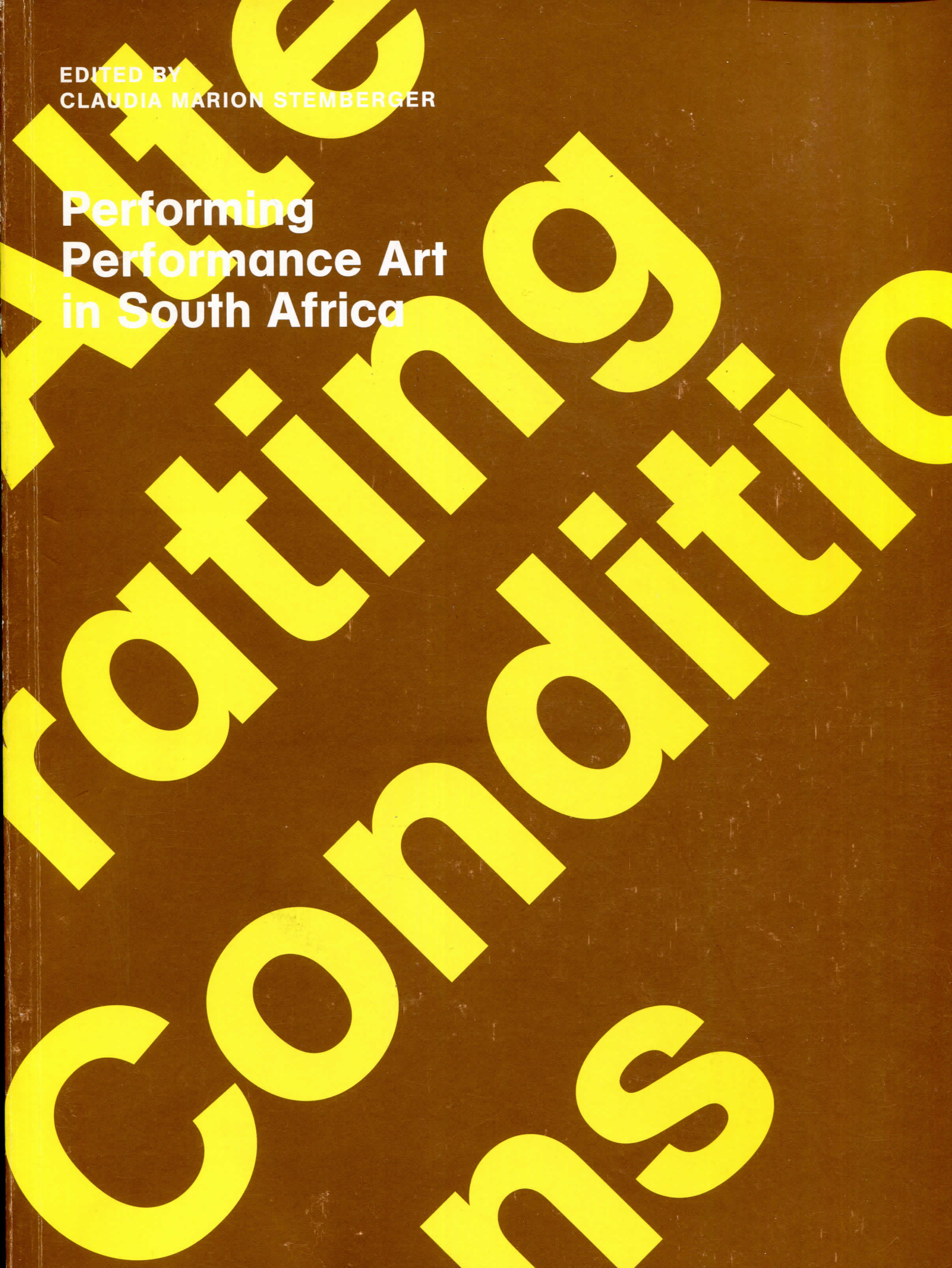


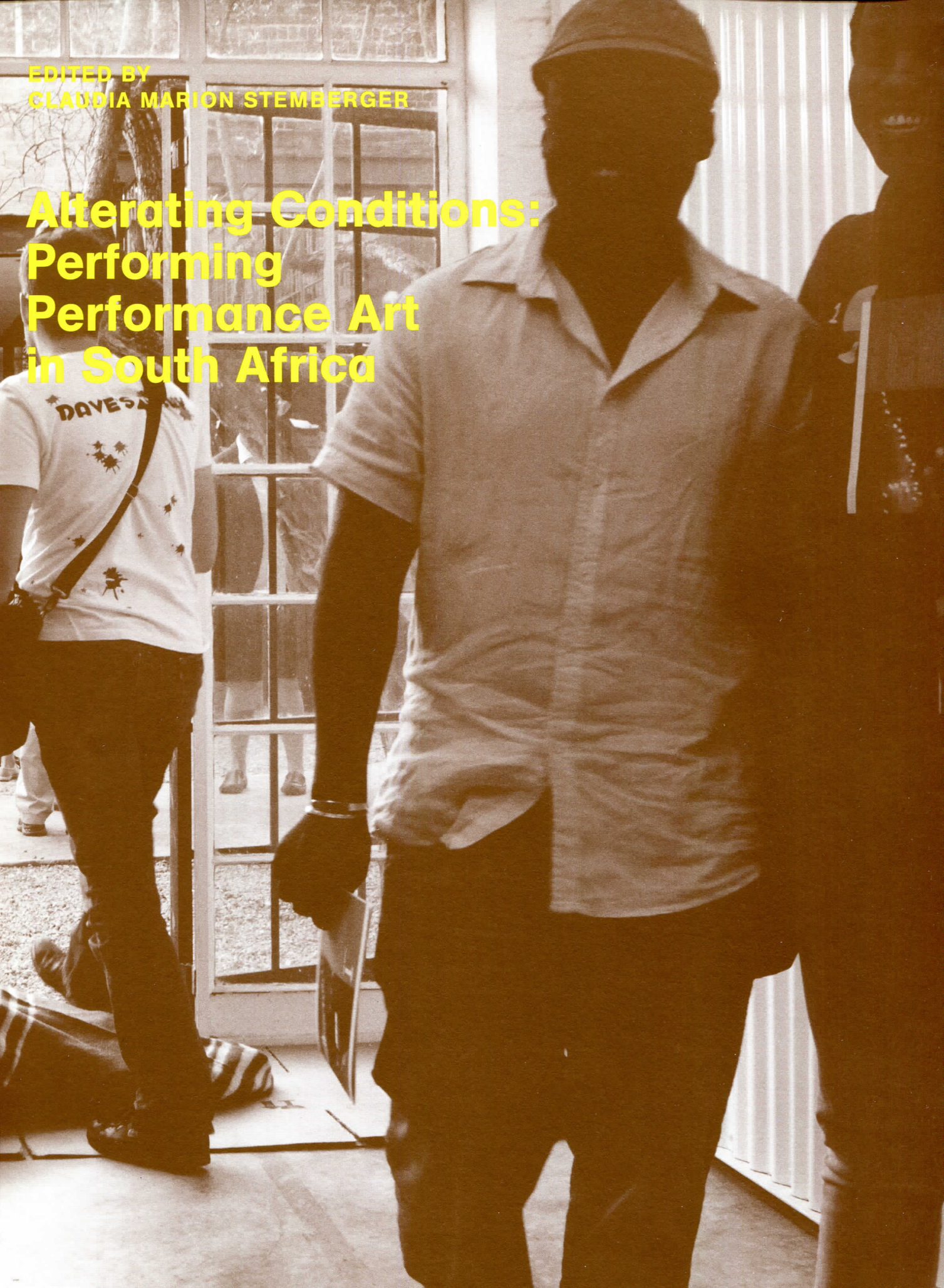
EDITED BY
CLAUDIA MARION STEMBERGER

**Performing
Performance Art
in South Africa**



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Altering Conditions: Performing Performance Art in South Africa



Alterating Conditions: Performing Performance Art in South Africa

THE BAG FACTORY ARTISTS' STUDIOS
AND GOETHEONMAIN

JOHANNESBURG, SOUTH AFRICA
11 JANUARY – 15 FEBRUARY 2011

Artists

DINEO SESHEE BOPAPE, TEGAN BRISTOW, RESHMA CHHIBA,
STEVEN COHEN, DEADHEAT (DOROTHEE KREUTZFELDT
& BETTINA MALCOMESS), HASAN AND HUSAIN ESSOP,
GABRIELLE GOLIATH, JESSICA GREGORY & ZEN MARIE,
PETER VAN HEERDEN, GERALD MACHONA, NOMUSA MAKHUBU,
THANDO MAMA, MOLEMO MOILOA, ATHI-PATRA RUGA,
BERNI SEARLE, LERATO SHADI, MINNETTE VARI, AMY-JO WINDT,
NELISIWE XABA & MOCKE J VAN VEUREN

Curator

CLAUDIA MARION STEMBERGER

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Becoming: The Art of Everyday Performativity

SHARLENE KHAN

I was born 'Indian'. I grew up in predominantly Indian¹ townships in Durban, South Africa, during apartheid. I went to school with predominantly lower working-class Indian children and, as a child of a mixed-religious upbringing, I successfully managed to evade attempts to graft me into madrasa² classes, refused to learn the little Hindi that was taught and instead chose a cultural studies class. My life was secured in a blanket of Indianness injected with Hollywood and Bollywood movies and music during the 1980s and, during this time, ignorance was indeed bliss. The only person who disrupted my gaze was my aunt Nettie, who married into the Muslim side of my family and looked Indian, but when she spoke she sounded distinctly Durban Coloured. Her mother was also a Durban Indian but all her other siblings 'looked' and sounded Coloured. My aunt married as per Muslim custom, converted to Islam, was called Nafesa by the Muslim community and dressed in Muslim garb. Nettie-aunt was always intriguing—she didn't have children, was one of the only women we knew who drove in those days and she always had different ideas from the other women I encountered. She didn't seem to *fit in*, but in her *standing out* she was attractive. My uncle and aunt divorced after a decade of marriage and she became, once again, Christian Coloured Nettie and added 'nurse' to her titles.

This brief biographical insight serves as an introduction to one of the millions of lives under apartheid that will not make it into any history book or media portrayal. It is a life of segregation, of not knowing, of believing the lies of apartheid indoctrination, of uncontested performances of race and ethnicity ruptured only slightly by individuals who did not quite 'fit in'. I have often thought of my aunt and how it must have been like for her to perform her misfitting identities as she did on a daily basis during her life. I did not know the precariousness of her Indian mother living with her Coloured offspring in a Coloured township, but their family was anything but unique. The emergence of apartheid narratives today evidence the many ways people *had to* manipulate discriminatory apartheid constructions through a range of everyday performances of identity and the notion of *fitting into* categories of race and ethnicity. This short essay hopes to raise the question of the potential of active identity performative practices as a strategy for the necessary subversion of identity categories in post-apartheid South Africa especially as they have manifested in the visual arts.

