

"Not Just Another Biennale?"

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by Susan Glanville-Zini (CEO of Cape Africa Platform) and Julian Jonker (Coordinator of Sessions Ekapa), in conversation with Mario Pissarra

The Cape Africa Platform promises to deliver a mega-event that will be “not just another biennale”. The first major element in their plan is a conference, Sessions Ekapa, which takes place in Cape Town from 6-8 December 2005. The conference theme is “(re)locating contemporary African art” and will be followed with a multi-disciplinary “Manifestation” in 2006.

Mario Pissarra: In terms of my own analysis of what’s happening in the South African art world I think what you are doing is really important because I feel that there’s a fixation on being South African on one hand, and there’s a sense of liberation that came with the lifting of cultural boycott and the new democratic dispensation, and the sense of being part of the international community, but it appears that somehow the rest of continent didn’t fit into that equation for most people, so in that sense I’m really excited about what you’re doing. I also think it’s usually quite difficult to get people to discuss these issues and you’ve obviously been very successful in bringing resources together for that so from that point of view it’s very critical that it is successful. But I think what will emerge from some of my questions are concerns about the detail, and whether you’ve gone about it the right way. So I want you to understand that if it’s critical from that perspective, at the end of the day I really do hope we’re on the same page.

Julian Jonker: Sure.

MP: We had the Johannesburg Biennale which was either the worst thing that happened to South African art or the best thing depending on who you speak to. What were the key lessons of the Johannesburg Biennale and how have they shaped Cape Africa?

Susan Glanville-Zini: Basically you have to bear in mind there were two Johannesburg Biennales and they were very different. The first ‘95 Biennale where I was part of the initial build up which was where the forty international curators came and traveled around the country, but I didn’t stay for the full duration, was on one level much more local in its frame of reference. It was more successful in terms of its training program with the young curators, people like Clive Kellner, Thumelo Mosaka, Thomas Mulcaire, all those names actually came out of that training program. It was an interesting model. Maybe as an exhibition one might want to look critically at what the product was. There definitely was a great deal of friction within the arts community regarding issues of representation and who gets to choose. I was part of meetings where there were forty people sitting in a room in the Johannesburg Civic Centre trying to come to an agreement and I think perhaps the lesson that came out of that particular experience is that too many voices it’s very difficult to

come to a consensus. [The idea that everybody in the visual arts community can] sit around the table and actually organize a mega exhibition, is an unrealistic expectation, and a great deal of energy was spent trying to accommodate that. If you look globally I think there are processes that are required, there's a need to be transparent, to accommodate views of the art community, but the kind of demands and requirements that the art community were [making]... and the voices that were coming to the fore were very aggressive and quite counter-productive. I think ten years down the line I hope we've gone through a learning curve that has made us more mature and realize that actually a mega exhibition is not a be-all and end-all of everything and the arts community itself, and finally something like VANSAs [the Visual Arts Network of South Africa] comes to the fore, needs to organize itself through other structures. I think the Biennale became the focus for a whole lot of stuff during '95 and what happened then in '97, again the appointment of Okwui Enwezor was very late. The exhibition opened 12th October '97, the appointment of Okwui was very late in '96, and Clive Kellner and myself came on board in January. A major lesson of '97 was the fact that we need to engage the local context, we need to engage local audiences and I think that was something that wasn't properly taken through from '95, the whole issue of who attends, who is being addressed. I think there was a lot of double counting in '95. I think the numbers were estimated at about 55 000 in terms of attendance, but if you look at the multiple venues there was a lot of double counting. By '97 that type of thing need[ed to have been] addressed. The so-called outreach program of the '95 Biennale as well, could have been rethought. In fact, all of those things were even less successful in '97... Okwui was brought on board, there was a very short run in period and he put together an international curatorial team. The only South African on that team was Colin Richards, and they put together a very exciting exhibition. It engaged with Cape Town, there were two exhibitions in Cape Town but it failed to engage with local content, it failed to engage local issues and it left the local arts community, never mind the broader audience, totally alienated. And I think that was enough of an excuse, it gave politicians who didn't [support the visual arts] or had a problem with spending that kind of money on a large scale exhibition enough of an excuse to make sure it never happened again.

