

Photography through conversation/Conversation through photography

Marijke du Toit and Jenny Gordon

Marijke du Toit: The Breathing Spaces exhibition of 2007 included space for exhibition-goers to write their comments. One visitor chose to ask fundamental and crucial questions:

Power of visual language, pictures of who? Taken by who? For who? What is the motive? Who to impress and who to embarrass? Story of the other by the other? Who commissioned this project and why? Does this project change the situation?

Visual technologies have often been associated with power and privilege. This visitor asked us as researchers, photographers and curators to think about our motives and purpose in creating and mounting the Breathing Spaces exhibition. Who has access to cameras? How were the subjects represented? Why were they exposed to public view – and to what end? These questions urge us to consider contemporary social inequalities and how these play out in public exhibitions. Perhaps the visitor also had in mind South Africa's long history of colonialism, segregation and apartheid – when state-produced images and the dominant popular visual culture involved huge divisions as to who could 'shoot' with cameras and who could represent self or other.¹ 'Taken by who?' One way to begin to answer this question is to consider your history as a photographer.

Jenny Gordon: The process of discovery is important to me. That is why I took up photography when I was still a student at university. In retrospect, I think it gave me an opportunity to discover the world. I came from a fairly sheltered background, and

using a camera meant going out into the world and discovering it for myself. From a much younger age I had been aware of living in a white suburban bubble. Photography became a means of self-education, and it remains my way of trying to understand people and society. I began the second year of my fine arts degree at the University of Cape Town (UCT) in 1977. The student uprisings of June 1976 in Soweto had quickly spread to the Western Cape and the state had responded with a lot of violence. I was becoming much more aware of what was happening in the country. I was completely horrified and wanted to find a way not only to deal with it psychologically but also to communicate about it. To my mind, it was not possible to do so by following a traditional fine arts approach and by continuing my initial choice of study, which was painting. I was uncomfortable with the insularity of much of fine arts. Most lecturers and students were interested only in what was in fashion in Europe and the USA and acted as if we were not in Africa. I was realising that introspection was important in the sense of thinking about yourself and your society. The liberal National Union of South African Students (NUSAS) was active at UCT, but the atmosphere was different on the fine arts campus. That's why when students and police spilled onto campus from a nearby high school in 1977 it was such a shock. I still remember that someone was lying naked on the floor covered in flour as part of some art project when we first heard the noise.

MdT: I was a girl of eleven, but I also knew what was happening because of my mother's work as a teacher in the 'coloured'

township in Stellenbosch and because my parents were outspoken against apartheid. I had access to a rich collection of literature that included famous photography books like Edward Steichen's *Family of Man*.² It had been published in 1955 and its celebration of a common humanity presented a wider world than the one I lived in – the photographs of diverse people and lives were very accessible to a child.³ Its images are still imprinted on my retina. As a teenager, I used to pore over my father's collection of newspaper cuttings of events such as the inquest into the death in custody of the Black Consciousness activist Steve Biko. I also spent hours looking through Peter Magubane's *Soweto*.⁴ By the early 1980s I was reading the magazine *Staffrider*,⁵ which included photographic essays documenting black lives in South Africa. But what photography influenced you as a young photographer? Today historians of South African photography point to the importance of *Drum* magazine.⁶ But it was really only from the late 1980s that the photographs of the 'Drum generation' of the 1950s would become available to South Africans as aestheticised images. Before that, they appeared as grainy pictures in magazines that were no longer circulating when you started out.⁷

JG: South African media mostly failed to acknowledge that we were living in Africa and was aimed at whites with no interest in black people's lives. When I first studied photography in 1977, I accompanied student doctors who were volunteering in Crossroads, the shack settlement that had recently been built outside Cape Town. They had asked that I photograph the conditions at the clinic. Many of the families who lived there had been evicted from elsewhere or had escaped overcrowded living conditions of the local townships and migrant hostels. Many had moved to Cape Town from the apartheid homelands in the Eastern Cape and in defiance of the Coloured Labour Preference Act, the law that denied most Africans the right to live and work in the Western Cape.

I soon gravitated towards taking portraits of people sitting in their small makeshift and half-built shacks. I was fascinated by the inventiveness with which residents of Crossroads built their homes – for example, using factory offcuts of product labels as wallpaper – and I noticed the care that was taken with the very few household objects they owned. This prompted me to think about contrasts between my own life and theirs, about how my easy access to commodities meant that I took less care of how I lived with everyday objects. At the very beginning of my

studies, I thought I would become a news photographer. But in that first year of studying photography I began to discover that people were my main interest. I would always be more interested in photographing people and their living situations rather than photographing action in the sense of politics on the streets. The feminism that I was into as a student also informed my photography – the personal and everyday could be political.

Most of my contemporaries chose 35mm cameras, ideal for using while on the move. In the beginning I had a Pentax K1000. I then got my Rolleicord – it's a square-format camera and you look down into it in order to focus. It was a good fit as it enabled me to engage, to talk to and relate to people more easily, because my face wasn't behind the camera. I think that people can pick up if you are interested in them and their lives. The American photographer Diane Arbus, who also changed to a similar-format camera, said that 'the camera is a kind of license . . . people want to be paid that much attention'.⁸ I was interested in a slow process; I wanted to talk to people and find out what their experience was. This was also when I started to give the people whom I photographed black-and-white photographs that I had carefully printed by hand.

MdT: Why do you think this is so, that you're primarily a photographer of people? When you first worked as a photographer in the late 1970s and 1980s, even though you wanted to record what was happening in the country, you didn't do hard news. In our past conversations, you've also identified yourself as a 'humanist', not so much in a specific ideological sense of the term, but to emphasise that when you take photographs and work out a new project, you do think about contemporary injustices and how you could engage with these.

JG: I am drawn to the idea that 'humanism is inseparable from art, however defined and created'. Bill Jay made this comment when writing about the photographer David Hurn in his book *On Being a Photographer*. I also think that passion must be part of one's art. You must have passion for the subjects that you're photographing. Hurn says that for him it's not simply about 'the craft of photography', but that 'photography is inextricably linked with life, the photographer is not invisibly behind the camera'.⁹

MdT: You met David Goldblatt, one of South Africa's most influential social documentary photographers, early in your studies. You have spoken often of his influence on you as a



Crossroads, 1977

young photographer – he documented life in apartheid South Africa from the 1950s onwards and he was also a mentor to you and others of your generation.

JG: In the late 1970s when I started photography, the painter Bill Ainslie invited David Goldblatt to view my photographs at his art school. Through Goldblatt I was then exposed to a broader community of creative people. I agree with Patricia Hayes that he mentored many younger photographers and that ‘by his insistence on photographic rigour and coherence of theme, he both nurtured and debated with the overtly politicized generation of the 1980s.’¹⁰ Every university holiday I used to go and show him my work. I saw the books of portraits that he published in the 1970s, such as *On the Mines* and *Some Afrikaners Photographed*, although probably by the late 1980s the human figure became less central to his work and landscape was important.¹¹ I realised that it was possible to take fascinating photographs of people’s everyday lives. At this time I also saw the famous and iconic photographs from the Vietnam War. Although war reportage or hard-news photography was not a genre that I tried to emulate, it showed me that photographs could be used as part of a struggle against a powerful state. Because of apartheid censorship, I did not have access to some important South African examples of how this could be done. What seems exceptional today are the photographs that I didn’t see at the time. In the 1970s I didn’t see any black South African photographers’ work, although I may have seen Alf Khumalo’s or Peter Magubane’s work in local newspapers.¹² Although I heard about Ernest Cole’s *House of Bondage*, I did not see a copy. That’s why a publication like *Staffrider*, which published photo-documentary essays by South African photographers in the 1980s, stood out so much.¹³

David Goldblatt used to host regular discussion evenings in which many photographers participated – these discussions were important to shaping how I thought about photography. They encouraged a consciously critical approach, not only about the philosophies that informed our photography but also about how photographs worked. It was not politicising in the narrow sense, but David’s ethical and moral approach was a powerful influence, together with his commitment to paying attention to the whole process of image-making.