Performing Identity

Feminist theorist Judith Butler and Homi K. Bhabha's post-colonialist theories on performativity are influential in this essay in that for Butler gender formation is more an affect of performative discourses,³ while for Bhabha colonial identities are formed in relation to the colonial order resulting in a mimicry of the coloniser, which is never 'quite the same'.⁴ The slippage is necessary to distinguish the 'authentic' from the 'inauthentic' but ambivalently opens up spaces for disruption. Personal and collective identity thus becomes a series of performances, willing or unwilling, that does or does not fit within dominant scripting of identity roles. One can understand why there is so much engagement with these ideas, as the notion that identity could be the result of a series of repetitive performances (albeit structured within specific overarching contexts) opens up the potential for alternative scripting and subversion.⁵ Butler's and Bhabha's theories offer the possibility that the recognition of the psychological and physical performances of social customs and mimicry that come to define identity categories can be transgressed to elide the kinds of essentialised markers of difference and dualistic positions that we occupy. Thus in recognising what it takes to 'fit in', one can choose to *not* or indeed to extend or contest what 'fitting in' means. Before I address specific instances of apartheid's fittings and 'misfittings',⁶ I wish initially to draw rather loosely on the 1959 work of sociologist Erving Goffman, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, in which he examines symbolical interactionism in terms of everyday encounters, situating persons as performers and audience members. Goffman defines a performance as all "activity of a given participant on a given occasion which serves to influence in any way any of the other participants".⁷ I want to appropriate his account of these kinds of ritualistic symbolic inferences we engage in daily and relate it to the kinds of active performances people engaged in on a micro-level during apartheid. Goffman exemplifies a typical inter-personal scenario:

"Society is organized on the principle that any individual who possesses certain social characteristics has a moral right to expect that others will value and treat him in an appropriate way. Connected with this principle is a second, namely that an individual who implicitly or explicitly signifies that he has cer-

tain social characteristics ought in fact to be what he claims he is. In consequence, when an individual projects a definition of the situation and thereby makes an implicit or explicit claim to be a person of a particular kind, he automatically exerts a moral demand upon the others, obliging them to value and treat him in the manner that persons of his kind have a right to expect... The others find, then, that the individual has informed them as to what is and as to what they ought to see as the 'is.'⁸

