What do the videos of Thando Mama Communicate? - As a Black Contemporary Artist in South Africa

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Introduction

On an aesthetic level art is said to be the soul of the nation, as a people’s culture, its backbone as the South African White Paper on Arts, Culture and Heritage states

‘Cultural expression and identity stand alongside language rights and access to land as some of the most pressing issues of our times’ (1996)

Through the creative process the artist has the means to influence social reality and social reality influence’s his creative process in return. The interesting aspect is to understand how this process operates. In the conversations with Thando Mama we will discuss the creative process as he employs it in his video art works.

The assumption of the paper is that the creative process includes research up to the presentation of the art work. Even though one may argue that the creative process is only the actual physical making of the work. In the case of video art this will mean when the artist picks up the camera to take a shot up to the editing process. This assumption that is used argues that the making of the art work is a thought out process and requires a reading of the social context, the technical knowledge of the medium and the art industry where the art will be presented. Some of this process is based on accumulative knowledge which might be the consciously practice in creating each art work but does become part of the creative process.

Thus the paper will trace the root of video art to provide a historical background to the medium within its ‘traditional’ social context and the social relevance it has had over time. This will make us understand the social connection of the work that Thando Mama is producing decades down the line in another part of the world. The meeting of these two worlds can be attributed to globalisation’s tentacles.

Globalisation will link to the tensions that come with the Information and Communication Technologies. ICT’s have the potential to initiate a discussion between contemporary art and popular media. This discussion is facilitated by technology that informs and distributes both art and media. The artist which is the case study in this paper is part of the technology as he is a social agent who works with current affairs as material. In the creative process the discussion will be on issues of access to the necessary technology and social capital in producing video art. Access to popular media and visual art education are important components of Thando Mama’s creative process. This places his work -within the South African society- in a contested space dealing with access to ICT’s which could be seen as a marker of social class. Even though video art is able to reach a wide global audience due to the nature of the medium.

Mama’s videos explore identity from the subjective perspective of the artist. This perspective is informed primarily by his education – Mama has been exposed to arts education at a tertiary education level in South Africa, which is a privileged position
to able to access such education. The Durban University of Technology offered a six month introductory programme to video art. As a contemporary black South African, he is influenced by socio-political theories, especially Pan Africanism as per the teachings of Robert Sobukwe, Black Consciousness through the writings of Steve Biko, and liberation struggle literature from Africa and Latin America.

South Africa is negotiating a post racial identity based global reality, such as the digital divide which is based on access to technological tools and knowledge. As a country that encompasses both scarcity and privilege, South Africa is riddled with frictions based on who has and who have how much access to the economy. Thus the value of social capital in such a situation is determined by access to the economy; both local and global and it is not linear but has many centres, depending on the local currency which is largely expertise, skills and knowledge from a western perspective of value. This is not unique to South Africa, as part of former colonised nation’s access to these particular scarce resources which creates privileged class in society.

Bourdieu in *Distinction A Critique of the Judgement of Taste* says that in order to understand the prevalent societal inequalities it is important to holistically evaluate the resources that people have access to in a given society in contrast to the legitimate resources which are the yardstick for class divisions and this could be distinguished from the different tastes that people identify with. He further advocates that educational level and family origin are the major determents of one’s taste.

In the case of South Africa those who have access to high levels of education and higher access to the economy become custodians of “legitimate cultural institutions”. Thus they legitimately prescribe value to cultural products like art works. Those who do not have the necessary education and access to the economy cultural legitimacy is looked takes on an inferior position. Thus through access to the privileged strata of society one can accumulate the necessary cultural legitimacy. In the case of Thando Mama, this is by having the resources which accompany artist talent and form part of his social capital which he also uses creatively.

The thread that has the power to link the different aspects of the creative process is the artist’s social capital. Thus this paper aims to discuss the value of social capital in the creative process within the creative industry. Adorno in the *Culture Industry* describes the creative industry or culture industry as a compromise between ‘high art’, meaning canonical modernist art and ‘low art’, that which is commercially driven.

Networking is an important part of the creative process as through contact and communication with others, social issues and issues relating to the creative practice are shared. This networked community facilitates a movement of resources. This may translate as inspiration and can take the form of formal or informal networks which includes audiences and those who have the power to confer legitimacy. This
becomes an artist’s social capital. According to Field social capital is a theory that advocates the importance of one’s social networks and he says:

‘by making connections with one another and keeping them over time, people are able to work together to achieve things that they either could not achieve by themselves, or could only achieve with great difficulty’ (Field, 2003, p.1)

In South Africa the visual arts sector is fragmented and poorly coordinated, thus for work to be done practitioners rely on their social capital which can yield financial capital for projects. Access to the necessary resources relies on these networked ties. Thus forming a connecting thread throughout this paper is a discussion of the artist’s social capital as Thando Mama’s video art is an example of his accumulated social capital. He has harnessed the relevant knowledge, networks to access the creative industry.

**Roots of Video Art**

One can view video art as part of the avant garde movement in its philosophical rejection of commercialisation of art and its sublime aesthetic. Avant garde has been what the visual art world has understood as modern art, the art that aimed to disrupt traditional realistic based art forms. The preoccupation of such artist was to challenge bourgeoisie culture and in the case of video art, broadcast television represented that culture. The commercial art market as well as broadcast media was seen as propaganda for capitalist vehicles such as advertisers and politicians.

‘ Classical twentieth century avant-garde movements, dada and surrealism, which appeared in the late 1920’s and 1930’s ... was to destroy art as an institution by emerging it with everyday life ... thereby become an instrument of liberation (Poggioli, 1968, p. 39)

Different authors have written about the medium tracing it to the popularisation of television especially in the media centres of United States of America (USA) in the 1960’s. The climate at the time in the USA, Europe and United Kingdom (UK) was one of experimentation in the visual arts informed by social activists.

‘As in the United States, the British video art scene arose out of a combination of events that included the development of accessible video technology, the concerns of minimal and conceptual art, the sensibilities and perceptions of the so-called ‘underground’ political movement and the model of independent/experimental cinema’ (Meigh-Andrews, 2006, p. 38)

This creative process was said to be producing videotapes. This took on various manifestations in different media rich western centres and the commonality is the experimentation with the then new technology to advocate socio-political concerns.
The use of the medium was a means of using tools of domination subversively and the domination tool which came under attack was broadcast media.

This led to initiatives of alternative programme content and subversively taking the actual television set out of its intended context, which was the living room in the suburban home. It was a time of utopian dreams of exposing the capitalist system, as the globe was largely dividing between capitalist and socialist ideologies. Thus there was a strong idea of giving power back to the masses so they can be agents of their own stories though recording their communities.

‘In the United states and Europe – video’s emergence coincided with the pivotal moment of idealism about cultural change and social pluralism contributed to its initial burst of energy and diversity’ (Hall & Fifer, 1990, p.107)

The people who were making videotapes came from social documentary and visual arts backgrounds and their approach to the medium reflected this. The visual artists took the disciplines’ concerns; thus they looked at the monitor and video camera as not only a communication tool but as the artwork itself. On a conceptual level the tools afforded multiple meanings which could be interpreted creatively and that was the excitement of video art.

‘Stuart Marshall’s examination of the shift in development of British experimental video from Modernist to Postmodernist concerns ... Greenbergian ‘Modernist’ project which explored and for grounded the specificity of the medium, and later documentary and narrative based concerns, further strengthened by the influence of feminist practice. For Marshall, Postmodernist video was primarily concerned with the deconstruction of narrativity as the dominant social discourse in television’ (Meigh-Andrews, 2006, p. 43)

Thus in the process of experimentation with the new medium visual artists adopted the familiar theoretical tools of analysis which were based on the history of visual art, even though the primary concern with the pioneers of the medium was defining the medium so they can have proof of its uniqueness. The constant challenge with this preoccupation is its changing nature linked to technological changes. As the use of the new technology bred familiarity, there came about a distinction between those who were concerned with its social value as documenter of society and those who were primarily concerned with its artistic value. The technological advances became the primary discourse amongst the later group of videotapes makers.

Postmodernist analysis of the videotape liberated the artist from the search of the uniqueness of the medium. In the acceptance of the close relationship between viewing video work and television the artist worked on challenging the television, thus, using the televvisual experience as a tool to discuss the art work. In this sense video art became accommodating to social phenomena and its agents. The medium of video was enticing to most of its practitioners, as it did not have a stable history to
monitor its value. The new medium through its practitioners could involve itself in the
documentation of its own history. Some practitioners even extended the challenge
to the critique of art history.