MP: I think it's important that you were involved in both of the Johannesburg Biennales, and the distinction between them is important because people fudge them when in fact they were two very different shows. One of the differences was also that the first one was a more conservative biennale format with national platforms whereas Okwui did away with that...

SGZ: A fabulous exhibition, it really was. I was proud to be part of it on one level, but very aware of the empty exhibition halls two weeks after the show [opened].MP: I would imagine with the first Johannesburg Biennale that leaving the content of the show to different groupings from specific countries does bring in that uneven element which I suspect might be partly behind what you say that the quality might not always have been up there. But on another hand it would appear to me that it was a necessary process in the need to engage people in those countries and to start building a relationship with those countries so in that sense I detect some, not continuity in a totally linear sense, but you've spoken about what the Manifestation

that's happening next year having an emphasis on the Southern African Development Community (SADC) countries. So I'm seeing it as picking up on that thinking again that we need to locate... you talk about the context, you're talking about not only what's happening specifically in Cape Town but more broadly on the continent specifically SADC. But when I look at the program I do get confused because I see a lot of slippage between on one hand statements about SADC and then a program that seems to be about Africa in general and I struggle to identify the SADC content. I see Fernando Alvim who I don't know if he spends more time in Brussels or Luanda, I don't know. I'm not picking on him, but what I saying is that I don't see the SADC content and I just wonder if this is something you struggled with... how do you address that kind of slippage that's there?

JJ: Two things I think at this stage... the Sessions conference and Manifestation are very closely tied, they're part of the same cycle but they are still different events. So if we're polling opinion why there're few [speakers] from SADC I don't think that's a problem [when you have a forthcoming] exhibition which will concentrate on SADC. With sessions the idea is to really get the exhibition format and some of the issues that arise in developing the exhibition, [and] to work through some of those. Because we don't necessarily want to work with SADC only for the conference. The other issue about that is that the SADC focus has actually been problematic for us. We were in two minds whether to have a SADC focus for the Manifestation next year or to have a general African focus and part of that was a question about what does regionalism mean in Africa today. Into what kind of political terrain were we playing by adopting ideas like Southern Africa or the Southern African Development Community. I think it came about purely for the exhibition, it came about by focusing, it came about for purely practical purposes. We thought it might be more conducive to concentrate on a localized or regionalized area to start with.

SGZ: Really I think one of the biggest challenges is to build networks and contacts within the African framework. The bottom line is people are very uncertain and unaware of what's going on just over our borders, let alone higher up in Africa. The idea was we're going to go through a phased development as a project over three cycles with the major Manifestation happening in 2010. In a way it was practical limiting our objective to say "okay, lets focus on the region initially. Let's try and build our understanding and networks within the region and then expand outwards". With Sessions I think we haven't been entirely successful in terms of bringing delegates, not necessarily in terms of participation on the various panels, but in terms of actually bringing people from the region to participate. That's actually where I think the session on networking, I hope [it] will give us some better insights into how do we build networks...

JJ: There has been a fair amount of African interest continentally in terms of attending the sessions and often there's a problem where people want to come but can't afford the flight. But there's a lot of interest generally. But that seems to be less so in terms of southern Africa. There's been a lot of interest from, from, [but] the southern African region has been slow and think part of it is our publicity- there's been a very short run up to Sessions, and it's been difficult to get publicity in our own country, let alone further abroad.

MP: I think where I would be a little worried with what I'm hearing is that I think by and large the African debate is dominated by Africans in the diaspora. I'm not trying to create an 'us and them', because I see the diaspora as part of an inclusive Africa, but I think there are very real problems in the sense that a person who is living and working in New York is faced with very different challenges to someone making art in Rwanda. In that sense I also wonder about... I hear you when you say that they're two different things, they're part of the same program ultimately but they have a different emphasis but I would think that in order to try and go beyond just having art from those countries in the Manifestation and to actually build those relationships... the way I see things is really that the main challenge facing art in Africa is the building of cultural infrastructure because most countries have got very little in place and East Africa for instance is largely at the mercy of the market and that has consequences in terms of the kind of art that is being made. It's very easy to turn ones nose up at that but I think it's more challenging to look at that stuff more critically and begin to unpack why they're making art in the way they're doing it. What are dominant trends there? So I think I hear you about the difficulties because certainly I'm not going to pretend that I have a phone book full of contacts but there are people here who have those contacts