MdT: Patricia Hayes describes these years in which a distinct practice of journalistic and documentary photography took shape

inside the country as a ‘rich, painstaking phase during which photography occurred alongside other (political and “cultural”) activities’. She characterises documentary photography as ‘embedded in multiple projects generated by organisations that included trade unions, alternative education groups, the liberal Black Sash and the radical Black Consciousness movement’.¹⁴

JG: When I first tried to make a living as a photographer in the early 1980s, I worked for non-governmental organisations that were providing an alternative to apartheid education, especially SACHED (South African Committee for Higher Education). I contributed to such initiatives as booklets for literacy education. It would be our shared interest in South African history that drew you and me to work together on the project in South Durban. Already in the 1980s I worked with historians, especially with academics who started the Wits History Workshop and who were working with the trade unions. They were trying to find ways of making history relevant to the anti-apartheid struggle. I worked on books by historian Luli Callinicos and helped prepare slide and tape shows for the History Workshop open days. I also took the photographs for the book *Write Your Own History* by Leslie Witz.¹⁵

MdT: This was also when you worked on your first substantial project that was focused on a specific urban space and community.

JG: Most of my photographic work has been about particular neighbourhoods. As a portraitist, I have always been interested in how individuals are part of a context. My major project of the early 1980s was on the Mai-Mai market in central Johannesburg, which somehow managed to exist although apartheid legislation banned African traders from working in the city and in fact from most urban spaces. Most of the customers were migrant labourers. Many traders lived at the market, which was highly illegal. Mai-Mai had previously been the formal trading area of a migrant labour hostel that no longer existed at this time. I put the photographs up in the market one afternoon, probably in 1986. This was the first time that I exhibited in the neighbourhood where I had photographed. In 1987 I mounted a more traditional exhibition at Johannesburg’s Market Theatre, which was an important space for independent photographic exhibitions from the early 1980s. My next large project was Troyeville, the suburb near central Johannesburg where I was living at the time. Most



Mai-Mai Market, 1985/6.

of the residents were white working-class, although people with various apartheid race classifications also lived there in spite of the Group Areas Act.¹⁶

MdT: Your focus on Troyeville was partly in response to black viewers of your Mai-Mai exhibition, who asked questions about the Mai-Mai market project's focus on black South Africans. The visitor to our exhibition at the Durban Art Gallery asked, 'Story of the other by the other?' Perhaps this was motivated by an idea that your 'own' community was white. Maybe this exact choice of words was accidental, but the lack of reference to 'self' is suggestive for our discussion, and for thinking through your photographic practice as a white South African in a country where inhabiting a raced identity was frequently inescapable.

JG: In fact, I have always seen myself as 'other' and not as belonging to a particular group. I grew up in a Jewish neighbourhood, but as my family was not traditional or religious, I didn't fit in. My parents had grown up very poor and working class but they were fiercely driven to be middle class and educated. Our home had no pictures on the wall, no art. My parents had books but nothing else. At least, they did not own the cultural objects that you would have found in more affluent Jewish people's homes. There were no pictures of kids on display; these were all kept in albums. So I did feel very 'other', compared to most people in my neighbourhood. My maternal grandfather and my paternal grandmother had both been communists, and my parents did not identify with their politics at all. My father believed in the free-market economy, but he was deeply unmaterialistic and resisted buying commodities except out of necessity. My mother desperately wanted her home to reflect middle-class status, but it was as if she did not have the necessary cultural know-how or access to a shared visual culture. I was never allowed to put up anything on the wall. We were reminded every day of our lives of how poor my parents had been. This has influenced the way I think of myself and the people whom I photograph. When I work in one or other place as a photographer, I don't photograph people because I see them as 'other' or as different from myself.

MdT: Perhaps your childhood created an abiding awareness of difference, or a consciousness of the issues of power tied up with socio-economic inequalities. These memories could also help explain your interest in the interior spaces of people's homes, and the materialities of their home spaces. You have

spoken before of how your mode of portraiture was criticised in the past, as the personal politics of your photography did not cohere so well with the struggle photography of the late 1980s. It is interesting to consider this criticism in relation to questions of visual aesthetics and politics.

JG: There was some debate among South African documentary photographers and photojournalists in the 1980s about a perceived tension between the photographer as a creative individual and as part of a group trying to change society. I'm thinking of Peter McKenzie's statement at the Culture and Resistance Festival in Gaborone in 1982 that no photographer should 'lay claim to any individual artistic merit in an oppressed society'.¹⁷ And of Darren Newbury's comment – with specific reference to Eli Weinberg – that 'struggle photographers' did not measure their success 'primarily in aesthetic terms'. They selected photographs 'for their informational content over and above their visual impact'.¹⁸

MdT: You've often talked about the conundrum of what genre of photography best describes your approach. You have explained how your photography differs from much of photojournalism.

JG: I love what David Hurn says about being a photographer: 'I'm a photographer obviously. My chosen tool for understanding life and communicating the results of the search to others is the camera.' But he goes on to say that 'the term photographer covers such a broad spectrum of activities that it is not specific and therefore useful enough to act as the verbal shorthand. Just what type of photographer are we talking about?' During the 1970s and 1980s, photojournalists used to say to me that I was a fine art photographer and fine art photographers would tell me that I was a photojournalist. I think that to a great extent in the world today these two approaches have merged. Hurn also says that he objects to being called a photojournalist because the term has gained unfortunate connotations. 'The photojournalist,' he says, 'is too often associated with a foot in the door, the camera in the face, aggression, without much knowledge or concern about what the subject is or how the image will be used or any regard for issues of ethics or aesthetics.'¹⁹ I was interested in the personal as political, and this also involved a careful way of looking and of communicating.

MdT: Patricia Hayes has commented that 'the avowed purpose

of progressive photographers' of the 1980s 'was a more complex portrayal of society than the images projected by the apartheid state', and that 'it is now routinely argued that particular norms emerged in the ensuing representation of socio-economic conditions and political resistance, and that these marginalised or elided women and broader questions of gender'. Her own analysis seeks to go beyond 'reductionist' critiques that were 'made with little or no scrutiny of actual work'.²⁰

JG: In that particular essay, Hayes discusses the work of women photographers who were part of the Afrapix collective, and also some of my photographs of Mai-Mai and of Troyeville. As her research also suggests, many of my generation of photographers did personal work, not only the few women photographers. They documented the everyday lives of ordinary people, in contrast to the photography of the Bang Bang Club in the early 1990s.²¹

MdT: Perhaps one could say that new possibilities opened up in the decade after apartheid and that this was the context for launching our project. For me as a historian, this involved discovering how to think of photographs as more than illustrations. It was in 1996, having completed my doctoral thesis that combined social and feminist history, that I joined the history department at the University of the Western Cape. One of my responsibilities was to teach a research module for which students did life-history interviews – the focus was on histories of migrant labour and of Cape Town's apartheid past. My new colleagues were at the forefront of the turn towards visual and public history in southern Africa. I was introduced to analyses of the force fields at work in colonial administrative photography and ethnographic image-making, and to emerging research about African photography, specifically about the history of social documentary photography in South Africa.²² It was because of my new interest in exploring how historians could work with photographs that I met you and visited you at the National Gallery in Cape Town, where you were teaching a photography workshop for children from Masiphumelele, the informal settlement near Hout Bay.

For you as a photographer, new spaces were also opening up. Hayes identifies 'a more self-reflexive and exploratory post-apartheid period in photography'.²³ I think that in the early 'post-apartheid' years, your impetus to use the camera as a medium to explore quieter, more private spaces instead of documenting overtly political confrontations found newfound opportunities.

You told me that when things were heating up during the State of Emergency in the late 1980s, some people said that your portrait photography was no longer relevant. It is interesting to compare the trajectory of your own work with that of Omar Badsha, whose photography challenges simplistic dichotomies of 'politics' and 'aesthetics'.²⁴ In the 1970s and early 1980s he took contemplative and layered portraits of the close-knit Indian community living in Grey Street in Durban's city centre. The photographs that he took during the State of Emergency were also complex in terms of aesthetics, iconography and emotive power. As Hayes writes, his 'photographic work is rooted in the everyday, the everyday of a man deeply immersed in politics'.²⁵ I am thinking in particular of the photographs that he took in Durban and Inanda.