‘David Hall was staking a claim for video as an autonomous art from, and indicated
that previous writings had either been simply descriptive or attempted to define video
solely in relation to broadcast television. Hall felt the reasons for this were two fold;
(1) In contrast to painting, sculpture and film, there was no historical precedent and
/or established practice for video art from which it could develop a theoretical and
critical base, and (2) a reluctance on the part of art establishment to embrace
‘electronic media’ (Meigh-Andrews, 2006, p. 39)

Even though part of the attraction of the medium of video was its broadcast and
duplication possibilities, there was an uneasy relationship between the makers of
videotapes and broadcast companies. The basic point of departure was the
commercialisation of the videotapes. For the broadcast industry, even the state
funded ones, commercial gain was the priority and for the videotape makers it was
the content and artistic value that was of supreme importance.

The duplicity of the medium of videotapes was a challenge to visual arts institutions
and made it difficult to prove its value within the visual arts institution as it alienates it
from the durability of art history. But the novelty and the creative use by artists,
especially through video installation, kept the interest of the visual art institutions and
the debate alive in the visual arts and popular media as in reality it strangles both
industries.

The practice of video art became largely dependent on communal resources and led
to the initiation of video collectives. In the case of the United Kingdom the
collectivism included art schools. This served the purpose of both sharing physical
and human resources. The collective became a support network for artists by
providing services such as funding for projects, audiences, documentation and
critique of the work produced.

‘by the end of the 1960’s, the New York video scene had flourished, and numerous
cooperative groups were formed. The members of Commediation, one of the earliest
(collectives), were united in the belief that video could be used as a tool for social
and political change. Individually and collectively, members of Commediation went to
form a number of other important video groups, including Videofreex, Top Value,
64)

The era was also a time of disillusionment by the majority of the artist who became
video artists with the gallery system. Thus the collectives became an alternative art
world, which provided access to a market and social aspects of creativity.
‘Artists looked to science, social science and cultural theory - anywhere but to dealers, critics or aesthetics – for leads. New forms attacked head-on the commodity status of art. Object hood was an issue not because art objects were commodities but because they seemed insignificant inert next to the electronic and mass produced offerings of mass media’ (Hall & Fifer, 1990, p. 42)

The exchange nature of the video collectives extended beyond disciplinary concerns but rather function on philosophical connections. The quotation below describes the attitude of those involved in making videotapes in the 60’s and 70’s.

We were doing stuff and took the wider view of what and artist is and in some ways pushing at the envelope in some direction – whether the aesthetic or technical or semantic – living on the edge in some way. So, if you think of yourself as an artist in that sense, the activity that you do is art, so if you’re doing recording which turns out later to fall into category of documentary, in my view that would still qualify as art’ (Meigh-Andrews 2006: 66)

The videotape collectives extended beyond the producers of videotapes to include their subjects actively in the creative process as subjects. This practice highlights the social focus of the producers not excluding the experimental space afforded by the medium.

‘ The process of making these tapes was the crucial activity, and this process included the entire cycle of engaging with the subject, recording and selectively playing it back to the intended audience’ (Meigh-Andrews, 2006, p. 68)

The United Kingdom became a leader in the video art scene in terms of institutional support from its national broadcaster the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) and funding from the British Arts Council. This afforded a more vibrant video art scene within the visual arts industry. The advocacy and lobbying of artist David Hall promoted the support that the video art scene enjoyed in Britain. David Hall was also writing widely on the new medium.

‘Video art emerged out of, and has been sustained by art colleges in this country not only because of an emphatic and progressive context ... but also out of necessity, since collages of art have been the main providers of the essential and expensive hardware. Many artists in Britain have been dependent on their connections with these facilities in one way or another since the early seventies. Occasional excursions into the use of commercial equipment are attractive but economically prohibitive especially if considerable time is required for experimentation ... A video artist unlike a painter cannot function without considerable support’ (Meigh-Andrews, 2006, p. 44-45)

When video art was co-opted by the visual arts it was largely due to the unsustainable nature of the collectives. The funding bureaucracies have stringent
rules on governance, thus treating the collectives as non profit organisations and the categories that come with such labels.

‘standard subcategories that are commonly used to describe video today – such as documentary, media-concerned, image-processing and narrative – while glaring inadequate now, had no relevant meaning in the 1960’s and early 1970’s. Distinctions between art and information were not initially made by these artists, to them everything was simply ‘tape’ (Rush, 2005, p.107)

The realities of the changing time from the late 70 are when popular media has neutralised its transgressive child through appropriation for the consumer market. Video art was at a cross roads as it had access to the visual art institutions as well as popular media but the tensions continued.

‘The belief structure of art in western culture espouses the primacy of the individual creator and the notion of a masterpiece as a means to establish the financial worth of a work of art, it does not bend easily towards the concept of collectivism’ (Hall & Fifer, 1990, p. 114)

This was a turning point in the practice of video art where it was a survivalist reasoning which started the conversation on the part of the artists, visual art institution and as well as broadcast media. The idea might have been to change the practice of the institutions from the inside but the reality was and still is at best a compromise. Artists needed to make themselves relevant to the institutions and the institutions need to keep up with competitive times in the global art market. But the compromise of defining video art in terms of its individual properties is like buying an admission ticket to modernist art theory. Ironically this compromise resulted in partial admission by the visual art industry of the medium due to its time based electronic properties and thus its relationship with broadcast television.

‘for Hall, it was the validation of such work within the modernist gallery system which finally absorbed the conceptuality project into the canon of modernism and consequently deracinated it of any critical and social value … within the dominant modernist paradigm of attribution, distribution and display, and its attendant discourses of authenticity, value judgement and aesthetic contemplation, video cannot operate as art at all’ (Knight, 1996, p. 234)

The use of video in television and other popular media has maintained the marginalisation of video as it is marginally accepted by the visual arts industry. The utopian ideal of video as a medium that can enter the belly of the beast to destroy it from the inside has not been realised, but its critical stance is still valuable. As it is the norm is capitalist society, those who have access to financial resources have the power to coffer value. The gallery/museum system has cultural value and the corporatised broadcast system has the financial muscle and the video art medium is in the middle. This affected the artists as some followed the new mainstream and
thus dividing the collectives and disintegrating the philosophical stance of their creation.

The adoption of video by institutions like galleries and museums shifted the location of video from the collectives to the above mentioned institutions. Thus video artists from the 1980’s onwards still follow the tradition of preoccupation with broadcast media and socio-political concerns, but to a large extent through the perspective of the institutions which provide funds and audiences for the art work.

The common reality of art which rejected art history and its related institution although with noble ideas became illegible art, thus exclusive to those who can decode the internal language and imagery. In the context of a capitalist society and the boom of popular media the transgressive can be given commercial value thus appropriation of its exclusivity. It is no huge shock that broadcast media appropriated the avant gardism of video art. The window of opportunity is best described by Rush:

‘At issue is the intentionality of the artist, as opposed to that of the television executive or even commercial filmmaker or video maker: the work is not a product for sale or mass consumption. The aesthetic of video art, as intentionally loose as they maybe, demand an artistic starting point from video artists that is akin to the aesthetic enterprise in general ... art and artful are separate, though linked, in terms that exist to help us differentiate between what can and cannot be considered to be art. Artful techniques may enliven commercial television, advertising etc, but these techniques are not in themselves what we would normally call art’ (2005, p.87)

The tension in a postmodernist analysis one can say is between the creative process and commercialisation of art. One can trace a relationship between what is termed propaganda art which fulfil a certain socio-political function and commercialisation which is concerned with socio-economics. The use of art, which is critiqued by the avant garde, has the potential to translate beyond the exclusive groups of its followers. Video art is in a precarious position, which is interpreted differently depending what value is being given to that art work. Thus on the one hand it could be avant garde and on the other popular culture.

Those who practice video art in the contemporary space have largely grown up with television and digital media and thus have access to sophisticated uses of technology. The global reach of their work is more a lived reality and support from art institutions is the expectation whether they use the medium for documentary or as art works.