SGZ: We approached some of those people to assist us and we were not very successful in acquiring that. I don't think we need to get into that in the interview. I'm just saying it was something we tried to acquire and there wasn't a great deal of generosity in terms of established projects who've actually been running residency programs and what have you, to share those kind of contacts, [who responded positively to requests to recommend who we should] make contact with. I was quite disappointed by that

MP: I get your reluctance to name people but I'm not sure we're talking the same people, so I am going to name. For me the thing that's peculiar in a sense is that there is quite a major SADC exchange happening at exactly same time as conference. There are at least nine artists from five SADC countries who will be in Cape Town participating in the international Thupelo workshop and that's basically nine out of twenty-eight participants which... I would expect to see them on the Cape Africa platform, so that was something I thought was interesting because if you look at what Thupelo are doing, [as part of the whole Triangle Network] the workshop is billed as an international event. They haven't specifically billed it as an African thing, but it has taken in that African emphasis so much that there's two Americans, the rest of the people are from the continent, all from southern Africa. I find that interesting because for me it's a question of what is "international" when we talk as South Africans. What is our view of what is international and I think where I have concerns with your program is that when I look specifically at the South African artists you have they are almost without exception people who have basically established their profiles "internationally," in the conservative western sense of the term. So I would argue that you are actually validating that other international model. I mean if I can refer to Kendell Geers for example, he says that there are two kinds of South African artists: those with international careers, and those without. Now when he says "international," I don't think he means Lionel Davis who has work in the National Gallery of Zimbabwe, in the National Gallery of Botswana; or Tyrone

Appollis who has work in the National Gallery of Namibia. I don't think those people are part of his frame, maybe I'm wrong. But it seems to me that you, maybe not deliberately, are actually not really validating an international perspective that is African-centered. Because I don't know for example how somebody who is successful in New York, how they're going to help me build links with Maputo. And I worry about that emphasis because in that sense I see a very traditional approach to the conference with the traditional indicators of who are the successful people that we have something to learn from. Now I'm sure they have a lot to teach us when it comes to "I want a career in," and I don't mean to undermine them in that, because I wish them all the best with that. But if we're trying to change the way we view things and actually validate Africa then surely we need to look for people who are working in Africa.

JJ: I think it's a very valid point. I should talk a bit about the process about how the program was developed because I think that's important I think that you're absolutely correct in the things you point out and I hope it's something that we can address in the future, I say that quite genuinely. The program was developed by bringing together various people from throughout Cape Town from various forums and various disciplines. We called them our Task Team and over the past three months we started meeting and having discussions about what are the issues that we need to discuss at the conference, and who do we need to bring together to discuss those issues. It's quite difficult to understand exactly how the program shaped up the way it did but it shaped up through a process of consensus amongst these people. I don't know if you want to know who...

MP: I am aware of the task team.

JJ: So I think for us it's probably interesting that it's an issue of our process rather than of our intention. Here I speak as much for myself as for the organization, I actually think that I expect Sessions Ekapa and Cape more generally [to be] an open platform and that it will grow and develop and eventually find the right direction for itself. I think we've really rushed the process in coming up with the program. Now again I can speak personally, I think there's a lot of this, I think this is something everyone experiences, I experience it myself a lot when somebody is mentioned who is very successful internationally, both in the continent and elsewhere, there's a kind of an "ooh, he would be really interesting," "she would be really interesting" and often I've found in this process of selecting there's been a lot less reasoned thinking why exactly is that person really going to bring that amount of knowledge, so I think I concede.

SGZ: I would agree with you and I think that process of discussion is useful but one loses one's objectivity. But I'm not totally unhappy [with the outcome].

JJ: I'm not criticising any of the members of the team or even the process entirely. I just think that given longer time and given more in depth discussion we might have quite a different program.

SGZ: We had this thing where we drew up a delegates' dossier, a list of names, resources that one is drawing on. One is more familiar with certain individuals and what they will bring, they're known quantities, like Kendell you mentioned. Perhaps the difficulty is to find those other people out there that we don't really know.

JJ: Or who are known to whom...