In the past, at least with regards to your larger projects such as Mai-Mai and Troyeville, you had worked on your own as a photographer. You also collaborated with people on other projects from which you earned a living as a teacher and researcher. Your work with historians in the 1980s was largely separate from your extended photographic projects. When I moved to Durban in 1999, we were trying to think of how I as a historian and you as a photographer could work together on an integrated project. I remember telling you how I took my history class on the 'Coloured Experience' tour that the playwright Gail Snyman organised, and how it ended with having tea at her parents' house, with glimpses of wonderful family photographs. I also spoke about the environmental justice work of the South Durban Community Environmental Alliance (SDCEA), and suggested that we should devise a project in South Durban.

JG: So we began the South Durban Photography Project. For the first time I integrated my two passions. I photographed people and their neighbourhoods, and we also taught visual literacy and photography in community situations, in ways that opened up possibilities for people who usually don't have access to these skills. My work as director of the Market Theatre Photography Workshop in Johannesburg in the late 1990s had involved putting my energies into teaching black photographers who were excluded from technikons and universities because of apartheid legislation. This formal training was offered to both street photographers and photojournalists. I loved the fact that I could now integrate teaching directly with the research process, particularly because of how the theories of education that were popular in the 1970s among the left, both in South Africa and internationally, had shaped my outlook.

These theories of education were exemplified by the Brazilian educator Paolo Freire.²⁶ Central to this approach was a commitment to transferring one's skills as a person who had been privileged to study, as well as the concept of 'each one teach one'. Freire advocated a 'dialogical method of teaching' towards the 'transformation of social relations', and he emphasised the importance of education towards critical consciousness, for both teachers and students.²⁷ My photographic practice has always been based on an ongoing process of discovery and learning, so that at a deep level of how I approach photography, these things are never separate.

MdT: You also pushed both of us to work more closely with activists and volunteers in local NGOs and to integrate this with our teaching. Our initial idea in 2002 was to put together a project that would involve photography workshops for first-time photographers who lived in the areas near the refineries – we thought of high school students as the participants. You would also be taking portraits, and I would find and make reproductions of family photographs. As the project unfolded, these different aspects became more and more interrelated. The photography workshops soon included activists among the participants, and they contributed family photographs. It also seemed serendipitous that after a year of working with a very small budget we were invited to apply for funding from the newly established Centre for Civil Society. This organisation was committed to forging relationships between university-based scholars and community-based organisations for social justice, and was open to a project that centred on camera-work and was aimed primarily at producing local exhibitions rather than scholarly papers.

JG: You'll remember that in South Durban we looked for grassroots activists from the beginning, but this became more and more central to my way of working as I went on. At the start of our project, it was you who approached local organisations for volunteers who could be invited to participate in our photographic workshops. I try to avoid going in with preconceived ideas about what I am going to achieve or who I am photographing. The American photographer Robert Frank once wrote in a grant application that 'the project I have in mind is one that will shape itself as it proceeds, and is essentially elastic'.²⁸ This is crucial to my own learning journey when I start a photographic project. I don't work totally instinctively at that

stage, and we did conceptualise and plan. But I knew that things could change at any moment. When one first starts working in an unfamiliar place, one has a really simple view of people's existence in that community. It is crucial to engage with people who have grown up, lived and worked in the area for years and who know it in all its complexity.

MdT: Our aim was certainly to try to develop an approach that involved working with people involved in various community projects, especially initiatives working against industrial pollution, in community health and for gender rights. And we wanted to use the language of photography in a way that did not thoughtlessly reproduce a divide between photographers and people framed as documentary subjects. In the photography workshops, we explained how cameras could be used to document everyday lives in one's own neighbourhood, to explore challenges faced by one's community or to expose social problems. That participants exhibited their photographs as part of an exhibition mounted in the local library was an important part of this dynamic. They knew that we planned to exhibit the photographs further afield at a later stage of the project, and that potentially their new skills of visual communication could be used for their activism or community work in future.

JG: Outside of the workshops and on every visit that I made to South Durban, the people from local organisations or who were involved in volunteer work actually took me to places that for them were symbolic of problems that people in their neighbourhood faced and that they felt needed to receive public attention. For example, George Ruiters would be talking about the challenges of living with HIV/AIDS, TB and poverty for people residing in a polluted area. So as it evolved, the project was not only about a partnership between the two of us; it was also a partnership with George, with Oliver Meth and with various other people. For me, one of the most inspiring aspects of the photographic project was getting to know all the community activists – people who were very often doing entirely unpaid volunteer work. They were unofficial social workers within their own communities and very aware of the need to educate people from their neighbourhoods – which is also what drew them to learn how to take photographs and to participate in the project.

MdT: Let's look at some of the images that resulted from these partnerships, starting with what was more out of your comfort

zone – landscape. In 2003 or so you were worrying about the fact that so many themes were emerging through the dynamic of asking people what to photograph, and you were wondering how to build up to a visually coherent exhibition. Through discussions with David Goldblatt, you confirmed your feeling that images of the industrial-residential spaces, of the physical terrain of which these neighbourhoods were part, had to function as a 'backbone'. As I remember it, from early on you talked a lot with the people with whom we began to develop close relationships about your effort to photograph the landscape of the south basin, and you often asked them to take you to 'viewpoints' or to introduce you to places that they thought you should photograph. And this effort quickly became a big part of your struggle to make the project work as one of environmental portraiture.

We soon conceptualised the exhibition that we had in mind as one in which portraits of people in or near their homes would be 'framed', in fact contextualised, by very large panoramic landscape photographs, which was something new that you attempted with this project. During the years that you took the photographs, we did not think of the portraits in isolation but almost as part of a three-dimensional collage of images. It had to make sense as a composite imaginary. The exhibition had to represent the larger spatial relationships, people and their home spaces, and our understanding of the experience of living there, in part put together through conversations that we had with people about what they were dealing with. We grappled with how we could convey the outside spaces of various homes and the proximities and spatial relationships of the neighbourhoods. We wanted to avoid any simple reproduction of the persisting boundaries of the apartheid-era Group Areas Act. Of course, we experienced this environment, including the polluting smells and industrial noise in Wentworth and Merebank, through all our senses. You sought to create photographs that would somehow evoke all this.

JG: When I was working on my Troyeville project in the 1980s and showed my photographs to David Goldblatt, he suggested that I put them in a context by also taking photographs outside. I started experimenting with portraits taken in the street, usually outside someone's home. In South Durban I needed to find a way of showing how the residential spaces were closely interspersed with the industrial spaces. It was difficult to do this in a single image. That's why I started to do the panoramas. Let's discuss the one in black and white taken from the Alabama Road flats

[pp. 80–81]. I really like it because it is all-encompassing. You can't see the landing between two small flats where I was standing, but you can just about get a feeling for everything else: the houses with shebeens across the road with the truck collecting alcohol, the cars and fridges on the pavement, and the kids who were playing below who had become aware of me taking photographs and who were watching me. And it does show you how the homes are right alongside the industry.

MdT: Of course, the portrait that you first took of Jimmy Davis together with Oliver Meth [p. 83] shows the interior of the flat in front of which you took the panoramic photograph in all its detail. I think we both remember Oliver Meth, who introduced you to Jimmy, as exceptional. He was about fifteen then, a high school student already interested in journalism and active against industrial pollution. The council flat where he, his elderly granny and his young sisters lived was only a three-minute walk away. He had just begun accompanying you as your very enthusiastic assistant. The 2003 exhibition held in the Merebank Library included a photograph by Oliver taken from the same vantage point – it was taken during the time you were working together and he was a workshop participant. It is captioned 'Alabama Road children pose for a picture taken with a background of old cars and fridges, "scraps" '. Participants had to look for opportunities to frame people in their everyday landscape while using interesting angles. One of Oliver's themes was children at play.

JG: Oliver took us to the Alabama Road flats because he wanted us to meet a very elderly man who had written his own history of how he started a church and who had all these family photographs that he wanted to show us. I then noticed the old cars and the broken fridges outside. Another backstory to how this panorama developed over time is our discussion with Lorna McDonald, Oliver, George Ruiters and the others who were part of the small group that we continued to work with from 2003 onwards. We met at the University of KwaZulu-Natal and we put all my photographs on tables for everyone to view and discuss. The working version of this panorama prompted a lot of debate. They became depressed about how the photographs displayed poverty. They argued about what the old fridges communicated about the neighbourhood, about which problems needed to be resolved most urgently and how. What is interesting to me as a photographer is that the participants walked down that same

road every day but that in a way the photographs brought their attention to it.

