a lot of time in Hillbrow and I always found the architecture from the 1960s and 70s completely soulless and bland. I know my reaction might seem extreme but these structures, whether apartment blocks, government buildings or churches, have always given me the feeling of all the worst aspects of our history, showing our lack of humanity, and lack of hope. The people in them are so small and insignificant and this is what is so strongly conveyed in these photographs by Goldblatt.

**MdT:** There is a powerful relationship between certain photographs in the final sections of the book that cover the 1970s to the 2000s – images that chronicle forced removals under the Group Areas Act.

**JG:** As a teenager I used to go to Fietas, which provided respite from the sterile white suburbs. Every time I went there, there would be a little less of that bustling, very vibrant mixed community, replaced by a utilitarian shopping centre (The Oriental Plaza). There are seven portraits of the Dorcas family at home and at work, and the book also has later photographs that record the architectural remnants of former living spaces. In fact, an image of the 'The Dorcas's lavatory ... too sturdy for the front-end loaders that destroyed their home in 1977' and still standing 'to this day (2010)' features as part of the final section of photographs on the new century. This final section of photographs also continues with its interrogation of society. This

reminds me of a comment by Goldblatt that after he completed *South Africa: The Structure of Things Then*, he found that his concerns ‘were exactly the same as during the apartheid years’, and that ‘it is only now, looking back, that I see that this concern with values has been my most persistent thread. The reason that this is so clear to me now, so long after the event, has to do with the end of apartheid.’<sup>5</sup>

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5 Sean O’Toole, ‘David Goldblatt’, <http://www.artthrob.co.za/02dec/artbio.html>.

Keith Dietrich and Andrew Bank, eds., *An Eloquent Picture Gallery. The South African Portrait Photographs of Gustav Theodor Fritsch, 1863-1865* (Johannesburg: Jacana Media, 2008), 172 pp., ISBN 978-1-7700-9641-7.

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Since the 1990s the study of anthropological photographs of the nineteenth century has taken a significant place both in postcolonial studies and in visual studies. Visual documents produced to support racial theories have been considered as a part of our colonial past and therefore put into their context in order to deconstruct western prejudices on non-western civilizations. The work of Elizabeth Edwards, Christopher Pinney and Thomas Theye are great examples of this historiography.<sup>6</sup> The book edited by Keith Dietrich and Andrew Bank about Gustav Theodor Fritsch's photographs of South Africans is part of this tradition.

Although there are few private archives that describe the personality of Gustav Fritsch (9), he left many writings on physiology and racial anthropology, as well as pictures taken on the several scientific journeys he made in southern Africa, Egypt and Persia. Gustav Fritsch (1838-1927) became a physiologist after having studied in Breslau, Heidelberg and Berlin. Assistant of Emile du Bois-Reymond, then professor of physiology, Fritsch taught at the Frederick William University of Berlin (Humboldt University) until 1921. He was 83 when he finally retired. As with many physiologists in Berlin, he participated in the foundation of the Anthropological Society of Berlin (*Berliner Gesellschaft für Ethnologie, Anthropologie und Urgeschichte* BGEAU) in 1869 and developed racial theories. He played a significant role in what we could define as the shift from linguistic methods in anthropology to a set of methods dominated by comparative physiology. This is precisely where the use of photography plays a determinant role: as Lorrain Daston and Peter Galison have shown, photography was supposed to provide an objective view of physiology that enabled the anthropologists to produce statistical information about the human body. Still influenced at its beginning in the 1850s and 1860s, by western photographic portraiture, anthropological photography became increasingly specific in an effort to enhance its supposed 'objectivity'.<sup>7</sup>