Such 'typicality' of individual presentation and self-definition, however, did not exist in a South African apartheid worldview, and in fact the converse becomes possible, where a person is not what s/he says s/he is, but rather what the dominating culture ordains her/him to be, thus reflecting the ideological framework of superiority employed by those in power. Moral obligation is then twofold on the part of the dominator: civilise and culture the dominated, and protect the cultural, political and economic terrain and morals of the dominant. The architects of apartheid⁹ between the 1940s and the 1980s, appealing to nature, biology, culture and God, tried to create a legislated social hierarchy that allowed White people to rule over the country and all of its resources, including its 'natural' inhabitants (and foreign slaves, prisoners and indentured labourers), which functioned as a workforce for the White colonisers (the tenements of such racial suppression existed from the earliest colonial ventures to the Cape by the Dutch and British). Suppression was eschewed by a separatist ideology that functioned by creating clear categories of identity based on race (and in the case of Indians and Chinese on race and a foreign nationality). Official State documents gave permission for a limited range of performances within the configurations of coloniser/colonised through a constant control over space, movement, language and representation. Thus in apartheid South Africa it was a smaller White foreign collective that determined the identity of a large Black majority, with individual identities required to mould themselves within the ideological parameters set by the apartheid state. Racial groups were asked to perform racial, ethnic and class identities and functions ascribed to them on a daily basis, with a White European colonial gaze judging the worth of the spectacle. Indians and Chinese had to perform 'Asianness', Coloureds 'mixedness' and Black South Africans 'nativeness'. Certain political persons such as the late Minority Front leader Amichand Rajbansi¹⁰ and Inkatha Freedom Party leader Mangosuthu Buthelezi¹¹ can be viewed as performers in the apartheid and post-apartheid landscape who have excessively played on their racial-ethnic identities to rally a constituency they also harnessed to protest against apartheid when necessary (while securing personal gains as well). The Black Consciousness Movement¹² was also criticised as using an essentialised race category as an overall premise in its political philosophy. White South Africans, too, had to perform in the colonial landscape,

1 This essay primarily uses the racial categories as used in apartheid and post-apartheid South Africa: 'White' (persons of white European descent), 'Black' (local indigenous Black groups), 'Coloured' (persons of mixed race and descendants of Malay slaves and prisoners), 'Indian' (persons of South Asian descent that arrived in the second half of the 19th century first as British indentured labourers and then as merchants), Asian (at one time it included Indian and Chinese but later primarily addressed people of Chinese descent, as well as new Chinese and Pakistani, Indian and Sri Lankan migrants). Where the term 'black' is used, it is used as a more positive form of 'non-white' and includes Black, Coloured and Indian South Africans as does the term 'previously disadvantaged' (and recently Chinese South Africans). Generally, quotes follow the capitalisation of the specific authors with regard to racial terms such as 'white', 'black' or 'coloured'.

2 In this context, madrasa denotes informal Islamic classes that were held after school hours by Muslim teachers for Muslim children free-of-charge.

3 See Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble. Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York and London: Routledge, 1990), 2nd edition.

4 See Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1994).

5 Of course this potential may also not be realised, as people consciously or unconsciously perform according to normative racial, gender and sexual scripting.

6 By this I mean both people who did not fit neatly into official segregated racial identity categories, but also in terms of being a misfit, as in one who could create problems.

7 Erving Goffman, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (London: Penguin Books, 1959), 26.

8 Ibid., 24.

9 From the moment of the Dutch East India Company's trading ventures in the Cape Colony, what became known as the South African republic has been subjected to Dutch and British colonial rule—sometimes simultaneously—especially due to the exploitation of the natural resources of the colony, particularly gold, diamonds, sugar cane, etc. Apartheid, as a system of legislated racial segregation, was formalised when the Afrikaner National Party came into power in 1948 and lasted until 1994 when South Africa had its first democratic elections.

10 Amichand Rajbansi served as leader of the Indian House of Delegates (elected in 1984) and of the National People's Party (formed in 1981), which later became the Minority Front (in 1994). The House of Delegates was the Indian constituency of the tricameral parliament of South Africa, which ran from 1984 up until democracy in South Africa—it gave limited representation to Indian and Coloured constituencies while maintaining the electoral power of the White minority. See http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Amichand_Rajbansi.

11 Mangosuthu Buthelezi is the founder and leader of the Inkatha Freedom Party, which has a predominantly Zulu constituency primarily in the KwaZulu-Natal province. It was formed in 1975 and is still maintained under his leadership today despite growing divisions in the party and leadership battles.

12 The Black Consciousness Movement emerged in the mid-to-late 1960s, with South African Students Organisation (SASO) leader Steve Biko emerging as its most outspoken proponent, while much of the ANC and PAC leadership had been jailed or fled into exile. The movement, drawing on ideals of a psychological and political consciousness of liberation based on a re-centring and understanding of 'blackness'—and at times the incompatibility of working with other racial groups to achieve the freedom of the Black oppressed—was influenced by the American and Caribbean civil rights causes (although the BCM did encompass members from all non-white groups in South Africa). Steve Biko was killed in 1977 at the hands of the apartheid security police. See <http://www.disa.ukzn.ac.za/webpages/DC/art19871200.032.009.762/art19871200.032.009.762.pdf>; <http://www.revleft.com/vb/black-consciousness-movement-t104720/index.html?s=04f3262d1164d548e45bfc1d2e5ffd46&p=1394411>; <http://www.sahistory.org.za/introduction-black-consciousness-movement>.

13 An 'Afrikaner' refers to White South African descendants primarily of Dutch colonial ancestry but also including early German and French settlers to the Cape Colony.

14 Goffman, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, 21.

15 Some of the more notorious of these laws include: the Population Registration Act, 1950, where all South Africans would be classified into a racial group and which provided the basis for a racially segregated society; the Res-

not just in terms of alleged biological and intellectual superiority combined with a supposed God-given right to dominate the 'virgin' land that was South Africa, but also in terms of schisms between liberal English-speaking Whites and conservative Afrikaners.¹³ And while the (majority White) audience could, no doubt, see through fractures in the quality, content and style of the performances, this was given over to a suspended belief (denialism and repression) for the larger narrative of the performance—White supremacy and order: "Together the participants contribute to a single over-all definition of the situation which involves not so much a real agreement as to what exists but rather a real agreement as to whose claims concerning what issues will be temporarily honoured".¹⁴ Violence and incarceration were used at every level during apartheid as a means of maintaining a disciplined cast.