‘It’s seemingly endless possibilities and relative affordability makes it increasingly attractive to young artists who have been in an era of media saturation. Video is a way of participating in and reacting to media kill. It is also a manageable means to communicate personal messages’ (Rush, 2005, p.121)
This is a testimony of the progression of video as a medium. The social commentary in video art might be obscured by the stylisation, which is the experimental project of video art. The issues may tend to be individualistic but one has to take into cognisance the social reality of isolation and identity formation in a time of media imagery onslaught. This, being accompanied by a political and social challenge to western cultural domination in terms of cultural product in the global popular media, and thus in turn, the possible global reach of such a medium.

‘Video artists of the 1980’s and 1990’s have largely, though not exclusively, turned their attention to personal narratives that reflect a quest for identity (particularly cultural or sexual) and political freedom. These are often expressive or economical realities. Western European, North American, and some Japanese artists, living in a time of relative peace and economic prosperity from which some artists, feel excluded, have turned to video to communicate their intense desire to achieve personal and social equality ... political struggle remains at the forefront of artistic and economic preoccupation’ (Rush, 2005, p. 111)

Video art, like television is an export in a country like South Africa from the global west, which is understood as privileged and dominant. Television first came to South Africa in 1979. In terms of the western countries access to the medium this as more than 20 years later. This late entry of television can be place at the door of apartheid as the than Nationalist government delayed television’s entry due to a fear that access to a global space can undermine apartheid policies by providing another perspective of the world to South Africans.

The history of the medium in the country is poorly documented and it has been practice by very few artists and experimental filmmakers. Thus besides names of artists who work with video there is hardly any discourse around the practice. Thus one can place it with other contemporary practices in the arts due to the commonalities in terms of content.

Thus within the creative spaces in South African video as a medium became a space of experimentation in the 80’s at a time when some media commentators were saying that South Africa is in the cusp of a civil war as the struggle against apartheid was intense and the country was under a state of emergency. So the content in the experimental creative spaces were about such public discourse.

‘in 1987, Jeremy Natan and Guilio Biccardi, two filmmakers and Matthew Krouse, a cabaret artist and agent provocateur, produced a short film entitled De Voortrekkers...positioned at an inflection point in the history of south Africa, which expressed incredibly succinctly and powerfully both potential opposition and the aesthetic power of film medium. Its title is an ironic reference to a benchmark film in the long history of South African cinema, De Voortekkers of 1916. This is South Africa’s own Birth of a nation, the first re-enactment of the myth of the Afrikaner people.’ (Sey, 2003, p. 46)
This particular video work is noted by the same author as one of the earliest video art works that was produced in South Africa and ascribed its video art credentials to its experimental aesthetics ‘emerging from a lineage of underground or “transgressive” cinema (Andy Warhol, Nick Zedd, Jack Smith) and a painterly, non-narrative lineage usually dated to Nam June Paik as progenitor.

The challenge for experimental video producers in South Africa from the 80’s until the present moment has been spaces that can accommodate this type of aesthetics and the visual art gallery has thus been the point of access as opposed to mainstream broadcasting and the film industry. The connection between video and the gallery/museum system in South Africa can be traced to the fact that the western visual arts industry had accepted video as a new medium which extends the language of painting, portraiture and performance documentation.

In a context of a developing nation like South Africa it immediately became an elitist art form due to the technology, tertiary education and its lack of economic value whilst relatively expensive to produce. The history of television like all import associated with modernity is initially associated with privilege, but through popularity through consumerist culture such products over time become commonplace. Broadcast media like television from a consumerist perspective might be commonplace but the technological knowledge is still privileged. This privilege is compounded by unequal access to the necessary knowledge including Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) and its education.

‘One notable rallying point for video work done through the 1880’s and 1990’s is what might be called an aesthetic of dissociation. The medium was taken up first by the white middle-classes, who had greater access to the technological means of production, and it remains the case that very few black South African artists work in video’ (Sey, 2004, p. 33)

The South African video artists have taken the social concern of their time into the new medium like their western counterparts. The video arts from the 80’s and 90’s such as Willian Kentridge Stephen Hobbs and Minneri Vari were much more interested in the urban landscape as this medium has a symbol of the urban and contemporary.

‘the aesthetic of dissociation haunts contemporary South African video art in other ways, apart from the still-skewed racial balance of its artists. A preoccupation with South African urban space has become apparent in much work through the 1990’s’ (Sey, 2004, p. 33)

The twenty first century saw new artists entering the visual arts industry which have grown up with television and have been introduced to video as an art medium at tertiary institutions. This included a group of black artists who have gain access to the technology though education. The concern with these fairly recent entrants into
the medium is political and social identity as a main concern and the use of their bodies to interrogate these concerns.

The manner in which this medium with the contemporary arts is discussed is more sociological than the aesthetics of the medium. This is reminiscence with video art in the 60’ and 70’s in the western centres, as opposed to the progression made in the 80’s to a aesthetic discussion as artists become familiar with their medium and using digital technologies as they advance.

Thando Mama’s Creative Process

Introducing the videos

In a conversation with Thando Mama we disagreed on the definition of the creative process as he subscribes to the conviction that the creative process starts from the moment an artist’s interacts with the art materials until that ritualistic interaction is exhausted. In the case of his video work it will be from the time he shoot’s an image with the camera followed by the editing process and that will be the end of the process.

‘It could be triggered by lot things, books you read and by news stories, lyrics in a song, things that just happened, news papers. Visually I imagine something and try to capture that image in some form of movement if possible with sounds. In a way that it takes almost a painterly quality. Surfaces texture, colours and moods (painterly quality) kind of parallel to the narrative of cinematography, things that are not scripted the way do it I chop things up in sections. One section will be independent to another and I layer them on top of each other and try to make sense of them.’ (T. Mama, personal communication, August 20, 2009)

Thus he does not acknowledge the research phase as well as the engagement of the finished work in the creative industry as part of the creative process. His definition is the repetitive process of shooting and editing to arrive at an art work as the entirety of the creative process. This stand point can be understood within the art education system, especially during studio practices as it is where the notion of the creative process is introduced. The theoretical phase which includes research - art history - is not included in this definition and the creative industry is not taught at all or it’s introduced very marginally in the curriculum.

Thus the division of labour in the visual arts value chain defines writers or critics as based in the visual history position, artist been those who produce the art works and curators and gallerists become the interface with industry. In an era of the knowledge economy one person can fulfil multiple roles in the value chain, thus redefining the creative process. Thus the education system needs to catch up to the changes in the
creative sector for the benefit of the artists they produce who are the base of the industry.

Thando Mama has tertiary level education level in the visual arts from the only art school in Durban, South Africa thus one of the few in the country. He was able to receive an introductory six month course in video art where the focus was introducing the students to the main video artists in the short history of the medium. This help in equipping him with the knowledge to research about the medium outside the education system. The practical aspects he learned by experimenting with the medium as there was not enough time in the syllabus for extensive practice. He started experimenting with video in his fourth year of art school. Previously he focused printmaking and photography. One can assume that this was a natural progression due to his interest in technology based art.

Mama’s work came into prominence at a time where South Africa was and still is grappling with its national identity. National policy aims to forge a national culture within a country with cultural divisions instituted by the former apartheid government laws and its instruments to enforce those laws. It was a time where there was an international euphoria on a new nation which has undergone what is documented as a smooth transition to democratic majority rule. Thus the social mood in the country was one of celebration as well as an acknowledgement of a need to transform apartheid institutions as part of create a new nation.

‘The nation, in other words, is produced in and through the struggle for democracy... The democratic nation, therefore, is not simply a nation or multiple identities; it is a nation composed of individuals’ (Chipkin, 2007, p.102)

In discussing the Social context of the environment that the video works were created, as well the environment that acknowledges the work it is important to briefly discuss South Africa’s national building project. Art works that were largely been created in South Africa post 1994 were mainly preoccupied with the notion of the ‘Rainbow Nation’, which foregrounds the cultural diversity of South Africans. Thus artists questioned their own identity and tried to define it for themselves as evident in the work they created.