Throughout his life, Fritsch reflected on these visual techniques. First inspired by the traditional photographic portrait, he shifted to a more 'rational' procedure and differentiated 'ethnological' (cultural) from 'anthropological' (physical) photography, as he explained in his text published in Georg Neumayer's *Anleitung zur wissenschaftlichen Beobachtung auf Reisen*, 1875 (see Andreas Boeckmann, 144-151). In the 1870s and 1880s he systematically undressed the subjects and took full size pictures in order to facilitate the comparison of measurements. In the 1900s, unsatisfied by the anthropometrical photography, he partly abandoned it and applied micro-photography to the racial analysis of the human hair (Michael Hagner, 162-169). At the same time he continued to produce photographs of naked people, using more and more erotic poses and writing on the canon of beauty 'for artists

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6 Elizabeth Edwards, *Anthropology and Photography 1860-1920* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992); Christopher Pinney, *Camera Indica. The Social Life of Indian Photographs* (London: Reaktion Books, 1997); Thomas Theye, *Der Geraubte Schatten. Eine Weltreise im Spiegel der Ethnographischen Photographie* (Munich: Bucher, 1989).

7 Lorrain Daston and Peter Galison, *Objectivity* (New York: Zone Books, 2007).

and doctors'. He also provided arguments both to the nudist movements and to the social hygiene movements (see Annette Lewerentz, 152-161). The strange career of Gustav Fritsch demonstrates the links between photography, physical anthropology and eugenic discourses on the human body.

All these aspects of Fritsch's career are broached in the essays found in this volume. But the book's focus is on the very first journey made by Fritsch in South Africa between 1863 and 1866, from Robben Island (near Cape Town) to Durban and Shoshong, through, among other towns, Port Elizabeth, Queenstown and the mission of Shiloh. During this expedition, Fritsch took portraits of South African natives and some landscapes, first published in *Drei Jahre in Süd-Afrika* (1868) and later included in the *Atlas of Die Eingeborenen Süd-Afrikas* (1872). The first part of the book reproduces – in a good print quality and beautiful layout – Fritsch's photographs remaining in the archive of the BGAEU (Berlin). These reproductions are accompanied by Keith Dietrich's descriptions of the journey, so that the reader can follow Fritsch's daily route and the circumstances of the production of these portraits: from the first pictures taken of prisoners on Robben Island to the portraits of missionaries, Dietrich relates the reaction of the photographic subjects, the negotiations Fritsch had to conduct, with offerings of tobacco or a bottle of brandy for a portrait. Each of these portraits expresses an encounter, a negotiation, perhaps even an act of resistance against the symbolic violence of anthropological photography.

The specificity of these portraits is their ambiguity (see Andrew Bank, 134-143): these are pictures of an incredible expressive quality, made with wet collodion, and influenced by western 'honorific' portraits. The majority of the photographed subjects are named; nonetheless, these pictures have also a 'repressive' character (the term is borrowed from Allan Sekula), used to confirm racial prejudices. As Michael Godby puts it (124-133), ambiguity characterizes Fritsch's project from the beginning. Influenced by western landscapes and portraits, Fritsch followed an anthropological and racialist purpose, and did not hesitate to 'undress certain of his photographic subjects', or hunt 'for human remains on the sites of recent massacres' (129).

After the publication of the Dammann Brothers' gallery of 'anthropological' portraits (1873-1876), the critics and scientists emphasized the ambiguous character of such a photograph, and Fritsch sharpened his methods. But even when applying his most 'objective' anthropometrical methods, Fritsch remains ambiguous when writing about the human body, as Annette Lewerentz demonstrates (152-161). He was inspired by ancient models of proportions, searched for a definition of the European self, the beauty of its body proportions, and cultivated his anthropological aims even in what seems to be his erotic fantasies. Fritsch is therefore the most striking example, as Liza van Roebroek argues in the last chapter of the book (170-175), of the shift from a descriptive to an idealist and normative anthropology. Even if a more complete biography of Gustav Fritsch is still desirable, this book is a very precise description of his South African journey and takes up opportunely all the aspects and inner contradictions of Fritsch's photographic project.

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