Everyday Performing

With a culturally diverse population, it was difficult for a White minority to ensure that people compartmentalised their daily interactions and relationships with other races. The answer to this became a host of laws,¹⁵ bills, texts and tests created, amended and implemented from the end of the 1940s to encourage people to 'colour between the lines'. The unreason of this forced racial segregation resulted in the use of increasingly unorthodox mechanisms of redefining race based on European social ideas of skin colour, hair, gender, class, religion and ethnicity.¹⁶ Goffman argues that when an individual presents himself to others, they will look for 'sign-vehicles' or carriers to acquire information and 'locate' this person.¹⁷ Such 'front stage markers' are primarily based on appearance and manners. Goffman says that by using these markers, people easily resort to stereotypes and assumptions based on past experiences or experiences of 'informed' others. The idea then follows that while verbal utterances can be deceptive, non-verbal clues give away the unintended, the ungovernable. During apartheid this 'uncontrollable' resulted in a person's identity being signified in totality by their appearance. Visual inferences were reducible to superficial markers of 'race' (namely skin colour and hair) firstly but then in combination with other factors. South African sociologist Deborah Posel, examining the Population Registration Act of 1950, discusses how all-encompassing these markers of inferiority became in terms of language, education, religion and sexuality.¹⁸ Disjunctures in the performance of race, especially when it came to the problematic 'Coloured' category, called for a set of controlling mechanisms in the form of race tests.¹⁹ With the superficiality of race as a marker for humanness, these tests were based on 'common-sense' information derived by the means of looking. The pencil test, arm test, blue bum test and colour swatches became notorious not so much for the inaccuracy of their testing methodol-

ogy as for the humiliation it subjected people to, thereby asserting power over Others.²⁰ And yet such atrocious acts became grounds whereby visual information could be falsified. Goffman notes though that an individual may "mobilize his activity" to affect impressions of him:

*"this control is achieved largely by influencing the definition of the situation which the others come to formulate [...] Now given the fact that others are likely to check up on the more controllable aspects of behaviour by means of the less controllable, one can expect that sometimes the individual will try to exploit this very possibility, guiding the impression he makes through behaviour felt to be reliably informing."*²¹

In Bhabha's notion of mimicry, the observed becomes the observer.²² Thus mimesis could be a strategy to temporarily escape some of the indictments that accompanied one's racial categorisation. In this 'information game', many ordinary South Africans were able to identify and parody visual markers so as to appear to be something other than what they were classified as. Colonial European ideas of difference were actively perpetuated so as to 'fit into' a racial category that one was deemed not to be. Thus one category of race was traded for another, thereby revealing the arbitrariness of authoritative biological racial categorisation. Coloured persons, who were the chief targets as their 'dubious' physical appearance did not clearly fit in with the established categories of European White, Black native or Asian, also had the most opportunities to move between categories of White, Black and later Indian.²³ The case of Julia Rudolph²⁴ from District Six²⁵ is one such case. Rudolph, who was born into a mixed-race Coloured family, was able to pass for White and married into a White family. Documentary photographer Ernest Cole²⁶ is another well-known misfit. Cole was Black, but was able to get reclassified as Coloured and therefore afforded marginal freedoms of movement and employment, which included not having to carry a dompas.²⁷ Art critic Ivor Powell situates Cole's strategy as relating to traditional African notions of the trickster who, "In order to be the self he perceived himself to be [...] became or presented himself as being what he was not." Most recently, the film *Skin*²⁸ highlighted the case of Sandra Laing,³⁰ a White child born to Afrikaner parents in 1955, whose increasingly dark skin and curly hair as she became a teenager drew the attention of apartheid authorities and became a famous case of classification and reclassification of race³¹ in the 1960s.

In apartheid South Africa the notion of 'passing',³² which is used to describe when a person of colour (usually of mixed race) is light-skinned enough to pass for being white, referred to persons of colour who made attempts to pass as any of the four racial groups. While the strategy of passing seems to denote some level of a personal scheme at attempting to better one's life by escaping one's race classification, in the case of South Africa passing needs to be viewed within the rubric of apartheid and the vari-

ous structural attempts by a White minority to control a black majority through enforced separatist legislature and violence. It is, thus, the bizarreness of a system like apartheid, which *forced* people to perform essentialised racial identities designated for them. The term 'passing' seems to denote an entry—or its refusal—into that which is guarded and defined and implicates positions of power and 'belonging'. Passing, by people of colour, as other 'Other' identities (Black, Coloured, Indian, Asian) should thus be viewed as a strategy of survival to live a 'normal' life under an abnormal system. Thus moments of racial subversion should be seen as specific responses not to one's racial self-identification but to an imposed external condition of race and hierarchy and an attempt to fit in within a segregated landscape dominated by the Group Areas act, the Immorality Act, the Prohibition of Mixed Marriages Act, etc.

In order to subvert identity markers of specific racial groups during apartheid, black subjects had to be aware of what racial stereotypes determined homogenised racial performances, not only in terms of appearance but class and cultural likings, manners, education, religion, language and even bodily gestures. What this implies is that the performer constructs an intimate analysis and understanding of the needs of the audience and then controls that performance in various degrees. In the case of Cole, one can imagine that the performance of being a Coloured was largely for a front-stage audience (White people), while back stage (Black communities) Cole could be whatever he chose to be or perhaps would have to pull off a much more nuanced performance to 'fool' members of the Coloured and Black communities.³³ What then of Julia Rudolph, who had to perform Whiteness all the time in her daily life, disavowing her family to an extent that some members of her family claim she could only be consumed by self-hate to lead such a life of deception—an "infinite cycle of concealment, discovery, false revelation, and rediscovery"?³⁴ Should she be condemned for exploiting a system that relegated her to a lower level of humanity? Though Laing was raised in an Afrikaner household, due to the humiliations she suffered within the White community—after all, it was objections from the self-policing White neighbours and teachers that resulted in her being reported to apartheid authorities—she chose to identify with Black people who 'looked' like her and for whom her racial identity was less problematic.