MdT: I remember that fairly soon after this I wrote about your effort to capture the dramatic aspect of the landscape, how startlingly close industry was to residents' houses. You considered using a single colour photograph in 35mm of the street with the houses opposite and the refinery behind. To my mind, this was simply a record of factual information with little emotive impact. But you had also been taking dozens of sequential photographs in order to piece together an early version of this panorama. Perhaps what I think of as the visually dramatic aspect of this urban environment is really about the scale of industry compared to homes, and to the human body. And it was important to convey this scale as part of communicating the extent of destruction that is still ongoing and the continuing transformation of the earlier rural, informal and communal spaces. That is part of why it was important to include the children in the foreground.

One could also think about these photographs within the longer time frame of histories of colony and empire. You have talked about how boring you find colonial photographs of towns or countryside, which often place the viewer at a great distance. Think of those photographs by Durban's segregationist and apartheid planners that show the early Lamontville [pp. 8-9], or the newly created South Durban dormitory township Umlazi in the 1960s.²⁹ People are either incidental to or completely absent from these images, the point being to demonstrate how orderly and available for control the spaces for containing 'natives' are. You have said that for you, landscapes in themselves are not interesting to photograph.

JG: If photographed as a record, it is hard to connect emotionally to the images. As a photographer, I find it difficult to successfully create landscapes without a person in them. I'm always more interested in people and their connection to places than in photographing landscapes on their own. For our project the whole point was to photograph a neighbourhood – it became interesting to show where people lived because of the impact of apartheid. I am not interested in photographing a place for pretty postcard reasons. In some of my panoramas there are people going about their daily lives, and in some there are people standing and looking at me. In fact, often we were talking with each other. Why do I find landscape so hard? You can't speak to the landscape. Having an unofficial contract with someone – as a

photographer I don't have that with the landscape.

MdT: When I think of the ways in which we tried to frame 'industry and homes', I am reminded that while some of the teenage workshop participants were purposefully photographing industrial spoilage of the environment – for example, a polluted canal – others were framing similar constructions because they admired the aesthetic quality. Of course, 'landscape' is a social construct. We were seeing urban space through a particular understanding of the persistence of history. Here it is useful to think about Israeli scholar Ariella Azoulay's idea of 'the civil contract of photography'. This is 'a social fiction', a 'convention that regulates the various uses of photography and its relations of exchange'.³⁰ She introduces this notion as part of an 'attempt to anchor spectatorship in civic duty toward the photographed persons who haven't stopped being "there", toward dispossessed citizens who, in turn, enable the rethinking of the concept and practice of citizenship'. Moreover, 'in the political sphere that is reconstructed through the civil contract, photographed persons are participant citizens, just the same as I am'. The context for her discussion is Israeli rule, the violence of this state and its denial of Palestinian citizenship. We were working in apartheid's aftermath, trying to figure out how to photograph its scarred landscape. Azoulay argues that photographs 'have no single, individual author' and that 'in principle, they allow civic negotiations about the subject they designate and about their sense'. So even though I think your authorship is strongly imprinted on these photographs of city spaces, they were also made via a process that involved 'civic conversations' and explored the possibilities for creating a portrait of place together with people who lived there.

Perhaps there is a relationship to your efforts to include people in the frame and the conversational working together and seeking out of the right place for panoramic photography. Such as when you and Lavelle Hulley – the latter also with a camera in hand – walked on a ridge above the refinery, or behind the Hyme Street flats.³¹ As a photography workshop 'graduate' and part of our small group of ongoing photographers, Lavelle was documenting the decay and neglect of peripheral urban spaces. Another example is the panorama that you took as a portrait of George Ruiters [pp. 40-41]. Both of you had the idea of photographing him in front of council flats where he often assisted people as a home-based carer and counsellor, with the refinery in view. All the while he was explaining the health

problems of living on the fence-line of a refinery. And out of this interaction – which involved a shared idea of civic responsibility and the potential of speaking out or engaging people through photography – developed this contextual portrait.

Let's look at some of the portraits of individuals that resulted from these partnerships. I'm interested in what comes to mind when you look at them now, as portraits and perhaps also as social documentary photographs. George Ruiters from Wentworth introduced you to Latasha Webster and her mother where they lived in Austerville, because of his conviction that Latasha's chronic illness is caused, or made much worse, by the pollution in the area. An important aspect of the interactions you had with residents of South Durban was that the people who accompanied you lived in the same neighbourhoods and knew the families well. We were working alongside people who were familiar and trusted, and known locally for their volunteer work in community health and against industrial pollution. It was Lutchmee Perumal of Merebank who took you to meet people who live a few hundred metres from the Engen and SAPREF oil refineries and the Mondi paper plant, and who suffer from chronic asthma. She spent a lot of time explaining to us the problems of pollution and ill health that the community faced.



JG: I had heard about Latasha Webster long before George took me to meet her. People talked about the fact that she lived in an area so close to the pollution, which made her illness, autoimmune hepatitis, harder to deal with. I had a long conversation with Latasha about her illness when I took her portrait [p. 37]. She showed me all her medications, going through what the different things were for. On top of everything else she suffered from asthma.

MdT: By placing the medications and medical devices in view, you made these portraits into deliberate statements about the problem of pollution. We wanted to ask viewers to think about environmental injustice. We also wanted to communicate an ongoing crisis of chronic illness that is caused by industrial pollution, but to do so while also honouring individuals who are able to exercise choices.

JG: When I first started taking portraits of people who had chronic asthma, I worried quite a lot about how I could communicate their experience, and often it was their idea to hold their pumps. We always explained what our project was about and then listened

to what people had to say about their health problems. Either they had the devices on them and were using them at the time, or they would fetch the pumps – I suppose because the pumps were a symbol of their problems. I hope that the portrait that I took of Hafiza Reebee captured the feeling I had when I was there and taking it [p. 32]. Hafiza was wheezing that morning. She was quite frail but she was in her own home, in her own space, a few minutes' walk from Lutchmee Perumal's house. What also interested me was that she insisted on being photographed in her nightgown while her daughter wanted her to change. I had a feeling that she wanted me to communicate her ill health, her asthma, and that this was why she wanted to be photographed without putting on a day dress. She sits on a red lounge chair with its plastic protective cover, common to so many homes in all the working-class neighbourhoods of South Durban. I don't know if it comes across that this is a woman from within her own culture, from one of the many South African cultures. She didn't speak much English. She lived in her neighbourhood where she had her own friends and family, her community. In fact, I took a number of portraits of people together with family members who also had chronic illnesses. When I looked at the photograph of Latasha afterwards, I was very interested in the sympathetic and concerned look that her cousin was giving her while Latasha was talking about her illness.

MdT: Our work with neighbourhood activists and community workers meant that I could go back to record conversations with the people you had photographed, and discuss the photographs with the activists themselves as part of the interviews that I did. In a sense, the interactions and discussions that happened while you were taking the photographs were then extended, and became text that accompanied the portraits. This aspect of my approach was influenced by *The Ones That Are Wanted* by Corinne Kratz. She notes that 'portraits are often associated with a dialogic quality and intensity of viewer engagement' and discusses her own incorporation of comments by local people into her traveling exhibition of portraits.³² When I asked Latasha Webster what came to mind when she looked at the photograph you had taken, she said, 'My cousin, the way she's looking at me, it looks like she's just fed-up and sad. Because she's close to me and she also feels it's enough now . . .' So the image-text of portrait-with-caption re-inscribes a mutual, familial dynamic of looking through the voice of Latasha, thus drawing attention to personal relationships and emotions.³³

The narrative that accompanies the portrait of Hafiza Reebee [p. 32], from an interview with Lutchmee Perumal, also presents viewers with a very personal perspective – familial, neighbourly and politicised. It emphasises how neighbourhoods exist as meaningful living spaces through networks of relationships that also involve care. Hafiza died quite shortly after this portrait was taken and just after I returned a family album that she allowed me to copy – I decided not to include the album pictures in the project because the family was in mourning. Later I asked Mrs Perumal what she saw when she looked at this portrait. Her answer extended our many previous conversations about the effects of pollution. Because of previous discussions about photographs, we also shared a way of speaking about aspects of an image. Lutchmee spoke about the details that drew her eye and explained why this was so: ‘With me now, the moment I look at this picture, my eyes goes on her face and her chest. And I can see that illness is there . . .’³⁴ She pointed out to me the bodily signs of illness – sharing close knowledge of the pain that Hafiza Reebee experienced. ‘If you look here, can you see this chest bone here? Can you see it’s swollen? This happens when they cough too much. And there’s so much of pain. Because I experienced that with my husband. Because you feel like needles are poking you here . . .’ She spoke not only as a neighbour but as the wife of an ill husband. She voiced her anger as a veteran of numerous community meetings and protest actions, out of her knowledge of research on the link between air pollution and respiratory illness, and as a frequent helper of ill people in her community. This was intimate and painful knowledge, her words expressing empathy and anger shared with the individual whose suffering she was witnessing: ‘. . . the way her mouth is, you know when a person is angry and they don’t know what to say, that’s the way her face looks to me.’