In addition to the nation building project, what has influenced the generation of politically minded young black artists has been the theories of Black Consciousness due to its radicalism and close relations with youth militancy during the last years of apartheid, Especially when Biko say ‘rewrite the history of the black man and to produce in it heroes who form the core of the African background’ (Biko,1996b:30) (pg 118). Thus the art works Mama produced looked at the black people’s representation in popular media which is what how he uses medium of video to critique the media that also gives it legitimacy. (Chipkin, 2007)
Gabi Ngcobo and Khwezi Gule are curators who have worked with Thando Mama and were fellow members of the now defunct 3rd Eye Vision artist Collective. They both understand the major theme in Mama’s work as:

‘Mama’s themes are dealing with issues around his identity as a black male from South Africa; his image, his representation in popular media and the general representation of black people. His work, having come to public interest during South Africa’s celebrations of a decade of democracy, quickly became a medium to talk about the country’s complex identity politics, a topic that was already exhausted in the West.’ (K. Gule, personal communication, 2009)

Gule reinforces Ngcobo’s comment by says:

‘In the beginning a lot of his work dealt with issues of identity and this was in the early 2000’s which were about being black and male in this world (the psycho-social dimensions of this label). Issues of representations especially in popular media (but also within art history) of blackness (of black masculinity in particular) were important to him.’ (G. Ngcobo, personal communication, 2009)

1994 Next Generation Movement produced in 2004 is Mama’s most successful work, if you interpret success as recognition within the visual art sector and thus the most travelled and been shown in institution with a high level of cultural capital.

‘First all the work was commissioned in 2004 for an exhibition in New York, Museum for African Art and St John Cathedral: Personal Effects. For which I had originally to videos and an installation. The significance of 1994 is the advent of democracy; remember these 10 years of democracy projects.’ (T. Mama, personal communication, August 30, 2009)

If ones look at the work titled, 1994 Next Movement, what the viewer sees when looking at this work which is in two parts on the one hand is the video installation which takes the format of a version of stop frame animation of a male figure exercising doing sit ups. The second part of the installation is the drawings of the same male figure in the different position of the exercise been performed. The drawings are in sequence so the view and follow the motion of the performance. The music in the background is Xhosa language traditional songs, if you listen to the tunes and tones of the singers.

One can infer from the connection of the ritual of exercise as a male bonding with his body and the ritual is an affirmation of maleness which is projected to be physically fit. This form of exercise is juxtaposed by the traditional music thus placing it in a modern context of an expression of maleness whereas in a traditional context that expression will take another form. Thus we are shown how short the distance between the modern and the traditional is in contemporary South Africa as they can
be such easily accessible reference points. In the life of one individual who owes his identify to both spaces.

In addition Mama introduces us to an aspect of the creative process through exhibiting the drawing which form the visual for the animation and he places them in a manner that is easy to read and translate from the two dimensional form to the video form.

The use of multiple projection places the actual television monitors as part of the installation. Thus the medium becomes the art work as well. The installation combined becomes a work that the viewer can walk through, thus the viewer has an intimate experience of the art work.

This was the story that the art world was interested in hearing about South Africa at the time. This work uses the medium of video but it does not necessarily critique the medium of television like Mama’s earlier works. It is one of the most direct of his work that deals with the black male experience in South Africa. It memorises the black male figure through the 45 images that shows this figure repetitiously in the videos and in the drawings which in form the stop motion animated quality of the work.

The audio in the work is a song about been black in a society that does not appreciate and persecute blackness. It is a lament on the black male experience in South Africa currently and especially under apartheid. It draws heavy in terms of content from the popular national narrative of the liberation struggle in South Africa and the history of the African National Congress.

In an interview with art writer Kwanele Sosibo Mama what this work represent as ‘It is a commemoration of our tangible history, referencing the figures of the victims of apartheid, which we all are. The bodies are in constant motion, never to get up fully, in transit and fragile’ (2007, p.19)

This tendency to memorise the black male figure also evident in the work titled Back to Me produced in 2004 explain the work which incorporates a scripted conversation between Mama and Keith Kunene a poet and Hip Hop artist at the time. They are talking about been black and male in their social environment as well as the representation of black maleness in popular mass media. They talk particularly about rap music videos as they portray black males and by identity association refers to themselves as misogynists, gangster and generally negative characters.

Back to me physically introduces television as component of the work, as another member of the conversation. ‘It was also about accessing that, the medium of television connects you to other similar conversations somewhere else, maybe in the Diaspora, maybe at home, maybe next door. It actually transfers you to a kind of a global.’ (T. Mama, personal communication, August 30, 2009)
The television clip from a movie about racism in the USA, is a monologue by a black older man about been mistreated because of the colour of his skin. Thus the work is a three way conversation between the older man in the video and the two younger men in South Africa and the connection is racism.

The video uses popular culture of hip-hop music, movies and spoken-word poetry as dialogue. This places the work in an urban youth culture setting within South Africa. The symbols are able to draw in non artistic audiences to the work. The style of the video is challenging to the eye, but the content transcend this particular video art style and the combination is inclusive, thus speaking to the art audiences and well as those people who are not video art literate.

Thando Mama identifies television content and the instrument itself as a large influence in his work. This falls in line with the tradition of the medium as a tool to challenge the television, which is a power transmitter of cultural messages.

‘TV is a big chuck of influence. TV, as something that captured and presents images and ways that it directs you to perceive or view things in a certain way... it plays an important role and continues to do so. The TV is a tool to do anything, tool for propaganda, social change, and politics, to control that is out there.’ (personal communication, August 29, 2009)

In reading Television John Fiske and John Hartley suggests that television content is part of our lived reality

‘Part of that environment comprises the constant stream of ‘secretions’ that emanate from the small screen... Just as our metabolic processes transform what we eat into material that can be assimilated, so our culturally learnt codes and conventions transform what we watch from external stimuli into actual communication, where the message is not only received but also decoded, understood and responded to.’ (1978, p. 68-69)

Thus one can say that those who have grown up with an experience of a mediated world those realities inform your understanding of reality as well the ever evolving cultural identities. In South Africa they is a tendency to prescribe identification based on political history and that historically prescribed identity does not account for those which are chosen.

Charles Purtergill and Anne Leide say ‘Identity formation in “late modernity” is indeed influenced by a multiplicity of factors... globalising markets and media, the flow of people, ideas and values, ethnic revival and the redrawing of political frontiers, ... In opposition to former notions of all-encompassing and essential identities, postmodern formulations of identity emphasise the notion of subjectivity and reject’ ‘grand theories that attempt to incorporate the totality of social experience (Prinsloo & De La Rey, 1999: 72)’ (Bekker & Leids, 2006, p.12)
In the South Africa context one cannot ignore the ‘grand theories’ of identity formation which heavily rely on an anthropological understanding of identity formation as opposed to the ones suggested by postmodernism. In South Africa as a new democracy these multiple understandings are recent and experimental, so as the case within the arts.

‘If modernism in art was the age of the avant-gardes, then, for many critics, postmodernism marks the exhaustion of those projects, the end of a sense that art has a single purpose or can change the world, and yet it also indicates a democratisation of art coupled with a continuing expansion of the forms and techniques that might be counted as artistic as well as the involvement of sections of the community who had hitherto appeared to be marginal to the art world’ (Malpas, 2005, p. 20)

The liberating factor that is afforded an artist who is dealing with the politics of identity is that the creative process itself is cathartic and one can interrogate society and their own understanding of prescribed identities. In Thando’s work you also see the feminist influence when he discusses black male identity as portrayed by popular media through the agency of his body.

‘The whole thing was about the body, identity and the major thing at that was representation, which has a right to represent them, who has a right to speak for you and how do you go about representing yourself.’ (T. Mama, personal communication, August 29, 2009)

In the video work We are Afraid produced in 2003 starts with a sound clip from the news on weapons of mass destruction and quickly move to a repetition of the phrase ‘many people fear that the world has forgotten about Africa’ This immediately focuses the art work on how Africa is depicted in the news media as war zones by linking the phrase mentioned above to insert of weapons of mass distraction. This links us also to Mama’s preoccupation with the black male body and this time within the context of war.

This audio is replaced by a computer generated voice repeating the phrase ‘we are afraid’ reframed by hip-hop music This is accompanied by a visual of a face in animated facial experience which are further digitally manipulated. The combination references horror films with an audio narration borrowed from news media, hip hop music and the computer generated voice.