SGZ: Exactly. What I'm saying is what one really wants [is] people, and this is with a view to the future, it's part of a learning curve, one would supplement what I think was a very competent task team with other with people with more knowledge and I think that was a shortfall of the process. There are few people with more grasp... we landed up with a program were one critical element we have to say who are the people who really know

MP: I actually wanted to talk about the task team.

JJ: Is that off the record?

MP: No, I want to say on the record. I understand the process that you've taken and that you've wanted more people to own it, and in a sense you've initiated, you've facilitated, you've allowed other people when it comes to practicalities to direct, to choose speakers etc. I understand the process, there is a dialogue there at least with more people, and I respect that. But again my question is, did you choose people who were qualified for this even? Because I see people, there are some exceptions, but on the whole I see the usual suspects. I see the people who are on any conference, any art event. I mean for instance you have a partnership with VANSAs... if you look at the latest articles that are published in *Artthrob* in anticipation of the VANSAs conference which I understand you raised money for, they didn't do it themselves but maybe that's a separate debate, I see a lot of issues that are relevant. I see issues around transformation, I see issues around race, I see issues around education, social development... but the word "Africa" does not appear anywhere, which to my mind is an indication of how that discourse is not an African centered discourse. It's not a view of transformation that recognizes the need to prioritise engagement with Africa. There's four people writing [including two members of the Task Team] and none of them mention Africa, so that's a concern. Now I'm not arguing against those peoples' competence for your usual South African art event. But if we're trying to change the goalposts then I worry because then I say how if we have ignored this field [Africa] how then can we put the same players there and expect the field to change? Not that they don't have expertise and can't be tapped. So that's a concern I have, and it goes into who do those people choose to talk. Because if we come to looking specifically at the question of contemporary African art as far as I'm aware there are only four people in this town who have made any progress teaching, researching writing in this field and I include myself in that. Most of us, not that we're an association, have been doing this since the late '80s. I don't see any of those names either in the task team or on the conference, but I see someone who teaches contemporary art that excludes Africa on the panel, and I get really confused because I think how then are we are going to change the debate? Why aren't the people who are teaching in this area, who are known, some of whom

I believe were consulted way back when but haven't been included in a critical capacity in the sense of helping identify speakers or in some cases maybe being the speakers themselves. So that's a concern I have again. I like what you're saying from the point of view that this is a learning process. I accept that for all of us involved we're trying to shift the way we're looking at things and yet all of us will make mistakes in that process, but to me there's just some obvious candidates that just got left out. From that point of view, I just have to wonder what was your criteria in selecting your task team? Did you say we need a special set of people, or who are the people?

SGZ: I think for someone like Emma Bedford, because of her work she's traveled extensively and been exposed to a very broad international frame, to Dakar, to Venice etc. She's brought in a very valuable overview of both the global and the national framework. She's also been a voice of reason at times that we've needed... Someone like Zayd [Minty] has engaged with Cape quite critically right from very early days and I think that his engagement has been valued. I think he brings a very local and very Cape Town based interest plus a broad view of contemporary South African art, Mustafa [Maluka] because the Cape project is looking to be, and I think that's another area where we're not entirely happy with the programme, being multidisciplinary. We're looking to open up this contemporary African notion from a visual arts base. Somebody like Mustafa, both in terms of his youth and in terms of his multi-media approach, we thought he would bring a very fresh perspective. Somebody like Ntone [Edjabe], who unfortunately was away for the early part and perhaps that was one of the disappointments- he was away then ill, we felt would bring a broader view of the continent and that's why that team was selected. And then Mirjam [Asmal-Dik] and myself, and Mokena [Makeka] really sat on the periphery of that process with Julian as the driving force to really look for Capes interest and make sure things didn't go too far off. And if we look where we started with the programme and how it shaped I think that conceptually the way that sessions developed... the way that where we started from and where we got to, I still think that I'm very happy. I think I take some of your criticism but I say that in terms of Sessions 4 around networking what we're trying to do [is that we're] almost defining our playing fields on day one. It may be obvious, some of the names and the people, but our objectives were to really look at mega-mega exhibitions and what are the things that we're dealing with here. Let's look at this whole issue of contemporary African art. I mean I'm hearing you asking where are some of the people that we could have involved. I don't know why the task team didn't recommend them. I may be at a disadvantage because I'm not a Capetonian. I'd really like you to name the names that you feel are missing because then we can address that more directly.