Another collaborative effort of environmental portraiture as social documentary unfolded in 2005, when we explained to Jabulile Ngcobo that we were aware that your photographs had not yet dealt with social problems in Lamontville but we needed advice about relevant issues and whom to photograph. In the 1980s Jabu had been regional chair of the Natal Organisation of Women and she has long been passionate about gender rights. In 2005 she was working with women who lived in the S.J. Smith (‘Wema’) Hostel on the edge of Lamontville. The group had started an empowerment project and one of their plans was to establish a laundry in the hostel as a way of achieving more financial independence.

JG: I wanted to show how men and women lived in what used to be a male migrant labourers hostel run by Durban’s municipality. It was important to try to convey how people lived in buildings that were leftovers of apartheid. They provided almost no privacy. Jabu Ngcobo introduced us to the minority of women who lived in the Wema hostel and were trying to improve the living conditions for women and children there. Compared to other places in South Durban, the environment was much less familiar to us both, and Jabu was careful to observe the protocol, to arrange and ask for permission to take the photographs. She helped us find other Lamontville residents who also worked with the women’s group. But I don’t recall any difficulty with explaining why we were there so that we could start to take photographs. The women wanted us to expose what was happening to them. I remember how hostel resident Zanele Ngcobo took us to the kitchen and wanted us to photograph the conditions, and at the same time she was talking to us about how the women needed their own hostel.

MdT: This photograph taken in the kitchen [p. 113] is very stark compared to others in the book, including the colour portrait of the same Zanele Ngcobo [p. 75]. In the latter photograph she looks directly at you, but in the kitchen photograph her head is turned to one side. Her body looks powerful and grounded, and the light glances off her strong face. The dim light meant that she had to stand quite still to enable you to take the photograph. This was the opposite of a domesticated space, or a space that signifies home. The walls were bare, and you included the only object in the whole kitchen in this portrait: the rusted jam tin with its very old, precariously balanced electric ring connected to a wall socket by exposed wires.

JG: While I was taking these pictures, what I saw and heard made me think about how important it is to have at the very least your own small space, never mind an entire house. When one is doing a portrait, it can also involve representing that person’s space, and these people really didn’t have their own space. Even though the hostel is totally a man’s world, my focus was on the women’s reality. Their situation came across as so overwhelmingly bleak. I think it was the most dire of any situation in the three areas that I photographed. What stands out in my mind is one young woman whom I photographed, Vuyelwa Songelwa [p. 112]. You told me how she said, speaking in Xhosa, that women are often pressurised to provide sex in exchange for a bed.





MdT: Vuyelwa Songelwa was speaking with the other women about conditions at the hostel as you were taking Dudu Dlamini's portrait [p. 74]. In the photograph that you took of Vuyelwa, who seemed really young, she stands in the passageway, a bleak space. I brought her a copy of the photograph and asked her to speak about what came into her mind when she looked at it. Her boyfriend, who was supporting her, was with her on this occasion. They explained how he had paid for her trip home so that she could have her child at her mother's house in the Eastern Cape. Looking at the photograph, she spoke about how bad it had been ('Hayi kwakukubi . . .'), how afraid she had been to find herself pregnant, which she said was a state between life and death ('Xa umithi kuphakathi kokufa nokuphile'). She also explained how her life – she had a son – was better now.

JG: What is fascinating to me in the case of Dudu Dlamini, who was lying on the bed in that very full hostel room where she slept with her boyfriend, is that the wall behind her was a highly personalised space, filled with cut-out pictures from magazines and political posters. Rose Thabethe, on the other hand, had a framed picture up on her wall – a family photograph rather than pictures from magazines [p. 76]. She was living in her brother's room and she still had very little privacy. Dudu Dlamini was actually thrilled to have her photograph taken. On the other hand, it was very important to Rose Thabethe to convey the difficulties of living in the hostel and she wanted us to expose the conditions. She was discussing this at the time I took the portrait, and she also took us around the place. She was part of the committee that was trying to change conditions and to get women their own hostel block.

MdT: When I interviewed Rose Thabethe about this photograph in 2008, she was then married and living in Lamontville. Looking at the portrait, she explained how she was 'suffering' at this time because a woman on her own could not rent a bed or room. Women had no separate bathrooms, and she explained how difficult this was, especially for the mothers. In this book we have juxtaposed the young Vuyelwa Songelwa's portrait with that of Zanele Ngcobo, who had taken us to the communal kitchen [pp. 112–113].

Although your focus was on the women, I had intense conversations with some of the men, such as with Zwa Gwala, who was very keen to have his own copy of the portrait of his friends sitting on a bed together with his partner, Makhosi

Nxumalo [p. 118]. His explanation of why he wanted this picture is one example of how providing copies of the photographs and talking about them with people who were close to those portrayed entangle social documentary and personal, familial photography. As he explained, he loved and needed this picture of his friends who felt for each other ('siyazwana') because 'it can show me the long language, it gives umlando omningi (much history), long story. You see, when you stay like this with someone you love, it is hard.' For me, that long history also refers to other photographs of migrant labour hostels as lonely and harsh spaces – for example, those by Ernest Cole.

Those portraits in this book that were not taken with very specific intentions of exposing an 'issue' or a 'social problem' were also shaped in quite subtle ways by interaction with the people that introduced and accompanied you. An example is the photographs that you took at the Hime Street flats.

JG: We first saw these flats through Lorna McDonald's photographs [p. 131, bottom], and she became a long-term workshop participant. She accompanied me to the complex of flats on that day. Her sister Ursula lived there and Lorna's own house was a short distance away. I had first met Auntie Olga [Olga Labuschagne] while I was photographing in the courtyard of the flats. She wanted a portrait with her grandson. I think she even got dressed up for this picture [p. 44]. Actually I don't think she had many family photographs, so a portrait that included her grandson was very meaningful to her. She comes across as quite a forceful personality compared to the two boys sitting behind her. That's why the portrait works for me. The three are quite at home with each other. The two young men are sitting in a fairly relaxed way and they seem to be comfortable with sitting close together with Auntie Olga.

MdT: When I brought Auntie Olga a copy of the photograph and asked her what she thought about when she looked at it, she spoke of how her grandson Quinton 'talks nonsense' with her in the kitchen and makes her happy: 'At least he's my little company.' She explained that she welcomed his friends because 'I was also in St Philomena's school, you see, in the orphanage school there in Malvern'. Her hands are those of a capable woman. Her left hand is in repose, but it has energy. Because of Quinton's disability, his hands look quite small and vulnerable.

JG: This portrait happened quite quickly and serendipitously

compared to some of the others. But this fluid process followed from dynamics that are important to unravel. That Lorna McDonald had taken me to the flats, and that she was also involved in the photography project and in taking photographs, was crucial to the portrait's making even if she was not present at that moment. As an outsider, I found that as I got to know people better I could blend in to some extent and gain more trust, and thus also access deeper meanings. The people with whom I worked over the long term and to whom I taught photography also shaped my work. It was only because I went to that neighbourhood with Lorna that it was possible to get to that state in which people were happy about me taking those pictures. I was associated with people who had grown up there or who were very familiar to the people in that place. Perhaps especially in some of the poorer parts of the neighbourhood, people were otherwise very suspicious of outsiders and of researchers. There was also some recent history of exploitative behaviour by news photographers having to do with HIV/AIDS – they had not respected people's privacy or their right to say no to being photographed. I felt accepted by residents in a different way compared to my previous projects. For the first time in my life I was regularly called Auntie Jenny.