In reflection in 2009 when we revisited this particular work he could in reflection relate it to the constant media coverage of the invasion of Iraq by the USA and the war in Sudan as presented by CNN news. South Africans could access CNN through the public broadcaster, today it is broadcasted by DSTV which is a paying television channel. He was trying to capture a feeling of terror and the use of politically black people’s experience in creating such imagery.
He described his intentions as: ‘To contextual the whole setting, to give a global perspective and brief comment on what type of news agencies are there, there is a distinct British voice and American as well. Remember that time were still getting news feeds from the BBC for international news, it was pre SABC. At any point in time there are series of events, some get more coverage than others, sometimes we lose focus on what we feel is important. At that time there was an inversion of Iraq, genocide on East Africa, Nigeria conflict religious, Darfur as well as our internal political issues in South Africa. Looking at the way the world is constructed through the medium of news agencies.’ (T. Mama, personal communication, August 30, 2009)

The quality of the video is reminiscent to early video art with its black and white grainy quality and the figure which is the artist performing for the camera. One can say the work is essentially the artist in dialogue with television facilitated by the medium of video.

The content of Thando Mama’s work is very much dictated by the context he is living in and the spaces that shape his understanding of his environment. The binary identities of been black and male is a constant feature in his work. He takes the position of critiquing himself and the institutions that inform his own understanding of the social environment. Thus as a consumer of particularly television, Hollywood films, Hip Hop music he aims to critique the same products through the videos. This takes on arguments about representation, particularly of white people representing black experiences in popular media. This critique can be linked to how black maleness is stereotyped in popular media and how these negative stereotypes are feed back into societies.

In his work The Revolution is Vol 1, 2 3 produced in 2006. The video is a layered work of recording and recording on top of the previous recording which is the composition of the 3 videos. The three works is the progression of this layering process. This technique is reminiscent to the painting process. Thus Mama draws on other art disciplines when creating the video. Thus this work is an example of his accumulated knowledge from his education is part of his video experiments. The work is simultaneously presented as three work thus volume 1, 2 and 3 which you can also read as phases in the creation of the work.

Thando Mama critiques the selective power of his chosen nemesis television in terms what is deemed to be news worthy at a particular time in history. The video work looks at how political revolutions in particular the Cuban revolution which put Fidel Castro into power uses popular media - and at this particular historical time it was radio - to spread its propaganda. In contemporary time we are left with symbols that represent those revolutionary moments as popular media icons. The institutions who own and run the popular media space creates these experiences and we are consumers in this media chain.
'the iconography of a revolutionary, the beard, cap and military jersey. I was reading a book about Angola/Namibia war of independence from colonialism with SADF and the Angolan army supported by Cuba. The book cover had a similar image of a revolutionary.' (T. Mama, personal communication 30, 2009)

The production in this video work is more complicated than the two videos mentioned above as it incorporate the palate of colour reminiscence of painting and the television’s built in technology like the two solid lines that one encountered when tuning a television set for video recording. His experimentation with the medium takes him to familiar experiences with the technology and he includes those codes in the work. At the end of volume three you are left with the symbols of a revolutionary which is what is presented in popular culture. This was the first video work Thando Mama produced when in Cape Town after his relocation from Durban.

The choice of referencing popular cultural symbols from the USA, mainly television and Hip Hop music is telling of the prevalence of these forms of cultural products in the South African mass media. This not a South African phenomena it is an indicator of the success of the USA cultural industries and the distribution channels afforded by globalisation. The accessibility of his work is based on the constant referencing of USA media as it is imbedded in South Africa’s media culture. Thus the question is this globalisation as we are experiencing it at this particular time in history and will the power balance change at a future date?

The most recent video work that Thando created is called Prayer produced in 2008. It is the first video where he does not use his own body as the performer. This departs from all his previous work as he is the observer in a similar manner as a photographer will be. In the video he is recording Muslims in prayer and the link with his previous work is its ritual performance and the representation of male bodies.

It is a meditative work and this quality is showed in his use of repetition as in his previous works, but this video is deliberately so. In my subjective perspective it is a work that shows his transition from preoccupation with the television as a medium to recording a physical environment to find ones bearings. It is voyeuristic even though it is conscious of trying not to reveal the identities of the people it is showing. It is looking at this particular religion as a social reality as oppose to its politicisation as shown in the news media around issues of the ‘war on terror’ and Islam fundamentalism.

The video is shot in Bamako and it is a conscious recognition of his current location as it relates to Cape Town, which has the largest Muslim community in South Africa. In a way, in this work he is living outside the television box but is in a social environment.

In terms of the creative process of this work one can argue, that this dates to his accumulative knowledge in producing videos that comment on ‘war’ declared on the
black male body. One can also further argue that the fact that his was physically in Bamako to exhibit is work in the premier space for showcases technologically mediated works by African artists the creative industry influenced the work, even if it’s was by affording him the experience.

The process of recording social realities without inserting his physical presence in the work itself started with a video he produced whilst still in Durban titled *Happy Day*, 2004. The work is a recording of people enjoying the sunshine by the sea as they walk up and down the Durban beachfront. It is a video in colour with the same painter quality of layering colours as well as the depth of a landscape painting. The sea is in the background and the people walking are in the foreground.

Mama chooses to insert himself as one of the people walking in the video and the departure point form all his other videos is that he is not the full focus of the video but rather he becomes part of the landscape. The focus is not on the male figure, but a spectrum of people at the beach on the day of recording. The theme of the video is about the landscape and the perception of a relaxed environment.

‘I decided to work with land and city, kind of taking the camera away from the buildings. It was shot in Durban in the beach front. I wanted to say something about movement of people body and stuff and looking at post demarcated zones (beaches) as one of the sites. A mixed of people actually interacting in the same public space. Intentionally comment on that creative process, creating space, there is movement, interaction of people, there is landscape and there is seascape. I just wanted to insert myself in it. If you don’t know me well you will think I’m just one of the people walks pass.’(T. Mama, personal communication August 29, 2009)

The politics of the video *Happy Days* is culturally specific to post-apartheid South Africa. The reference is the landscape - the beach - which was demarcated according to race under apartheid. This requires from an observer a consciousness to this fact as it not clearly portrayed in the video. The recording of a racially mixed people in video is also a recording of changed times in the South African social environment, an image of a post-apartheid South Africa. It is also a symbolic testament to euphoric ideal of a ‘rainbow nation’ as a multicultural society. This can place in the space of an imagined future where this could be a reality, as this process of imagining such a society is in its infancy in South Africa. In this work he takes up the challenge of art to initiate such an imagining.

In a process of redefining the representation ‘lens’ of his identities Thando Mama used the art of video to critique and initiate a conversation with television. Television been a medium that allowed him to access a wider social view that his immediate environment. Television gave access to the news media from the global north as well as hip hop culture to his South African environment. The medium of video itself is a facilitator in self reflection for the artist. Thus the critique cannot be divorced from the process of appropriation of the same cultural content mediated by television.
Representing the Self

In the contemporary space of art from the African continent, with South Africa been the latest entrant. The visual arts have used arguments and theories from the social sciences which fall under the umbrella of cultural studies. In relation to Thando Mama’s work and that of his generation of artists working in video and other mediums there is a borrowing of post-colonial discourses around identity interpretation as well has feminism around issues of masculinity and the body.

In the South Africa context the issue of transformation of institutions, in particular from their apartheid form to be representative of the demographics of the country has been the focus since 1994. This starts right from the top in government policies to the cultural institutions such as museums and art schools. This discussion on transformation is centred around ownership ranging from ownership of the physical infrastructure the most basic been the land, to the intangible like cultural symbols and the right to represent oneself on both the physical and symbolic levels.

This need to self-represent is evident in Mama’s work, thus the most visual aspect of his work is his body. This is a starting point into addressing larger social issues that affect mostly those he has chosen to be part of the collective that he identifies with. This body is a body of black men and this is where the discussion begins in terms of what is been communicated by Mama’s work.

The body is no longer just a personal representation of a singular human being but becomes a representation of a multitude of black male bodies that come with a history and current realities. Mama tries to forge a common narrative so that black men can see mirror images of some of their realities and histories. Despite this effort, this is a fragmented mirror showing a kaleidoscope of smaller narratives. Thus the viewer is been given a choice to engage with both the familiar and the unfamiliar.

As a strategy this is useful for speaking to a diverse audience and it also speaks to the artists reference points and what he associate himself with, through his work. It is the history of oppression of black people, in particular how the black male body as it is recorded in the slavery, colonialism and apartheid narratives. This is a self reflective practise through social commentary and using history as a legitimising tool for a particular stand point. It also appropriate contemporary practices which appropriates the negative imagery to illustrate the critique. This binary method can be explain in the manner that Robert Young defines the concept of hybridization.