MP: I can name names... Sandra Klopper is the obvious person. She's started critically engaging with how is Africa represented in the west etc, she's been doing this since the '80s and has gone into contemporary culture...

SGZ: She was away...

MP: But I also know that she was consulted quite early on...

SGZ: Sandra was also invited to the focus group and she was away.

MP: Lize van Robbroeck is one of the people that's making connections between, for example, what happened in Polly Street with what happened in other African countries with other expatriates in the teaching of modern African art. I must be one of the few people on the continent who has actually taught a course in modern African art, and I've taught African art since the late '80s. Liese van der Watt has been teaching since the '90s... on one hand it's uncomfortable naming people because it's like "why is so-and-so not on the panel?" But for me the issue is there are very few people who have really swum against the dominant tide in terms of saying "let's put Africa in the curriculum." There will be people who will say there hasn't been enough progress, universities haven't moved fast enough etc. But there is a degree of expertise there, and at least some of that voice you would expect to see. What I've heard from talking to people as well is that there is a sense that, and I'm not going to go into the details, but I'll give you the impression that very personal petty politics have come in as to whom has been excluded. Sometimes it's institutional politics, sometimes it's been personal. I think I'm reluctant to go into that but some people will know what I'm talking about.

SGZ: I think it's important to list the names you've mentioned or have been mentioned in the course of discussions who are in the delegates dossier. I mean both Liese van der watt and Sandra were part of the initial discussion last year and then we had a bit of a financial wobble and then they were both invited to the focus group on the 6th of August, and Jools I think you've kept those people updated as to the progress and development of the programme. So there was also the opportunity for those people to input and make suggestions.

JJ: Ja we have kept them [informed]. It hasn't been as intensive as if they'd actually been involved in the Task Team so perhaps that's regrettable. But my thinking about the Task Team, and for me this is an interesting issue, I'm interested in the issues which you've raised and genuinely trying to think about how one goes ahead with that... when I came on board the Cape project I saw it as a very good opportunity to connect Cape Town and Africa with the emphasis actually being on Cape Town, because here's an opportunity to create a large scale art event which happens in Cape Town. Sure the focus or the perspective is on Africa, but it's really about being rooted in Cape Town. So I was quite excited about the Task Team which was selected at about the same time that I was appointed to the organisation, because these are all interesting Cape Town voices. They're all interesting people in terms of their perspective on Cape Town as a city, as a growing city, as an existing and as a potential cultural hub. I think thinking about the make-up of the Task Team becomes quite interesting from that perspective. I don't deny the fact that there might be some voices [excluded] and I don't know at this stage how to accommodate that.

SGZ: It may be a controversial point but I think it's a point that needs to be made because it's come up quite a lot in the last two weeks. It's around how one engages with a project and how proactive one can be, and also that our door has really always been open for engagement. We're here and we have actually circulated, there has been the opportunity for people to say "hey, we'd like to be involved" or

“you’ve missed this out”, or whatever. There’s never been that kind of closed door and I think in terms of engaging with Capetonians and nationally, I think that’s the point that needs to be made. We’re not a kind of monolithic structure that’s not open to engagement or to criticism or to comment, and that doors been open. Instead of like now, we’re a week before the sessions... but I mean this conversation could have happened months ago and it would have been great.

JJ: I think we’ve done quite well in quite a short space of time. People regard us as being a huge project with constant resources, and to some extent we are relatively well resourced. But from another perspective I think we sometimes feel that we’re two people sitting in an office, sometimes three or four [people], and we have an overall goal of what we’re trying to do and would appreciate help and suggestions. The petty politics of the art-world... as an outsider to the art-world, because that’s my engagement to the project is as someone excited about the opportunity for Cape Town. I find those petty politics quite disabling and I don’t fully understand them yet.