For many South Africans such 'defensive' practices (Goffman defines 'defensive' practices as the strategies or tactics employed by an individual to protect his or her own projection) meant the ability to have sexual relations and marry whom they wanted, to live with their biological family, lovers and children, to get better education, employment, healthcare and free movement. These were performances necessary to not only live where you wanted and with whom (within restrictions) but as someone—whether

ervation of Separate Amenities Act of 1953, in which all public facilities, transportation, services and premises would be segregated according to races; the Bantu Education Act of 1953 segregated all educational institutions in the country with a sliding scale of finances spent on the four racial groups, with Black education receiving the lowest funding possible for an education that primarily focused on equipping Black students for unskilled manual labour; the Immorality Act of 1927 and its 1950 amendment forbade extramarital sex between White people and people of different races; the Prohibition of Mixed Marriages Act of 1949 prohibited marriage between White people and people of other races; the Group Areas Act of 1950, which divided urban spaces according to racial groups and restricted ownership and residence accordingly. See http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Apartheid_laws.

16 Darren Newbury highlights various cases of racial classification showcased in Drum magazine during the 1950s. See Darren Newbury, *Defiant Images: Photography and Apartheid South Africa* (Pretoria: Unisa Press, 2009), 139–141.

17 See Goffman, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, 13.

18 See Deborah Posel, "What's in a name? Racial categorisations under apartheid and their afterlife", *Transformation*, 47 (2001): 54–65.

19 Apartheid scientists were greatly influenced by Nazi human experimentation based on their white-supremacist ideology.

20 The pencil test referred to a hair-based test in which a pencil was pushed through the 'afro-textured' hair of a person and if it stayed in the hair, a person could be deemed non-white, cites one magistrate for whom skin colour was not as definitive as the 'tell-tale' signs of the colour of the patch of skin on the inside of the arm. See Posel, "What's in a name", 58–59. According to the UK online resource *Film Education* (in their educational material on the film *Skin*), race swatches were tables composed of images of skin types, eyes, teeth and gums. Blue bum tests were conducted on infants as "officials looked for a small patch of pigment on the sacrum, seen most commonly of newborns of Indian descent, which later disappears". <http://www.filmeducation.org/skin/genetics/page12.html>. This blue patch is also known as a Mongolian spot and although it has a high prevalence in persons of colour, it is known to appear in all races.

21 Goffman, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, 15–16, 19.

22 See Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (1994).

23 For a more nuanced discussion on 'loose' racial categorisations prior to 1950s and the idea of race as a 'social standing' and the establishment and definitions of racial categories in the 1950 Population Registration Act, see Posel, "What's in a name", 55.

24 Featured in the TV series *Tales from the Edge: Julia's Secret*, episode six, SABC 3, director: Linda Gumede, producer: Beverly Mitchell.

25 District Six was a mixed residential district in Cape Town established in 1867. Although it had a largely Coloured population, it also housed Black, White and Indian families. In 1966, District Six was declared a White-area under the Group Areas Act (the Immorality Act which did not permit persons of different races to live together, was often used as an excuse to move people from property valuable to White business or too close to White residential areas). From the late 1960s to the early 1980s the inhabitants were forcibly removed, with many Coloured persons relocated to the Cape Flats township. Such forced removals during apartheid occurred throughout South Africa, with Sophiatown in Johannesburg and Cato Manor in Durban being famous examples of cultural hubs and communities being decimated by the laws of the day.

26 Ernest Cole was born in 1940 in Eersterust, Pretoria, with the family name 'Kole', which he converted to 'Cole' in his reclassification. See Gunilla Knappe, "Notes on the Life of Ernest Cole (1940–1990)", in Gunilla Knappe, ed., *Ernest Cole: Photographer* (Göttingen: Hasselblad Foundation and Steidl Publishers, 2010).

27 Black South Africans were required to carry a 'dompas', an identification document that detailed biographical information as well as their employment status and gave them permission to be within city spaces within certain hours. See <http://www.apartheidmuseum.org/sites/default/files/files/downloads/Learners%20book%20Chapter3.pdf>.

28 Ivor Powell, "A Slight Small Youngster with an Enormous Rosary: Ernest Cole's Documentation of Apartheid", in Gunilla Knappe, ed., *Ernest Cole: Photographer* (Göttingen: Hasselblad Foundation and Steidl Publishers, 2010), 39.

29 *Skin* (2008) film, director Anthony Fabian, UK/SA: Elysian Films/Bard Entertainments/Moonlighting Films.

that someone was somebody you were culturally raised as or someone that you adopted rather than someone you were determined to be by a government representative. Such defensive practices, which constantly undermined the 'reliability' of biological tests, gave opportunities for the exploitation of loopholes in the legislation, which resulted in constant 'protective' practices of the apartheid system with various amendments in racial categorisation—it was an amendment to the Population Registration Act stating that if a person's parents were both of a particular racial category then the child was also classified under the same race that allowed Laing to be reclassified as White again, which she subsequently rescinded. The cases of Cole, Rudolph and Laing seem to point at more than just a series of strategic performances but rather importantly are evidence of how everyday performances become an encompassing performativity that 'brings into being'. The everyday performativity of their lives shows that it is not only an internalisation of an externalisation (which could be problematic, as with Rudolph, where she had to eradicate her Coloured history, family and community) but could also serve as a constant marker between differences of the visual (read biological) and the cultural as well as their inter-relatedness. It is also imperative, however, to note Black feminist theorist Sara Ahmed's warnings about celebrating the notion of passing. In her discussion of passing in the American and Australian contexts, Ahmed argues that passing as another race must not be seen as an inherently subversive or transgressive practice.³⁵ Posel has noted that, in the South African context, the fundamentalism of racial categories as outlined in the Population Registration Act was not widely contested by South Africans (and even broader political contestations) as race was "widely normalised and naturalised in the experiences of apartheid subjects".³⁶ This kind of critical project in post-apartheid South Africa will no doubt be an enormous undertaking when one considers how every aspect of South African life has been structured by race since the Dutch and British colonial ventures to the Cape Colony during the 15th century. Moreover, as is evident in contemporary South African society, which is largely still racist, patriarchal and homophobic, passing performances did not result in disruptions to other identity markers such as gender, sexuality and ethnicity.