‘ hybridization can also consist of forcing of a single entity into or more parts, a severing of a single object in two, turning sameness into difference, ... thus makes difference into sameness, and sameness into difference, but in a way that makes the same no longer the same, the different no longer simply different... a breaking and joining at the same time’(1995, p.159)
Thus by referencing history and in Mama’s work the history of apartheid and colonialism, is an attempt to redress past wrongs towards primarily the black male body by racism and patriarchy. He focuses on the stereotypes coffered on the black male whilst showing a vulnerability that all human beings experience in the form of a black male body ‘under attack’ and black male body which is afraid and fragile. This particular clear in the video works *Un(hear)d* as well as *We are Afraid*.

The representation of the self goes beyond the race binary of black and white and it does take the form of geography as in the urban and rural and class within the race category. It also stretches the imagination in terms of what is an appropriated experience and that which is the direct experience of the artist. This is by commenting on the historical experience of the black man, in multiple geographical locations and time frames.

‘The work of transformation of the country involves the reshaping of its physical nature, its infrastructure, even a complete and programmatic rewriting of its history in the ongoing replacement of Afrikaner and white nationalist place names with those drawn from the black liberation struggle. And the obsession with race persists in the subtler identification of a person’s class position as a result of their alignment with middle class attitudes, cosmopolitan or urban dress codes, personal style, even ways of speaking’ (Vari, 2008, p. 130)

The multi sites of redress include the manner in which we relate to the past taking into cognisance the contemporary which gives access to multiple perspectives of history. Even the projects of transformation and in the case of South Africa which foreground multiple narratives starting with those which were previously oppressed, there is a danger in this “space clearing exercise” to sanction some and repressing others. Thus as it is relevant to try to find a common narrative or one that weaves in many narratives into one, it is equally so to acknowledge the contestations that are part of the same narrative.

The role of the creative in this space that is in transit is to define the process to show a way to where the future might look like. This is an onerous task and the artists have used their personal narratives to start this conversation about the past mostly in the contemporary space. There is hope that by understanding especially the immediate past, as most contemporary artist use that yardstick as a reference, we will be able to understand the collective self in a post- apartheid reality.

Ashraf Jamal in Predicaments of Culture in South Africa puts it succinctly when saying ‘My attempt, is not to address the new, but also to give credence to the old; to rethink and refigure a radical heterogeneity which precedes and exceeds the strategies of containment which have forge a restricted, diminished, and pathological conception of South Africa’s history, its present and its future.’ (2005, p. xii)
Mama says in the MTN New Contemporaries catalogue the year he won, 2003 ‘First and foremost, artists in South Africa have a greater responsibility than ever before to the country. Socially, artists need to open their minds more, and look at social involvement with local communities on issues of AIDS, poverty and unemployment. Artists have a power to communicate with people and can do so with the necessary resources. Historical and economic issues need to be treated more carefully—people need to know their history.’ (2000, p. 5)

This been a trend with black artists in particular who are speaking to the collective memory of the formerly oppressed. In the video art of Thando Mama this is clearly seen as using his body as a black man in South Africa. This black body is a tool to memorise in the same vein as monuments and commemorate sites are erected to memorise a particular moment in history which a nation deems as worthy.

‘One of the most powerful instances in which the body made a forceful appearance in contemporary South African art in the series of graphite drawings by Paul Stopforth based on the autopsy images of the body of Steve Biko, the Black Consciousness leader who died in police detention in 1977. In Elegy (1980), against a dull reddish-brown background Stopforth draws the prone, naked body of Biko laid out on a bare metal slab, fixed in death. This image of the dead Biko, like that of Andrea Mantegna’s great Dead Christ currently in the Kunsthistorisches Museum in Vienna, is as much an image of the death, trauma and violation of Biko as it is of him as martyred resistance fighter. As such the painting is simultaneously both elegiac and heroic’ (Enwezor, 2004, p. 34)

This artistic site of the black male body as the connotations of history as a departure for the re-telling of the South Africa story in the sense that it also becomes a site to critique cultural norms associated with the gendered roles of a black male in South Africa society. In process of self definition artists have gone back to cultural norms to revaluate their social role in the contemporary. This development is important in the sense that the black male artists are doing the critique of their cultural backgrounds and realities. And one can say that they have come up with the understanding that:

’There can be no coherent, essential monolithic, all-encompassing definition of masculinity. Rather, there are many masculinities or, as Judith Butler might argue, performances of masculinity’ (Greslé, 2004, p. 43)

Despite this understanding of multiple identities of depictions of masculinity there is still room for presenting a case for a black male in opposition to stereotypes that form their socialisation and how society expects from them to portray them beyond the South Africa experience. Thus there is space to argue that the personal narrative can inform one collective narrative that represents an identity. We assume that there is an intimate relationship with what he his representation which is a black male who is a global subject. This is based on the assumption that as another black man he
has a right and insight to represent the collective or the collective is part of his experience.

In search of ourselves we identify with the familiar to gain an understanding of our nature and the post-apartheid art production has been preoccupied with that search, coming from different angles. The point of critique might be where we find that familiar in a time of globalisation. In the case of Mama’s work as representation of the black man, the question will go back to who are his references as an artistic practice as a social practice cannot be practiced in isolation.

Dagmawi Woubshet in relation to Mama video Back to Me understands this reality as ‘the increasing African Americanization of global culture and taste, phenomena distinctly of our contemporary moment... African American popular culture in Africa seems inescapable. Suffice to say, it is a phenomenon that raises peculiar contradictions’ He goes on to point out the that ‘popular imagery challenges, for example, specious associations the world routinely makes vis-a-vis whiteness. And, isn’t there something to be said for finding one’s resemblance out there in the world, even if that identification is purely visual? Identification is a frontier creature, and contemporary popular culture is prying open a territory that the Eurocentric imaginary had tightly harnessed’ (2008, p. 133-134)

Thus one can say that the work of Mama borrows references from the black world with an assumption of the basic commonality of struggle for self-representation in particular. It also fair to assume that with the amount of American mass media proliferation in South Africa, especially in relation to television and films that depict black people this has been a major reference. In Mama’s work one can also say that critique and consumerism are becoming part of the same process.

‘The growth of awareness among South African blacks has often been ascribed to influence from the American ‘Negro’ movement. Yet it seems to me that this is a sequel to the attainment of independence by so many African states within so short a time.’ (Biko, 1996, p. 69)

Vasif Kortun in the catalogue of the 2nd Johannesburg Biennale themed Trade Routes makes and interesting observation by saying ‘Although the real fate of geographically and metagrammatically underprivileged Third Worlds is a mutual one, the only mode of communication that exists between them are forms of cultural expression delivered through media. So - as has been pointed out many times before- although the favelas in Rio de Janeiro mat strike similarities with slums of Cario or with some neighbourhoods in South Bronx, these nuclei are not linked by invisible wires that socialise and empower them. Their experiences are filtered through television, and their representations are already mediatised through the same channels for international legibility. These cultural situations are not where most contemporary art comes from, but they are where much contemporary art is derived from.’ (1997, p. 36)
Kortun critiques the assumption of commonality that Mama uses as he traces the commonality amongst black men to the oppressions of slavery, colonialism and apartheid, which black consciousness gave him a ‘readymade’ political discourse for his assumption.

According to Biko ‘Black Consciousness is an attitude of mind and a way of life, the most positive call to emanate from the black world for a long time. Its essence is the realisation by the black man of the need to rally together with his brothers around the cause of their oppression- the blackness of their skin’ (1996, p. 91-92)

The position of the black subject advocated by Biko is the position taken by Mama in his videos when it comes to the use of the black male figure as a representation of a universal black male. The relevance of this representation speaks to a South African moment of black assertiveness post 1994 and a celebratory mood within the black community. Thando Mama’s work do not address issues of reconciliation directly but rather advocates for transformation in favour of black South Africans based on the experiences of the black people globally. The work Happy Day is as close as he comes to discussing the issue.

His strategy in making a case for transformation has been to concentrate on the black male body. This concentration one can argue has produced a memorised figure. The methodology which lends to the argument for memorial is that of repetition of an action and/or a sound which evident in all this videos. Thus evoke notions of ritual and sacredness. Thus in a cultural sense he aims to infuse a humanity to what has been historically treated as inhuman, if we follow the logic of black consciousness.