MdT: Elizabeth Edwards, a historian and anthropologist, has written about photographs as 'not merely images' but as 'social objects' that 'occupy spaces between people and people, people and things'.³⁵ Her focus was on 'thinking about photographs in relation to history'. Perhaps this helps us to think through the relational dynamic involved in the making of these portraits and the composite result. As 'Auntie Jenny', you were given your place in a web of relationships. Corinne Kratz has commented that 'the *neighbourhood* portraits that emerge across images and captions show neighbourhoods as *social networks* as well as places' and convey 'a density of social relations, family and friendship'. The inclusion of family photographs also involves 'reach[ing] back in time and extending these social networks'.³⁶ But let's also think more closely about our social interaction with the subjects of your photography while you were actually taking photographs.

JG: Photographers often talk about blending into the background, and being hidden behind their cameras. I tried to be as unobtrusive as possible, but I was very aware that people were conscious that I was taking photographs of them. If they started talking to

someone else, I didn't interfere or try to talk myself. I was also completely involved in the process of making the photograph. I have learned over the years that I take my best photographs when I am totally in the moment, and really concentrating. You were often also there and engaged in conversation, taking the attention away from me. And then I could more easily capture a moment, as people relaxed a bit. I was very aware of people's response to the camera and I photographed with this in mind.

Look at the street photograph of Angel Simmonds and her friends and neighbours, for example [p. 102]. People who live in very crowded conditions spend a lot of time hanging out in the street and, except for a few photographs, I didn't really manage to capture that enough. I just sat there until the people relaxed and went on with their lives. I was actually sitting around talking about the project to someone who is not within the photograph's frame. I wanted to get away from conventional responses to the camera. It's not that I want them to forget – and I don't think they actually do forget about the camera.

People in Wentworth, Merebank and Lamontville were most often familiar with photographs taken at family occasions, when you had to smile at the camera, or with newspaper photography. This was partly why I often took a number of photographs for the family. For the purposes of the project, I wanted a portrait in which people did not 'act up' for the camera or feel stiff and awkward. That's why I always made sure that someone was talking, to avoid an uncomfortable silence while they were sitting in front of the camera. At the same time, I did not want anything to intrude on my effort to capture something about them, their personality, their character. It was often very difficult, inside a crowded and small lounge, for them not to be aware of everything that I was doing. Sometimes I had to ask if I could move some furniture so I could find space for my tripod. Or I would ask that they open the curtains to let in more light, because I never use a flash. For me it was better to recognise that they were aware of my presence and to work with the way they were relating to me.

MdT: In my experience, the moment when the photograph was taken was always part of a discussion, a negotiation, and also often something of a social occasion. The relatively formal and solemn way in which people present themselves to your camera often reminds me of studio and family photographs, which one could think of as 'records of how . . . people wanted to represent their lives in their own terms' and of how people participated in



visual aesthetics of dignity, beauty, elegance as modes of self-assertion during apartheid.³⁷ One could think of the portraits that you took as related to the work of itinerant photographers from the mid-twentieth century, such as the family portrait taken of the Narain family in their Clairwood home [p. 148]. And the attentiveness between yourself, Gopal Govender and Premi Govender in the photo of the couple [p. 33] also resonates with the studio photographs of the young Premi [p. 34]. What was different was the dynamic of conversation about how pollution was affecting their health. Here personal portraiture is combined with the on-the-ground immediacy of investigative photojournalism.

JG: I actually visited the Govenders twice, and I spent a long time talking to them. For me it was not just about the moment of taking the picture. Both of them were very ill and distressed that morning. They were trying to recover from bad asthma attacks and they were wheezing badly. We were having quite an intense conversation and Gopal had actually sat forward at the moment when I took this photograph. By nature he was a very quiet man and liked his wife to speak. But he was making a point to me about how his asthma was affecting his job as a caretaker at Merebank Secondary School, and explaining that his younger son was also affected.

I think the simple decision to ask people whether I may take their portrait and to take time to discuss the reasons for doing so has led to me photographing in a certain way. Mostly people are looking straight at me into the camera. This appears very old-fashioned; it is very different from most photography in the documentary and contemporary fine art field, where even if people notice that you are photographing them it is too late to do anything about it. In a discussion about street photography, the writer Geoff Dyer asked whether it is possible that a photographer 'could get a *quality of being* through the fact that a person *knew* he was being photographed'.³⁸ I do think that the person's awareness of being photographed enables me to represent a quality of being, not only out in the street but also inside people's houses.

MdT: How do you choose among your photographs when you look at a contact sheet? Working with the Hasselblad camera was expensive, so I suppose you didn't take as many photos as you might with another camera.³⁹ But you still usually had at least several photographs to choose from, or a number of

photographs that you took of people living in the same vicinity. What was involved in the process of choosing between them?

JG: When I choose photographs for an exhibition, it is important to decide which photograph best conveys what I felt at the time. David Hurn wrote that 'I never claim my photographs reveal some definitive truth. I claim that this is what I saw and felt about the subject at the time the pictures were made. That's all that any photographer can claim.'⁴⁰ Sometimes this is difficult because I remember the moment of taking – of making – the photograph. But then, looking at the result, I'm not sure that the photograph is conveying what I felt at the time.

MdT: What do you mean by 'what I felt at the time'? 'Feeling' is often understood to refer to one's own internal emotional space. But I think you're also referring to how you were responding to what was happening at that moment (and the intuitive process involved, in which intellect and emotion are in fact not separate). I still remember how intense the photography sessions always were whenever we worked together and tramped around one or other of the neighbourhoods. You spent hours in a trance of concentration, both while working with the camera and as we spoke with people, asking questions about their lives and explaining the project and what you as a photographer were doing. I've often thought about how you seem to attain a different sort of calm and focus behind the camera. It's also interesting to think about the conversations we've had about the aesthetics of a photograph, and how aesthetics, as the root of the word indicates, is also about perception. I don't think it's simply about what you felt at the time. What do you mean by 'the time'? Perhaps what you are saying is that you were making a series of decisions about the situation and how you were trying to capture it, represent it.

JG: 'The time' for me is deciding where I am going to position myself, and the conscious awareness of really seeing what I am looking at. And here I want to mention something about the language that people use about the moment that one takes the picture. People generally use the word 'shoot'. I find this deeply disturbing. I prefer to say that I *make* or *take* or *conceive* a photograph, in order to emphasise the fact that it is a process, although with me it is largely an unconscious process. But when I look at the photograph that has resulted, I go back to that moment, that memory of taking the picture. And sometimes it



will appear evident to me that I missed 'it' somehow. Because I cut something off, or I wasn't in the right place, or my reading of the light was wrong – for whatever reason I didn't actually get what I noticed or what I experienced. Or I didn't get the expression that I saw on someone's face. For an instant, things can come together to communicate a feeling, a moment in time. That right moment is a very fleeting thing. So sometimes I saw it, but I didn't manage to capture it.

MdT: This brings us back to the debate about politics and aesthetics. These are contextual, environmental portraits that have a social and political intent but that are also often beautiful to look at. I'm thinking of the dismissal of the Brazilian social documentary photographer Sebastião Salgado's photographs because he was seen as presenting poverty as beautiful, and therefore as reinforcing passivity in the viewer.

JG: I think that one thing that divides Salgado's work from the work of many other contemporary social documentary photographers is that it has created so much debate. It shows how effective his work has been. So much has been written about Salgado. Some of his photographs are sentimental, but I think on the whole they're very, very powerful. Writer and critic David Levi-Strauss offers a convincing critique of the argument that Salgado is too concerned with producing a beautiful image and that it is ethically wrong to present tragedy in an aesthetic form. He challenges the idea that the more 'transformed' or 'aestheticised' an image is, the less 'authentic' or politically valuable it becomes. The question he poses is, 'Why can't beauty be a call to action?'⁴¹ In South Africa in the late 1970s and early 1980s, there was this whole idea that having an aesthetic quality was a very middle-class indulgence. But I always thought that if you are competing with advertising and the media, in order to convincingly put forward a different point of view you need a very strong communicative aesthetic, like that of Salgado.