But what of persons of colour who could *not* pass for another race? While people were indeed forced to live under the laws that governed separation, people also found ways to move within apartheid surveillance, albeit always under the penalty of legal punishment if caught. I would argue that identity performance was an intrinsic component of all aspects of relational interactions under apartheid. Ideas of Black Consciousness, of non-racialism, of multi-racialism, of socialism, of Blackness or blackness, of different tribes and cultural, ethnic and religious affiliations were all activated by various political parties and

struggle movements to get people to identify and unify under a label to fight against apartheid (but also to sustain a sense of self beyond White objectification). I would, however, like to turn attention away from more well-known political enterprises and rather focus again on the micro-level. With the black population serving as a large workforce in cities, performances were the order of the day whether it was people pretending to be another race to harness jobs designated for certain racial groups or educated black people acting 'less smart' in order to get even menial jobs. The role of domestic workers, or 'maids', is particularly interesting as the personal space of the White coloniser almost always included a Black worker.³⁷ Anyone involved in such personal contraband relationships can testify that some level of performance is involved in working within the confines of a racialised, gendered power relation i.e., to be a part of a family and not; to hear and see things and not; to be around things that you will never own; to being silent and an object but 'loved' for the limited performance that you portray; to live and care for a family while only occasionally 'visiting' your own; to raise children who will become your oppressor (one of Ernest Cole's photographs presents a poignant visualisation of this).³⁸ Such ideas of personal-professional performances call into question the normalising of social relationships on a grand scale in revisions both of apartheid narratives and in the continuation of these narratives in post-apartheid South Africa along race-class stratification. The idea that someone in your personal space could have always been performing a role for you and your family is not to be underestimated in its ability to unsettle dominant ideologies of 'knowing' and being able to 'place' a person within certain personal frameworks. It can also be a moment of liberation in understanding one's own economic power over people and the ability of people in service positions to subvert power relations in a limited but significant way with regards to what they chose to share or not about their selves. Thus, performativity in the workplace during apartheid, I would argue, was par for the course and enabled people to negotiate their economic placements as best as they could. While a performer who no longer chooses to perform according to the script can be 'dealt with', an entire cast that seeks to disrupt a performance spells problems for a production. With a black majority internally and an awakened postcolonial world externally, apartheid was always going to be a doomed modernist project.

Post-Performances

Post-apartheid, post-colonial, postmodern South Africa continues to exact identity performances. People actively perform their racial, gender, class, cultural, religious, ethnic and sexual affiliations to find niche representation opportunities, community support, etc. Identities are built on these

constant negotiations and renegotiations in a multicultural context. Goffman supports the idea that personal identities are fluid and respond according to the specificities of particular contexts. Multiculturalist propagators use such instances to call for a concept of non-racial collective identities in South Africa even though such positivist affirmations of identity manipulations are still completely contingent on apartheid racial categorisations. I would argue firstly that the idea of non-racial identities that academics such as Posel argue for, in a climate of very limited historical and economic redress, continue to benefit White South Africans and hide the deep socio-economic inequalities that still exist throughout South African society. Secondly, while I do not agree with any kind of racial essentialism, the problem of race is not simply a South African one. Race is a feature across the world as a marker of colonial histories and urbanisation. One only has to browse the internet to see how this democratic platform simmers with racial hatred and slander. A pretence of not being primarily defined by race and gender again predominantly benefits White men and women across the globe, who occupy normative, invisible positions. Posel presents the argument for racial self-identification and a limited address of the resultant problems. Racial renegotiation in South Africa would only seem to work on the premises of people of colour identifying with 'blackness' (read 'non-white') as a level of political consciousness and ideology or with all South African identifying as 'African' (I cannot see how Whiteness can be ascribed unless through a lifestyle long-ing). We would all seem to benefit from understanding and ascribing such positions, but let us not forget how easily it has been for many well-meaning White people to speak for and on behalf of Others because they 'understand'. Thus instead of decentralising discourses and including the range of participants there are in Africanist and black discourses, a largely White Westernised hegemonic discourse continues to speak for the subaltern, perpetuating generic discussions on difference.³⁹ By flippantly using the terms 'blackness' and 'Africanness', we also deny the affects of apartheid.

It is not unusual to be in academic settings and hear about conditions of global movement as Third World⁴⁰ subjects infiltrate the spaces of their previous colonisers. But what about the all too dominant township spaces in South Africa where Indian, Coloured and Black people are still not exposed to White people unless at work (this includes tourists) or social spaces of entertainment—this becomes even more glaring in rural communities? Or how such spaces also breed ethnic tensions between South Africans and African and Asian migrants (who themselves harbour home-grown ethnic divisions)? Theorists such as Frantz Fanon, bell hooks and Grada Kilomba have been extensively concerned about the internalisation of one's Other status and the impact that has on one's subjectivity. It is indeed a sad truth that one sees such internationali-

30 Sandra Laing was born in 1955 in Piet Retief, Transvaal, South Africa. Although both Laing's parents were White Afrikaners, Laing was born with notably darker skin and curly hair, which became the subject of attention when she turned ten years old and was sent to an all-White boarding school. Following complaints from teachers and parents, Laing was expelled from school. Laing was subjected to different racial tests and was reclassified Coloured. An amendment to the Population Registration Act in 1967, which stated that the child of two White parents must be White, allowed her to be reclassified White. At the age of 15, Laing ran away from home and married Swazi Petrus Zwane, with whom she had two children. Her family disowned her, although she had fleeting contact with her mother. In early 2000s, she re-established contact with her mother shortly before her death. See <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/fe-mail/article-1093674/The-tragic-story-white-girl-born-black-tore-family-apart.html>

31 This essay does not deal with instances of White subjects passing for persons of colour except in the case of Laing, as this opens up a much larger terrain of passing which cannot be dealt with sufficiently in this essay.

32 Sara Ahmed discusses the visibility of 'passing', where external visual information of skin colour becomes the main signifier of difference and desire (her frames of reference are specifically the US and Australian settings). Ahmed acknowledges discourses on passing as a process of destabilisation but argues that, paradoxically, existing power relations are also secured via this same process, that differences are re-enunciated and recuperated within power structures. Like Posel's arguments as well, Ahmed notes that passing always involves an assumption of an economy of difference under which a subject is identified (thus moving from one set of assumptions to another). Importantly, while I agree with Ahmed's reading of the notion of passing and wariness of attributing a level of voluntary transgressiveness to it and over-estimating its potential for ruptures, passing strategies during apartheid contradict her statement that "Passing is not identifiable as a discrete practice that has discernible political effects". See Sara Ahmed, "She'll Wake Up One of These Days and Find She's Turned into a Nigger", in Vikki Bell, ed., *Performativity and Belonging: Passing through Hybridity* (London: Sage Publications, 1999), 93. I read her critique primarily in the context of a White majority society, where there are more 'benefits' to passing as white by black or mixed race subjects (although this is usually cloaked in the fear and danger of being caught out). This essay proposes, in fact, that passing in apartheid South Africa was used as a personal political manoeuvre against the larger politics of the day (Nelson Mandela used to pose as a gardener on the Rivonia Farm, which was situated in a White area in Johannesburg, and used such means to evade capture many times). The idea of passing in post-apartheid South Africa takes on many different dimensions in a black-majority country, where to be White still has much socio-economic privilege, but where there is simultaneously a system of political, social and economic redress that is instituted at political levels. Thus being identified as part of the 'previously disadvantaged' groups under apartheid could now be used to gain opportunities one never had access to previously. For instance, the South African High Court ruled in 2008 that Chinese South Africans could be classified as 'Black' and therefore qualify for the same economic privileges of redress marked for 'previously disadvantaged' groups. See <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/7461099.stm>. But this again returns us to Posel's debate over racial categorisations still being entrenched in contemporary South Africa and a seemingly endless quagmire of racial identity.