Okwi Enwezor in the “South Africa in black and White” edition of Third Text Africa notes the following: ‘In the post-apartheid moment of national reconciliation, reconstruction and unification we have heard so much of the militant black subject who wants to change everything and remake the nation in the illusory image of black identity’ (2010, p. 24)

The difference in Mama’s male figures which departs from how the black male figure has be imagined as part of resistance politics is that instead of producing a physically strong and stoic image, his figures have a vulnerability to them. Thus in this sense one will argue that Mama he employs feminist critique in his representation of the black male body. Thus one can say the memorial figure is also a vulnerable figure, made vulnerable by the burden of history and expectations.

In the exhibition catalogue for one of the international contemporary South African art survey exhibition titled, Personal Effects Power and Poetics in Contemporary South African Art, Mama in 2004 explains the black male figures in his work as ‘I feel that people are still building now – they have that solid ground, but maybe they have this very fragile self that has been carried from that period, from that time. The
might break down at any moment, you never know, or maybe they’re being reinforced with a willingness to look forward to the future’ (Murinik, 2004, p.99)

Thus his male figure does not quite live up to the stereotype of the militant black man but gentle, with the same concerns and referencing the same texts. In surveying contemporary visual art produced by other black male South African artists who are his peers who are also concentrating of the black male figure. There is a commonality at looking at initiation practises, thus using the ethnic identity as an entry point to the debate of masculinity as represented by the black male body.

They deal with patriarchy by exposing the taboos, thus critiquing their ethnic communities and bringing the traditional aspects into a modern artistic practise. Curious enough Mama interacts with this traditional space in a very subtle manner, as part of the general landscape of his reality not as a specific identity to interrogate. It is in the sound of the video 1994 Next Movement, which in his oeuvre is an epic work in the sense that it draws all his concerns in one work.

One such artist’s who has been part of the group exhibitions with Mama is Churchill Madikida and this how he explains his practice of video and installation. ‘I use English, I use Xhosa, I use initiates’ language, which is so secrete that only people who’ve been through initiation will understand what I am saying. But the audience is given access at different levels. So I’m playing between the idea of secrete and public and sacred, and all those kind of things.’ (Murinik, 2004, p.82)

In the work of Thando Mama ethnic referencing is in the Xhosa language which is used in the content of the sound which is also reminiscent of struggle songs. This places the ethnic identity within black consciousness discourse, which pronounces black as a political identity inclusive to all black people who are fighting for the liberation of black people.

Apartheid created ethnic divisions in South Africa by the geographical and social construction of Bantustans. The Bantustan were and still are considered by many Black South Africans as preserves of ethnic languages, social and political systems, even though they were manipulated by the apartheid government to preserve apartheid’s social engineering. In a search for a traditional space in South African culture one needs to negotiate this falsity. One also needs to question the authenticity of traditional practice, thus open a line of critique based on the basic question of, if I accept what I have been socialised to believe is pre colonial practice am I sure that I am not condoning apartheid’s falsity? This is a line of critique that not many take in a hunger of a sense of historical identity which predates colonialism.

In addition to the hunger for this particular identity which for many answers the questions: who am I and where do I come from, there is a particular static understanding of the “traditional” identity, which has been fixed by the apartheid gaze.
In the *Third Text Africa* edition themes “Surveying South Africa” the Colin Richards says in relation to the apartheid gaze ‘Identity has been fixed by ‘nature’ backed by God. Every identity ... is prefixed by a static ethno-nationalist category. This fixation has maimed and crippled our cultural life. The identity may be dynamic has been foreclosed. That people might choose different identities in different situations has been denied. The cruel economics of the apartheid vision have dissected identity, inflating it’s alienated fragments into a grotesque wholeness’ (2009, p.130)

In the search for a black subjectivity especially within the visual arts which are seen as Eurocentric artist try to grapple with the idea of an ethnic identity. A positive manifestation of this ethnicity play into the South African projection of a ‘Rainbow Nation’ as there is a particular emphasises on cultural difference based not only on race but ethnicity as well. Been able to assume various identities as one sees fit it could be argued that in South Africa this position is seen as a privilege. In the case of Mama’s work to represent a vulnerable black male image, the one that defeats patriarchal stereotypes assumes choice in a society which is not used to the freedom of choice. It is a society used to the polarised reality of solidarity for survival and thus one is expected to assume identities that fit within a solidarity group.

Sachs in a paper titled ‘Preparing Ourselves for Freedom’ which came out in 1989 as quoted by Ashraf Jamal in *Predicaments of Culture in South Africa* says ‘We South Africans fight against real consciousness, apartheid consciousness, we know what we struggle against. It is there for all the world to see. But we don’t who we ourselves are.’ (2005, p. 2)

It is interesting to question if the black male figure in Mama’s video is a representation of the past, the hope, the future or can we say it is a current black male? We know that he is a hybrid being which is mediated, in the sense that he is amalgamation of images of black man as referenced by the artists. He is a historical figure by the mere presence in current times, as he is of a people who have been oppressed and have achieved political liberation.

It also interesting to look at Mama’s male figures from the perspective of what they are not telling us. We have no sense of the geographical location of this black man expect in one work where he included the Xhosa Language we are given a clue. In the times of globalisation especially within the visual art market where internationally recognised artists are highly mobile there is no given in terms of geographical location.

Bhabha warns us in an essay titled The Postcolonial and The Postmodern in the *Postcolonial Studies Reader* ‘The transmission of cultures of survival (by the cultures of survival he is referring to the cultures lived and the symbols produced by ‘those who have suffered the sentence of history- subjugation, domination, diaspora, displacement’ does not occur in the ordered *musee imaginaire* of national cultures
with their claims to continuity of an authentic ‘past’ and a living ‘present’. ’ (1995, p.190 -191)

A mediated space such as video art creates mobile hybrid images and by extension identities. Without the narrative behind those images they could be from anywhere in the globe, black males are part of many societies. They can represent directly and indirectly the histories of slavery and colonialism and even apartheid if ones looks at the idea behind the geographically specific practice in South Africa.

In the popular imagination the plight of the black man in South Africa has been one of violence and poverty thus he needs to pitied and fear in the same breath. In his videos Mama mentions the fear related to violence. The assumption is that one of the major contributors to the violence that is shown by black men relates to political, social and economic realities which by default makes him poor and powerless.

Are we then to assume that the male bodies in the videos are of powerless, poor black men who are feared and live in fear? Previously in I have mentioned the vulnerability of the figures, but Mama also speaks to both the feared and fearful experience. When he speaks to the fact that black men are feared on the assumption that they are violent he draws on the popular medium of hip-hop culture, as in the videos Back to me and The Revolution Is vol 1, 2, 3. The image of the revolutionary in the later work relates to how hop-hop culture has appropriated the same image to depict the culture as militant.

Bell Hooks sheds some light on the subject by saying ‘Cultures of domination, like the United States, are founded on the principle that violence is necessary for the maintenance of the status quo. Orlando Patterson emphasizes that long before any young black male acts violent he is born into a culture that condones violence as a means of social control, that identifies patriarchal masculinity by the will to do violence ‘ (2004, p. 49)

Thus the violent black man identity that is shown is mediated in the manner that it is represented, this does not mean that it is a false representation but a strategy to communicate a stereotype, which by depicting it in that stereotypical fashion the artist is leaving a clue for the audience as an entry point to the work. This is one reading but one can also point to the possible hindsight nature of the medium such video which critique mediated images and cannot distance itself from the actual object under criticism.

The images of violence are part of the South Africans psyche is one of the few things that South African share. In Mama’s work this violence is perpetrated against the back male. Thus the reality that the black man is both feared and causes fear is a double abuse. If one follows the logic of Hooks argument.
Clive Kallner wrote in the catalogue *Trade Routes* ‘Violence is a strong metaphor in contemporary South African cultural production. Images of the violation of woman (Breitz), references to townships (Hassan), guns (Bester) and tormented faces recur in various form from the collage to conceptual art (Geers). Visual and textual signs of art practices that encompass installation, conceptual art, performance and relatively new media are becoming part of the national norm.’ (1997, p. 30)

This particular binary representation of the black male has in a way produced a fetish image of the black subject in the gaze of the white, coloniser, slave master, basically those who are the custodian of patriarchal power when we speak on a global scale.