MdT: Levi-Strauss goes on to argue that the very way something is made is political, that poetics and the political are 'not mutually exclusive nor even separate'. And that a work of art will be compelling only if it contains tension, so that it invites the viewer into a more complex response. He dismisses what he calls the 'anti-aesthetic tendency', saying that it really amounts to an effort to 'protect oneself from pain', and that Salgado finds ways to focus attention on the wounds and fissures of society.⁴²

Corinne Kratz has pointed out, however, that in recent years 'social practice art has become its own category', so that 'those puzzled people' who tried to categorise your work either as fine art or as documentary photography might now recognise your work as such.⁴³ Writing about Omar Badsha's work, Patricia Hayes has suggested that one should allow for 'the constant operation of aesthetic judgment in an unfolding social and political setting'. This dynamic structures possibilities for perception, so that 'divisions and boundaries . . . define, amongst other things, what is visible and audible'.⁴⁴ But how exactly do you harness the language of photography and invite viewers to pay attention?

JG: When I take a photograph, and later choose between my photographs, I obviously pay attention to where the lines are going, what kind of shapes there are in the picture, what effects the light causes, the mood of the photograph. A very important part of my aesthetic is that I want as much detail as possible.

MdT: I once discussed our project with a medical doctor from Merebank who was active in the SDCEA. He was participating in a demonstration at the city hall. Residents were confronting the eThekweni Municipality about plans for a road that would benefit industry but would cut through their neighbourhood. He expressed his frustration that the social histories of people who have made their lives there for many years remain unacknowledged by urban planners. This takes me back to *Breathing Spaces* as a composite environmental portrait. Each individual environmental portrait that shows a person, family or friends inside a particular home makes present a density of detail. The photographs by workshop participants contain glimpses of interaction between family and friends, or draw attention to social questions that preoccupied the photographer. Old studio photographs and snapshots suggest familial acts of remembrance and participation through time in personal networks that made place into neighbourhood. Each stilled moment invites viewers to pay attention to a particular time and place, to make imagined eye contact with particular persons, while also holding in their mind's eye the images of an urban landscape structured by histories of environmental injustice. Presented together with comments and reflections by people who live in the neighbourhoods, these image-texts make 'places, people, and environmental relations visible and audible and present in ways that change patterns of attention'.⁴⁵ As such, we have invited people to look beyond the aesthetics and image economies associated with tourism, with

transnational petrochemical interests and with official discourses of sustainable growth. Photography can hopefully 'produc[e] new

contact-zones between the world photographed and those who see it' and so 'unlock the potential for participation and action'.⁴⁶

Endnotes

1. Patricia Hayes, 'Power, Secrecy, Proximity: A Short History of South African Photography', *Kronos* 33 (2007), 139–162.
2. Edward Steichen, *Family of Man* (New York: Ridge Press, 1955). Multiple editions were printed over many decades.
3. Edward Steichen's exhibition opened at the Museum of Modern Art, New York, in January 1955. It 'quickly became one of the most popular exhibitions in the museum's history and quite likely the most widely seen collection of photographs ever created' (Fred Turner, 'The Family of Man and the Politics of Attention in Cold War America', *Public Culture* 24, no. 1 [2012], 55–56). Turner reviews the extensive literature that criticised the exhibition and book catalogue, by writers such as Allan Sekula and Abigail Solomon-Godeau, as 'an attempt to paper over problems of race and class' (p. 56) and as articulating an aesthetics of colonialism. As an arrangement of images and words, *Family of Man* articulated limited and racialised ideals of the nuclear family. Turner considers how the exhibition represented 'a fulcrum moment in the development of an increasingly ubiquitous mode of media power' that entailed giving audiences 'a democratic degree of freedom in relation to imagery' and urging them to 'pursue their individual experiences within collective terms set by his own aesthetic expertise' (p. 58).
4. Peter Magubane and Marshall Lee, *Soweto* (Cape Town: Don Nelson, 1978). Born in 1932, Peter Magubane began his photographic career at *Drum* magazine. He worked for the *Rand Daily Mail* during the Soweto uprising of 1976. Other books by Magubane about this Johannesburg township include *Soweto: The Fruit of Fear* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1986) and (co-authored with David Bristow and Stan Motjuwadi) *Soweto: Portrait of a City* (London: New Holland, 1990). See also Gary Baines, 'The Master Narrative of South Africa's Liberation Struggle: Remembering and Forgetting June 16, 1976', *International Journal of African Historical Studies* 40, no. 2 (2007), 283–302.
5. *Staffrider* was a literary magazine that 'provided a medium for the publication and exposition of ordinary people's life experiences during the years 1978 to 1996', a period of harsh state censorship. Andries Oliphant and Ivan Vladislavic (eds), *Ten Years of Staffrider, 1978–1988* (Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1988). See also Irikidzayi Manase, 'Making Memory: Stories from *Staffrider* Magazine and "Testing" the Popular Imagination', *African Studies* 64, no. 1 (2005), 55–72; Darren Newbury, *Defiant Images: Photography and Apartheid South Africa* (Pretoria: Unisa Press, 2009).
6. Newbury, *Defiant Images*, pp. 81–172. Black photographers associated with the *Drum* generation include Bob Gosani, Alf Khumalo, Ernest Cole and Peter Magubane.
7. See Jürgen Schadeberg, *The Finest Photographs from the Old Drum* (Lanseria: Bailey's African Photo Archives, 1987); Jürgen Schadeberg, Bob Gosani et al., *The Fifties People of South Africa* (Lanseria: Bailey's African Photo Archives, 1987); Jürgen Schadeberg, *Softown Blues: Images from the Black 50s* (Johannesburg: Jürgen Schadeberg, 1994); Jürgen Schadeberg, *The Black and White Fifties: Jürgen Schadeberg's South Africa* (Pretoria: Protea, 2001).
8. Diane Arbus, in *Going Where I've Never Been: The Photography of Diane Arbus* (film documentary), directed by John Musilli and written by Stephan Chodorov (1972).
9. David Hurn and Bill Jay, *On Being a Photographer: A Practical Guide* (Anacortes, WA: LensWork Publishing, 1997), pp. 12 and 33, quoted in Marijke du Toit and Jenny Gordon, 'Photographic Portraiture, Neighbourhood Activism and Apartheid's Industrial Legacy', *Kronos* 35, no. 1 (2009), 178.
10. Hayes, 'Power, Secrecy, Proximity', 144. Contributions by Patricia Hayes to the history of documentary photography in southern Africa include 'Santu Mofokeng, Photographs: "The Violence Is in the Knowing"', *History and Theory* 48, no. 4 (2009), 34–51; 'The Uneven Citizenry of Photography: Reading the "Political Ontology" of Photography from Southern Africa', *Cultural Critique* 89 (2015), 173–193; 'The Colour of History: Photography and the Public Sphere in Southern Africa', in Divya Dwivedi and Sanil V (eds), *The Public Sphere from Outside the West* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2015); and (co-authored with Wolfram Hartmann and Jeremy Silvester) *The Colonising Camera: Photographs in the Making of Namibian History* (Cape Town: Juta and Company, 1998).
11. David Goldblatt, *On the Mines* (Cape Town: Struik, 1973); David Goldblatt, *Some Afrikaners Photographed* (Johannesburg: Murray Crawford, 1975).
12. Alf Khumalo began his career as a freelance journalist and photographer for the *Bantu World* newspaper in the early 1950s. In 1956 he was appointed photojournalist for the *Golden City Post*. Over several decades, Khumalo used his camera in order to document state repression and resistance against apartheid.
13. See Patricia Hayes, 'The Form of the Norm: Shades of Gender in South African Photography of the 1980s', *Social Dynamics* 27, no. 2 (2011), 263. She identifies distinct phases of photojournalism and social documentary photography during the years of apartheid. This discussion refers to what she identifies as a period 'prior to the rise of international interest in anti-apartheid struggle in the

mid-1980s'. It was followed by the 'barricades photography' of Afrapix, which expanded 'alongside the emergence of the United Democratic Front', particularly during the State of Emergency from 1985 onwards.