33 Testimonies from Cole's family members claimed that he became much more introverted/secretive during this time and this may have been due to the photographic work he was doing on the *House of Bondage* or could also be indicative of the psychological elements of this kind of masquerading. See Knappe, "Notes on the Life of Ernest Cole", (2010).

34 Goffman, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, 20.

35 See Ahmed, "She'll Wake Up One of These Days and Find She's Turned into a Nigger", 87–106.

36 Posel, "What's in a name?", 62.

37 This essay does not address conditions of domestic workers or such informal employment between the races and in post-apartheid South Africa as it draws in many different dimensions of gendered racialised work structured along class lines, which cannot be dealt with sufficiently in this short discussion.

38 "Servants are not forbidden to love. Woman holding child said, 'I love this child, though she'll grow up to treat me just like her mother does. Now she is innocent.'" Photography showing a Black nanny hugging a White child in Cole's *House of Bondage* (1967), reproduced in Knappe, ed., *Ernest Cole, Photographer* (2010).

sations of race being performed through contemporary race hatred primarily directed at Other Black Africans under the guise of xenophobia⁴¹ and nationalism—who does and does not belong in this new nation state at the tip of Africa. It is seen in the kinds of extreme violence we experience every day in South Africa and the strong need to cling to the kinds of stereotypes and stigmas that have articulated racial categorisation and have been further fractionalised by ethnic divisions. As a society, we see it played out daily in the kinds of inter-black racism that exists between Coloured-Black-Indian-Chinese groups, as straight hair, fair skin and a lighter eye colour are all prized props. It is evidenced in the mistrust that continues between English and Afrikaner White communities, between the rich and poor. The psychological devastation enacted on *all subjects* in South Africa through racism still needs to be understood on a national, collective scale and how that filters down to the personal. Thus, while non-racialism indeed sounds like an ideal that everyone would like to see realised soon, colonial scripting of difference can be interestingly interrogated not just for post-apartheid South Africa, but for a postcolonial world stage.

This is where the notion of performativity has opened up different kinds of plays with the matrices of gender, sexuality, class and race in niche areas such as the arts. Goffman finds that all social groups have genres which seem to fixate on disruptions: "There seems to be no grouping which does not have a ready supply of these games, reveries, and cautionary tales, to be used as a source of humour, a catharsis for anxieties, and a sanction for inducing individuals to be more modest in their claims and reasonable in their projected expectations."⁴² With such a diverse society, South Africa has a long history where performance has played an important role. From the learning mechanisms of the San and Khoi communities to the religious story-telling festivals of Hindu culture, the initiation ceremonies of various Black cultures and slave carnivals morphing into the Cape Coon festival, learning, knowledge-sharing and alternative epistemologies are to be found through orality and performance. Performance, in the fields of film and theatre, has actively harnessed the farce of racial constructions allowing South Africans to laugh at their pathology (think of Joe Mafela, Leon Schuster, Evita Bezuidenhout, Mark Lottering, the Essop Khan and Mohammed Ali duo and more recently stand-up comedians Riaad Moosa and Trevor Noah). As apartheid-scripted boundaries began to break down in the early 1990s, the de/regulated body became the site of relentless interrogation. Perhaps seeming like a level of sadism or extroversion, the racialised, gendered body became implicated on site/sight. Hidden, repressed, stereotyped, inscribed on, the visual arts field provided an infinitely open platform to employ whatever strategies were necessary to deconstruct the body. Along with traditional media, visual artists have employed live performance, video and pho-

tographic multimedia technologies in public and gallery spaces to contest visual, cultural and linguistic markers of identity and capture the immediacy of the body in motion. Notorious among these artists using excessive performance as strategies are Stephen Cohen, who has contested White male masculinity and homophobia through his flamboyant controversial objectifying performances; Minnette Vári's morphing spliced, androgynous, multiplying, devouring body which questions notions of history, landscape and belonging; Berni Searle's photographic and video work, which poignantly evidenced the fallacy that is the term 'Coloured'; Tracey Rose's masquerades, which have interrogated gendered racism actively playing out racial stereotypes, and Nicholas Hlobo's anthropomorphic public performances, which draw attention to gayness in the Xhosa culture.

There have been insistent calls (from South Africans and also internationally) for South African artists to 'get over' their identity fixation and find more interesting issues to deal with. Moreover it cannot be denied that some artists strategically foreground essentialist aspects of identity as cultural and economic capital to further their artistic careers and that the international contemporary art world has been rather obliging in exhibiting our neuroses for the world stage (as well as disparaging colonial native tropes),⁴³ often to the detriment of other art genres that are not so overt. However, I continue to believe that South African performance art, in its interrogation of the parasitic reach of apartheid in all aspects of our identity constructions and social relations, can offer invaluable critiques of difference and multiculturalism from the point of view of post-colonial subjects at a time when the Western landscape is seeing a distinct suppression of Other viewpoints. The exhibition *Altering Conditions* takes as its focal point of departure the position of the Other and exposes the extent to which the body in performance has become a major nuanced strategy in South African visual arts in deconstructing the totalising project of apartheid.

The transparency and power of language is contested and continuously disrupted in a number of works in *Altering Conditions*. Dineo Bopape's *Swear Piece* (2005/2011) continues this idea of a performance of excess where 'vulgar' language is used to swear at a range of unknown characters. Everyone—and no-one—seems to be the target of Bopape's torrent of abuse and its excessiveness ceases to have any meaning or force, its repetition rendering the profanity useless. Her abuse therefore lacks the goal of wounding and becomes an on-going spectacle of initial shock and amusement and then of boredom. Bopape seems to articulate the kinds of inner dialogues we can never confess to having. Thando Mama's *Mindspace* (2004), too, seems to be one of an inner aggression given expression, a constant state of unabated anger and questioning. Or is it rather the depiction of the unrestrained, expressive Black male body language that makes us resort

to stereotypes of feeling threatened, frightened, confronted? One feels reassured of one's safety through the gaze, the language ascribed to the Black body emasculated at a safe distance via the video lens. Reshma Chhibba's *Untitled* (2003), which situates two women communicating an unknown text (one through Bharatanatyam and the other with sign language), results in a literal visualisation of language where the normative status of verbal communication and language is undermined. One-to-one sign/signifier/signified relationships become endlessly ungraspable for those who are normally in a dominant position of articulation. Invisible and culturally specific languages occupy a central position of knowing, of holding information and dispensing it in a manner understood to their informants-in-the-know.