MP: You see I think you said a very interesting thing Julian, about how what excited you is the Cape Town aspect of it. Because I think what would be interesting, and I’m not necessarily going to ask you to go into this now but when you unpack it, how would you assess if this has been a success? What are your indicators? If you haven’t done it already that would make it really clear how people are going to come at your project from very different expectations. I think for instance that for many people the issue is how do we make an event here of a world class standard? That’s the issue. How we make this place more exciting to be? Which objectively isn’t necessarily a problem, but where it’s a problem from my perspective is does it shift that world view? Does it actually do anything to address the fact that all we’re then doing is fitting into a dominant model? You mention Dakar etc. If you read the critiques of Dak’art the issue is “How do I get to Paris?” It’s not about “What is it that Africa needs?” So yes, it’s important that we’re there but that’s the challenge I would see that you’ve set yourselves. How do you change that debate so that it’s not just about discovering the ‘new Tracey Rose’, which would be great but you know at the end of the day as Joseph Gaylard points out quoting Michael Stevenson, the international western art world can only accommodate twenty South African artists at the most, and that’s not really a sustainable model in terms of putting all our aspirations there. We have to think more laterally and creatively in every other direction in terms of rethinking that. So for me I don’t doubt that kind of excitement. I don’t doubt that it will be good for Cape Town etc, in that sense. But I’m just posing from a very particular perspective where in terms of my own indicators [evaluating your success] would be to what extent do you shift the discourse around contemporary African art? To what extent does start to see itself as being part of the continent? To what extent do we start to validate exchange with other African countries on an equal footing? If we’re able to say to a South African artist “Do you want two weeks in Kinshasa at a workshop, or do you want to go to Documenta?” where they actually have to think about it. Because I suspect right now “Just take my work to Documenta, please.” People won’t question that, and if that’s someone’s choice that’s their choice, but I would think that there’s another argument to say that Kinshasa might be more important from some perspective, not everybody’s

necessarily. And I think that's the kind of challenge... I used the examples of Lionel Davis, Tyrone Appollis to say "What is an international artist?" We have to start validating that kind of experience, that kind of perspective. But the last point I just wanted to raise which you've touched on is this whole multidisciplinary thing. Because I also find it quite interesting from the point of view that if you think about it, visual arts once again is lagging behind the other art forms. The writers were bringing in African writers in 1990 already. The musicians are well established in terms of networks. Filmmakers... maybe I'm looking at it from the outside and maybe there are more problems than seem on the surface, and I don't know about theatre people, but it seems to me that the visual arts always lags behind the other art forms on many levels. And I wonder with this constant emphasis you place on "its not going to be just a visual arts thing, its going to be multidisciplinary," my concern is how often do we really get to push the visual arts, and when we talk about this multidisciplinary vision what is the place of the visual arts in that vision?

JJ: It's a great question

SGZ: I'm often at loggerheads with other directors in putting the emphasis strongly on the visual arts in terms of marketing the way we way package the event. In terms of the way we want to grow our audience...I don't think we need to be so narrow in our vision of what the visual arts constitute. So I just think it's interesting to expand our definition of the visual arts... the cutting edge of some other practices are essentially what we would like to include in Cape because we believe that we want to be an interesting showcase of what constitutes the cutting edge of contemporary culture, and we feel that the visual arts are normally at the forward edge of all of those factors... One of the reasons that I chose Julian to work on the project was that he's not from a visual arts background. I think we've become very narrow in our focus, not broad enough in our way of thinking about our practice. Maybe other people from other areas can give us some insights in terms of fresh direction, and I've really found that with Julian is his openness... Particularly in South Africa, because of some of the problems the visual arts arena is facing we've become quite stuck in our thinking, that's my own sense and maybe in order to open up, in order to just bring fresh air and movement I think those other voices are going to perhaps bring refreshing perspectives and energy into the discussion of Sessions and to ourselves as visual practitioners.

MP: Well I certainly hope so because I think what does happen often in my view is that people see multi-disciplinary, particularly music, and particularly djs, as part of audience development, as part of bringing in people who wouldn't come near the place otherwise. I always wonder about that kind of approach. Yes, if you get 50 000 people into a fine arts venue for a rave, and I'm not saying you're doing that...

SGZ: No.

MP: but I'm just saying that has been the pattern

SGZ: We're not doing Soft Serve

MP: I always wondered really at the end of the day how many people come back when the rave is not on. I mean the first time I ever went to the Community Arts Project was to a disco in 1978. I never went back to CAP till 1988 or 1987...