14. Hayes, 'Form of the Norm', 263–264.
15. Luli Callinicos, *Working Life 1886–1940: Factories, Townships and Popular Culture on the Rand* (Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1987); Leslie Witz, *Write Your Own History* (Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1988). See also Luli Callinicos, 'Popularising History in a Changing South Africa', *South African Historical Journal* 25, no. 1 (1991), 22–37.
16. Jenny Gordon, Mai-Mai, exhibition at Market Theatre Photo Gallery, Johannesburg, 1987; Around Troyeville, exhibition at Market Theatre Photo Gallery, Johannesburg, 1990.
17. As quoted in Newbury, *Defiant Images*, p. 239.
18. Newbury, *Defiant Images*, pp. 222–223. Here Newbury is discussing the selection of images for Eli Weinberg's *Portrait of a People: A Personal Photographic Record of the South African Liberation Struggle* (London: International Defence and Aid Fund for Southern Africa, 1981). Born in Latvia, Eli Weinberg moved to South Africa in 1929. Besides working as a photographer, he was active in the Communist Party of South Africa and as a trade unionist. Weinberg was persecuted in terms of the Suppression of Communism Act in the 1950s and was served with banning orders in the 1960s. At the time of publication of *Portrait of a People* he was living in exile. See, for example, <http://www.sahistory.org.za/people/eli-weinberg>, accessed 4 April 2016. Born in 1982, Peter McKenzie grew up in Wentworth and was a member of the photographic collective Afrapix. See <http://www.sahistory.org.za/people/peter-mckenzie>, accessed 4 April 2016.
19. Hurn, *On Being a Photographer*, p. 37, quoted in Du Toit and Gordon, 'Photographic Portraiture', 182.
20. Hayes, 'Form of the Norm', 263. The women photographers discussed in this article include Lesley Lawson, Wendy Schwegmann, Anna Zieminski, Deseni Moodliar, Zubeida Vallie, Gille de Vlieg, Gisele Wulfson and, later, Suzie Bernstein. Among the male photographers whose work is relevant to this discussion are Omar Badsha and Cedric Nunn.
21. Hayes, 'Form of the Norm', 263–277. Four photographers in particular are associated with the self-identified Bang Bang Club that took photographs in South African townships in the early 1990s: Kevin Carter, Greg Marinovich, Ken Oosterbroek and João Silva. Their focus was on 'conflict and violence as a supplement to news narrative' (David L. Krantz, 'Politics and Photography in Apartheid South Africa', *History of Photography* 32, no. 4 [2008], 298).
22. This research includes: Wolfram Hartmann, Patricia Hayes and Jeremy Sylvester (eds), *The Colonising Camera: Photographs in the Making of Namibian History* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1999); Revue Noir, *Anthology of African and Indian Ocean Photography* (Paris: Editions Revue Noir, 1999); Elizabeth Edwards (ed.), *Anthropology and Photography: 1860–1920* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1994). See also Ciraj Rassool, 'The Rise of Heritage and the Reconstitution of History in South Africa', *Kronos* 26 (2000); and Leslie Witz, Gary Minkley and Ciraj Rassool, 'Who Speaks for South African Pasts?', paper presented at the Biennial Conference of the South African Historical Society, 'Not Telling: Secrecy, Lies and History', University of the Western Cape, 11–14 July 1999; Natasha Becker, 'The Lives of Colour Exhibition: South African National Gallery, September 1999', *Kronos* 27, Special Issue on Visual History (September 2001).
23. Hayes, 'Form of the Norm', 264.
24. Patricia Hayes, 'Seeing and Being Seen: Politics, Art and the Everyday in Omar Badsha's Durban Photography, 1960s–1980s', *Africa* 81, no. 4 (2011), 546. In the early 1980s, in response to efforts to limited parliamentary reform by the apartheid state, a wide range of civil society organisations mobilised under the umbrella of the United Democratic Front. By the middle of the decade, popular resistance against apartheid policy had spread to towns, villages and the 'independent' bantustans. A partial State of Emergency in 1985 was followed by the declaration of a national State of Emergency in 1986 as part of efforts to mobilise security apparatus against protestors.
25. Hayes, 'Seeing', 554.
26. Paulo Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* was first published in 1970. His *Education for Critical Consciousness* appeared in 1973.
27. Ira Shor and Paulo Freire, 'What Is the "Dialogical Method" of Teaching?' *Journal of Education* 169 (1987), 11–31. For a more detailed analysis of the pedagogy practised at our workshops, see Marijke du Toit and Jenny Gordon, 'Experiential Learning and Photography of the Everyday: Teaching Visual Communication for Social Awareness', in Naydene de Lange, Claudia Mitchell and Jean Stuart (eds), *Putting People in the Picture: Visual Methodologies for Social Change* (Rotterdam: Sense Publishers, 2007).
28. Robert Frank, quoted in Du Toit and Gordon, 'Photographic Portraiture', 179. Frank is best known for his book *The Americans: Photographs* (New York: Grove Press, 1959), and it is for this project that he secured a Guggenheim Fellowship to travel across the United States. See, for example, Robert Frank's 'The Americans': *The Art of Documentary Photography* (Bristol: Intellect Books, 2011).
29. Sighart Bourquin, who was director of Durban's Department of Native Affairs from 1953 to 1973, took numerous photographs of the informal settlement Cato Manor, particularly as it was being dismantled, and of the dormitory townships KwaMashu and Umlazi during their construction. Examples are in various archival collections, including the Killie Campbell Collections (UKZN) and at the KwaMuhle Museum in Durban.
30. Ariella Azoulay, *The Civil Contract of Photography* (New York: Zone Books, 2008), p. 14.
31. The photograph 'Lavelle Hulley Walks Above the Engen Oil Refinery in Ballerina Terrace, Wentworth' is published in Du Toit and Gordon, 'Photographic Portraiture', 194–195.
32. Corinne A. Kratz, *The Ones That Are Wanted: Communication*

- and the Politics of Representation in a Photographic Exhibition* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), p. 118.
33. For a discussion of the notion of image-text, and of the dynamics of looking and imagining the returning of a glance or look involved in family and personal photography, see Marianne Hirsch, *Family Frames: Photography, Narrative and Postmemory* (Cambridge, MA, and London: Harvard University Press, 1997).
 34. Interview with Lutchmee Perumal by Marijke du Toit, 9 March 2006.
 35. Elizabeth Edwards, 'Photographs and the Sound of History', *Visual Anthropology Review* 21, nos. 1–2 (2006), 27 and 29.
 36. Corinne A. Kratz, comments for South African Contemporary History and Humanities Seminar 'Photography Through Conversation' (Marijke du Toit and Jenny Gordon), Centre for Humanities Research, University of the Western Cape, 15 September 2015.
 37. Sophie Feyder, 'Lounge Photography and the Politics of Township Interiors: The Representation of the Black South African Home in the Ngilima Photographic Collection, East Rand, 1950s', *Kronos* 38, no. 1 (2012), 133. See also Nkiruka J. Nwafor, 'Re-presenting Self: Reading Some Van Kalker Studio Photographs', *New Journal of African Studies* 7 (2010), 165–166; Sophie Feyder, 'A Space of One's Own: Studio Photography and the Making of Black Urban Femininities in the 1950s East Rand', *Safundi* 15, nos. 2–3 (2014), 227–254.
 38. Geoff Dyer, *The Ongoing Moment* (Westminster, MD: Pantheon Books, 2005), p. 17.
 39. The Hasselblad that Jenny Gordon used was a medium-format film camera. At the time of use, the specialised square-format film required for this camera was comparatively expensive. The film roll had only 12 exposures compared to the usual 24 or 36, and specialised printing was also required.
 40. David Hurn and Bill Jay, *On Being a Photographer*, p. 2, quoted in Du Toit and Gordon, 'Photographic Portraiture', 188.
 41. David Levi-Strauss, *Between the Eyes: Essays on Photography and Politics* (New York: Aperture, 2005), p. 9.
 42. Levi-Strauss, *Between the Eyes*, pp. 7–8.
 43. Kratz, comments for South African Contemporary History and Humanities Seminar 'Photography Through Conversation'. She was referring to projects such as the Houston-based Project Row Houses and Theaster Gates's work in Chicago.
 44. Gabriel Rockhill, 'Introduction', in Jacques Rancière, *The Politics of Aesthetics: The Distribution of the Sensible*, trans. Gabriel Rockhill (London: Continuum 2004), quoted in Hayes, 'Seeing', 546.
 45. Kratz, comments for South African Contemporary History and Humanities Seminar 'Photography Through Conversation'.
 46. Patricia Hayes, 'The Colour of History: Photography and the Public Sphere in Southern Africa', in Divya Dwivedi and Sanil V (eds), *The Public Sphere from Outside the West* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2015).