The display of bodies—sites of the sacred and the abhorred—are shown to be active sites of history, politics, economics, ownership, destruction and reclamation. Even the silent body has much to say, to reveal, to confess. Steven Cohen's *Cleaning Time [Vienna]* (2007) public performance implicates history through his South African Jewish body in a space of humiliation demanding that history is ever present and cannot succumb to forgetfulness, the risk of which is imprisonment and death. Nomusa Makhubu's *Self Portrait project* (2007) interrogates notions of history through a performance of forcefully inserted bodily mimicry that seeks to mock the disjuncture between projection, textbook history and ancestry shown to not quite-fit, its violent contemporaneity uncomfortable in the rendition. In *Thlogo* (2010), Lerato Shadi's body is bound by an imaginary space she creates. The woollen cocoon need not hold her, and yet she subjects her movements to its claustrophobic confines, the immense pressure sustained on the body through these performances rendering it as an object to be bent at will. The time-consuming creation of the woollen cocoon seems to hint at the self defining a physical and mental space for Shadi, but is it a space of her self-imprisonment or is it a place of safety, an inner untouchable inner sanctuary? Gabrielle Goliath's *EKKE* (2007) seems to question senses of self through a 'not-quite-being', a constant Other portrayal of her Coloured self under the post-colonial gaze and self gaze, an identity deferred. Her *Stumbling Block* (2011) performance, much like Shadi's *Thlogo*, performs the invisible, the unseen, the-always-there in self and society. It raises question of belonging even in the context of the white gallery space and art-world. Likewise, Jessica Gregory and Zen Marie's *The Perfect Leader* (2009), a retake on the 1960s film *The Perfect Human*, deconstructs the idea of what it is to be a human, questioning the performance and farce of authority and rendering it less impressive in the observance of everyday body language and humanness. In its almost childhood Dick-and-Jane instructional analysis (implicating the White colonial educational underpinnings), the authority of beliefs engrained at a young age becomes visible, the

39 I have also previously argued that some prominent Western-born and educated persons of colour have also contributed to superficial discourses on Africa due to occupying mediating positions of power in the visual arts field. See: Sharlene Khan, "Gatekeeping Africa: KuratorInnenschaft, Supermarktmentalität und Selbstrepräsentation", *Springerin* (1/2009). See also Khwezi Gule, "Mut und Vorstellungskraft. Über Wissensproduktion, Kapitalismus und die Problematik 'afrikanischer Kunst'", *Springerin* (1/2009). See also Sharlene Khan, "But What's All Dis Here Talkin 'Bout?", *Artthrob*, March 2011, <http://www.artthrob.co.za/Reviews/But-Whats-All-Dis-Here-Talking-About.aspx>.

40 The concept of the Third World is said to have emerged after 1945 as political terminology in discussing decolonised territories, as well as territories that were 'under-developed' and lagging behind the 'First World' free developed nations (democratic nations) and the 'Second World' countries (the Soviet Bloc). At the 1955 Bandung conference in Indonesia, twenty-nine countries participated in representing a Non-Aligned movement between these two polemics. After the demise of the Communist Soviet Bloc—and hence the Second World—the ideologies of the First and Third World continue and have become infused with socio-economic ideas of developed and developing nations. While the term 'Third World' is generalising and sometimes arbitrary, it has also been mobilised by Third World proponents to continue to highlight the vast economic disparities globally. The term is attributed to French demographer, anthropologist and historian Alfred Sauvy, who used it in 1952 as an analogy to the "third estate" (commoners in France) to define the "poor and populous areas of the world". See Arturo Escobar, *Encountering Development. The Making and the Unmaking of the Third World* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1995), 230.

41 In May 2008, xenophobic attacks against poorer traders from other parts of Africa by Black South Africans in various townships in Johannesburg, Cape Town and Durban (as well as other parts of South Africa) appalled local South Africans and the international community. Approximately 41 foreign African immigrants were killed during this time. While such attacks were decried as opportunistic crimes among informal traders jostling for customers in townships, many others were involved who distinctly hated the presence of African migrants in South Africa, claiming that they took away lower-paying jobs by working for even lower wages, that they were getting access to housing that South African squatters were waiting a long time for, that African men were 'stealing' and marrying Black South African women, etc. Resurgences of such xenophobic attacks continue today, although police and community leaders are reacting faster to such situations.

42 Goffman, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, 25.

43 The *Africa Village* exhibition concept, created by Makhaya Art and Cultural Development, has showcased events in Central and Eastern Europe since 2009. The *South Africa Meeting Point* exhibition, curated by Bongani Mkhonza, featured 15 contemporary South African artists as part of this 2011–2012 'Africa village' sideshow which has already travelled to Vienna and Belgrade in 2011 and is due to show in Moscow in 2012. The exhibition featured prominent artists such as Sam Nhlengethwa, Mary Sibande, Lawrence Lemaoana, Mbongeni Buthelezi and Kudzanai Chiurai, some of whom participated unwittingly in this exotic trope. Certain artists expressed their disgust at being included in such an uncritical spectacle, in which South Africa—and particularly Johannesburg—is sold as representative of an African village. <http://www.africavillage.eu/about-africa-village>.

naïve manner in which we as adults place value upon individuals to run our lives and societies. By situating a Black body as the central character, Gregory and Marie also interrogate post-colonial leadership in the 21st century.

Identity in these wide-ranging performances seems to be a constant negotiation of the affects of race-gender-sexuality-class matrices—always not quite, always something else, always ‘becoming’. ‘Becoming’ seems to be an ever-future preoccupation. It talks about a constant state of making, moulding and reshaping without necessarily attaining the possibility of having ‘become’. The title *Alternating Conditions* seems to hint at this ‘state of being’ that is in flux. A being that is conditional, subject to modification, redoing, remaking, refashioning, revision, reworking. It indicates a state that is not permanent but can be altered at will, an on-going process that is conditional to contexts and times. These works challenge us to be wary of securing a ‘become’ state where potential rather lies in being an undone, unfinished project.

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