SGZ: A very simple statistic is that if you look internationally... you were talking about being successful, in order to be successful you need to be an international scale event attracting an international audience. Even the most successful of these international events only [a small percentage] of their audience is international, the majority is local [the size of the local visual arts audience] probably only totals about 55 000 or 60 000 which means if we're looking to build volumes... I mean now I'm just talking business, but I mean in order to justify the costs and more than that, to make it an exciting and worthwhile project, we're looking to build volumes of over 100 000. The only way we can do this is if we focus on a youth audience. I mean if you think about how did you get involved in the arts? It's generally through an experience you had at a relatively young age. Our research has shown that teenagers are looking for some kind of identity rooted in contemporary Africa I'm sprouting now our business plan but basically I think it's valuable... if you just go or approach things from a very white cube, strict, traditional visual arts approach we're going to lose that potential audience. I think if we take a broader view of what Cape can deliver as a visual arts project [in a more multidisciplinary way] we can in fact have that ability to speak to that target market, but in a way that means that by the time they're in their thirties they will have developed an understanding of contemporary art language which they would not otherwise have necessarily been able to develop. That's sort of part of what our objective is, to project the idea of an integrated marketing and arts awareness programme is something that we want to rollout intelligently.

MP: I think it's really important that you are looking ahead, because this problem of South Africa not being active in Africa you're not going to address in one conference one exhibition one anything so hopefully we will reach that point where it's not just ultimately conforming to what I think is a legacy of colonialism where there will always be this inferiority complex where success will always be measured by so what if you're exhibited here but that doesn't really count unless you've been in the main art capitals.

JJ: There was actually a bit of a split about whether we follow a visual arts direction or whether we should choose some multidisciplinary vision, and I think there're gradations of that as well: multi-disciplinarity as a mode of engaging the visual arts; or multi-disciplinarity, talking about the arts; or even going beyond that, talking about creativity or culture seen as more expansive and not necessarily practice based, so it becomes a very interesting question it's not just a visual arts... the one thing that's really interesting when I was talking to Thembinkosi Goniwe I was asking him about one of the panels and the selection that had been made and [he asked] "why do you want to have all this multi-disciplinarity, at what expense to the visual arts?" and I think that's a really valid point. I think that's something which maybe some of us considered this is a forum in which people involved in the visual arts [dominate] maybe but on the other hand the vision of the multidisciplinary event I find very enticing because it opens up different practitioners to working in new spaces. That's

the kind of thing we want to achieve, not bringing together different people but making people do new things in different ways.

MP: I've had a similar conversation with Thembinkosi and I certainly will not try to speak for him. I actually raised the issue with him from the point of view that I had a perception, and I'm not saying you're doing it but I think it's something that does happen, where particularly with the black voices that often come into publications we're obviously all sensitive to issues of demographics, redress etc but what happens often is that we find people who are from different fields...On one hand it contributes to this radical sense of this multidisciplinary debate but there are black visual artists with critical input who maybe don't have those qualifications who often get left out of that which again doesn't validate their experience, doesn't validate their perspectives. So I'm not sure if that's what he was questioning but, and I'm not saying you're doing that, but it is something that I've actually observed as something of a trend. Sometimes one wonders because people say "this is an inclusive forum, etc" but you find that all the abelungu are visual arts people (laughs) you have this disjuncture and it does happen sometimes but that one I'm not throwing at you.

SGZ: Also from a business perspective from other discussions we've had with other festivals, other programmes, the thing is that with audience development a lot of the work is already done if you can get your various art communities, different practices to collaborate with each other. So for instance if it's just a visual arts event its only for a very specific community. If you let cross pollination happen you get a cross pollination of energy. It's actually very different, you're actually more successful ...the collaboration that happens between different creatives, I think that's an exciting potential that hasn't been explored enough.

MP: I also support it from the point of view that what does happen often is that you have people being multi-disciplinary but within a very tight visual arts frame. So they're doing performance art for instance, but then you find that there isn't that engagement with people who're not coming from the visual arts field. But I'm going to give you a parallel thing here... the issue of activism is often brought into a fine arts framework but I'm not always convinced that its broader social activism. I struggle sometimes to understand really what it's got to do with activism. So one of things I'm looking forward to is to actually hear what is that constitutes activism in 2005 for people who are working largely for a fine arts audience?

JJ: We had so many discussions in the Task Team about that particular Session, the arts and activism session. Perhaps one of the things I feel is that it's essentially a visual arts panel. I was very excited about the fact that Zackie Achmat was going to chair that panel and I hope bring something different. I was hoping that he would call people to answer questions, but I think the panel could be a bit more expanded, I mean there multi-diciplinary becomes really interesting because activism transcends one's particular discipline and there you have a conversation that really explores what is activism? What does it mean to be activist? Does it make sense for art to be activist? In what ways is it? What sort of issues? I think that's actually an

argument for having multidisciplinary discussions. I don't know, what do you think constitutes activism at the moment?

MP: Well I tend to think that one has to go outside the fine arts frame. For me its not just performing some supposedly radical act, but really you're just appealing to an art audience, it's a way of presenting yourself as being this cutting edge artist. I really wonder about that, really when people do that, I wonder about the claims they make to represent themselves as activists. For me activism has to engage more broadly with social issues. It has to do more than just try to promote a particular kind of so-called cutting edge art but actually somehow tangibly address those issues. It's something I've been grappling with. I'm familiar with the old school activism from the '80s and what that meant to be a cultural activist, and it seems that everybody is a cultural activist today. I'm not questioning everybody who frames themselves in that way...

SGZ: it seems that everybody like the idea of being a cultural activist

MP: This is really the thing that I'm starting to grapple with to what extent is it just a form of branding, to say "well, I'm avant-garde. Is it a new way of saying avant-garde that's more acceptable? These are challenges for the people on the panel to enlighten us on what is activism today.

SGZ: And what is a responsible position in that regard, irrespective of social activism or cultural activism...

JJ: That panel particularly can be problematic. Why do you have Kendell and not Lionel Davis, sure, I think it's a really interesting question... I'm quite interested to know how that panel will relate to the exhibition next year... so what is the sense of talking about activism in and around an exhibition and I think the reason that session was framed the way in which it was, and it really was a very difficult session to frame in Task Team discussions. I think in a sense it's quite a conservative session, and it reflects the panel that we couldn't find agreement on it. Because the session actually originated as being a session about multi-disciplinary practice and we couldn't agree on what constituted that. We wanted to talk about people who were practitioners but weren't working in a fine arts economy or framework, and from there it became about talking about art... its ended up being quite different from where it came from. I think it's still very exciting because if nothing it will provoke exactly the kind of issues which we're discussing but I just find it so interesting that was such a hard session to pin down, so I'm quite curious about what happens.

SGZ: I think also to go back to Cape as an organisation... having gone through the process of establishing ourselves and now [beginning to address the notion of] opening up our membership which will go further than even the focus group in circulating ideas. That will really make us permeable to people which basically means that at the Sessions people will be able to express interest in joining the organisation. We're entering into another and very interesting phase in our evolution as an organisation.

MP: I'm personally very interested in that... you've spoken about a reading room which to me is critical because if you're not at university you do not have access... I teach part-time at university and when I don't have a card to get into the library it's so difficult for me to access resources. I still find so many artists who are not even aware of certain shows, debates etc and it's not that they wouldn't be interested but it's just that you have to be at university to have access, or be a professional who can afford to buy all this stuff yourself. So I think that to open up that kind of space I would imagine there would be other kinds of programmes that can start happening, obviously not on the scale of this conference but much more grassroots in the sense of being able to be more down to earth, more modest outputs which I think is really important because for me the basic issue is the lack of education broadly. I include myself in this. I teach modern African art but I had to read everything I could find and probably half of what I think I know if I was to have the opportunity to visit those countries and engage with artists from there my position would shift completely. So I always say to people the fact that I teach it doesn't mean that I consider myself an expert, but very people have even had that privilege

SGZ: I think it's a very exciting position that we're at this juncture... we can start to explore and understand what is essentially a very wide open field. I think that's the exciting potential of Cape as a project.

[Editorial note: Every attempt was made to provide an accurate record of the conversation. Editing has been kept to a minimum. Unfortunately due to intermittent lapses in audibility and subsequent difficulties in transcribing, it has at times been necessary to insert content in square brackets]