According to Bell Hooks in *Black Looks race and representation* ‘Speaking about his recent film *The Camp at Thiaroye*, African filmmaker Ousamane Sembene explains: “You must understand that for people like us, there are no such things as models. We are called upon to constantly create our models. For African people, Africans in the diaspora, it’s pretty much the same. Colonialism means that we must always rethink everything.” Challenged to rethink, insurgent black intellectuals and/or artists are looking at new ways to write and talk about race and representation, working to transform the image.’ (1992, p. 2)

Thus one can say that Mama in the representation of the images of the black male figure, knowing the loaded meanings ascribed black male bodies and the multiple identities that it evokes, he also aims to initiate discourse around this image. This is through referencing black history to give context and a nuance understanding of the black subject. As well as speaking in a contemporary language of popular culture and the mediated arts.

The use of the body as site of political and social interrogation is evident from the early stages of the video art movement in the west during the 60’s and 70’s. As well as a feminist intervention which introduced intimacy and flexibility in video making. Feminist artists could record the most personal footage because they could take the medium to a private space like the home. Thus narratives of vulnerability became possible to work with and they were depicted firstly outside the public space.

This body has been also commercialised in the time of hyper capitalism where cultural identity has a commercial value. The black body in South African visual history has been a site of curiosity, abuse and awe and this body has been largely been represented by white anthropologists and institutions of power. Thus the black body is a mostly for black artist a first space to reclaim its ownership and to use it to again access to a symbolic transformation.

In looking for social meaning in a work of art according to the tradition of aesthetics is irrelevant in this case but, since art is a social product one cannot but highlight this contradiction. The social realistic art which Mama practices has that potential of creating an appreciation of art in technology weak spaces by the fact that the art
itself is technologically mediated in a modern time of fascination with technology. The value of art should be on what it is communicating and the effectiveness of the methodology it employs in its creative process.

Thus the communicative value of the human body transcends the visual art space by linking it to the performing arts which in our social context is more immediate. This strategy does not diminish the value of the video art work but gives it an ability to be agile which should increase it value.

In a catalogue of a South African contemporary art survey exhibition titled *A Decade of Democracy* Rory bester says; ‘It is proliferation of highly visible media forums (in combination with academic specialisation) that has disarmed the accuracies of public discourse. It is testimony to the overlapping discursive practices of media and art that artists are able to disarm whatever negative effects the media have on generating rich and diverse forms of public intellectual life. It must be said, however, that in spite of this crossover, there is a tension between media and art in exhibition spaces, between the need for simple and clear messaging in the former and desire for conceptualism and abstraction in the latter’ (2004, p. 26)

**Visual Art Industry**

In understanding Thando Mama’s creative process ones needs to acknowledge the players in the South African visual arts industries mainly universities, museums, galleries curators as well as art critics who are the link to the popular media space are the custodian of the industry. They have the power to coffer value to one’s creativity. These custodians combined power decides which artists should and why should they enter the domestic and global art market. In a global art market they also set the thematic focus on what should be considered contemporary art.

Post 1994 South African artists have been having accessing to the global art market even though that footprint is relatively small if one compares it to the developed nations who have a larger number of art consumers, thus control the art market. By consumer the assumption of this paper is those who buy art as well as those who view art without buying.

According to a 2010 research report produced by Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC) for the South African Department of Arts and Culture:

‘Both the domestic and international consumption base for South African visual art is small by international standards, relative to both advanced economies and the rapid expanding economies of India and China. As the Chinese and Indian examples make clear, growth in the art market is very directly linked to growth in the wider economy ... At present, very few galleries are able to promote artists that they work
with or represent internationally, owing to the substantial cost associated with attending at art fairs and other trade events. (2010, p. 10-11)

One can say in the case of the South Africa visual arts there is domestic market which fall within a lower range price tag but with the potential to gain value as the artists becomes internationally recognised. The international status for an artist is normally achieved by been represented by a major gallery and been collected by reputable collectors and auction house in Europe and the United States. As well as been selected by curator to show at a mega-exhibition which usually take the format of biennales or art fairs and there are more biennales and they cover a relatively larger geographical spread than art fairs. This system by its nature and the logic of capitalism allows only few artists with high levels of cultural and social capital access to that platform. The different biennales have their own currency which largely dependent of the cultural capital of the curator(s).

In reviewing the one major mega-exhibition titled Africa Remix that has represented African contemporary Rory Bester for Nka Journal of Contemporary African art states on its travel to Johannesburg : ‘as a group show that in its fullest form included eighty-five artists from the continent and diaspora, Africa Remix is on a scale the of which the city has not seen since Okwui Enwezor’s second Johannesburg Biennale in 1997. Because this was a code so easy to read, Africa Remix’s opening night brought unprecedented numbers to the city’s downtown area, where the Johannesburg Art Gallery (JAG) usually struggle to cobble together opening-night crowds. ... usually unmixing art audiences came together in a single night in recognition of an exhibition’s accumulated capital. Which Bester points out the ‘accumulated capital’ to include ‘the famous curator... world toured exhibition... state of the art catalogue with critical essays... funding’ (2008, p. 82)

There are arguments supporting the notion that South Africa rushed blindly to join the global art market as they do not set the agenda or are amongst the countries that are part of the decision making process. But when you look at the African art market South Africa is the leader. Not only in visual art infrastructure, which include the institutions which create value for artists according to the mentioned industry as mentioned above but also funding institutions. Thus this relative position of privileged has allow South African artists to experiment with various art mediums which brings them closer to the global art market.

An art form like video art which does not have an exclusive domestic market, but is gaining audience value due to its link with the technological savvy or fascinated generation falls outside this market. It becomes art that does not sell as it does not hold value according to the principles of supply and demand, but gives contemporary currency for its practitioners.

The advent of democracy in South Africa did make the country an international curiosity and thus the interest in art from South Africa. The seminal exhibitions that
Thando Mama partaken in where South Africa was celebrating a decade of democracy are .ZA Govane Art dal Suid Afrika in 2008 and Personal Affects: Power in and poetics in contemporary South African Art in 2004. These exhibition were produced as a survey of South Africa art at a time where South Africa was been recognised in the global art market as a marker for African art.

Even though there has been a shift in the manner that the international Biennales are structured which is a move away from country representation in the 1990’s to themes this has not stop the international trend of focusing in particular geographical spaces for inspiration. This is similar to how we have learned to decode the world especially by tracing cultural origins of people and their cultural products based on history and geography. Globalisation due to advance communication technologies have made this search and decoding easier but one can also say has also made it superficial.

‘The shifting global terrain is also evident in how other Biennales and mega-exhibitions are motivated and organised. This is particularly conspicuous in relation to the Venice Biennale and Documenta X, as they have been around longer. Both exhibitions have changed their curatorial approach from exhibiting the art of different countries in the national pavilions to curating according to themes; in the later approach, the criterion for contributing to a particular exhibition would be the relevance of a particular artist’s work to the theme, rather than his or her country of origin.... in choosing those ... themes, the curators have not only been able to circumvent having to dwell on issues of national concern, but they underscore the relevance of the Biennales in the context of globalisation.’ (Duncan, 2001, p. 287-288)

One can say that this is a way that the visual art world is supporting the argument that globalisation has brought the world together. The notion that artists have similar concerns thus the national particular realities do not feature in the global art market. In a sense it is saying that an artist practicing contemporary art in order to be successful needs to be globally mobile and have access to the currency of the information age and/ or in close proximity to the contemporary art centres. The term contemporary art itself assumes this kind of access since a work of art needs to demonstrate access to global information technology and some knowledge of the practises of the contemporary art centres.

As much has this is a general argument for a global ideal, art still has the tradition of its value been attributed to a sense of authenticity and how does highly mediates art show this value?

‘ this approach has been termed the ‘glocal’ which is identified as... the most pressing issues for curators today, at least to the extent that success at integrating one’s local realities with those of the world at large is fast becoming the only sure
way to maintain a community’s standing in the race for global relevance.’ (Duncan, 2001, p. 288)

It also important to realise that the process of been part of the global is more leaning towards the practice of producing art that is considered consumerable to the taste of those who economically support the industry. This trend can be balance by governmental art developmental support thus creating a diversified consumer base. In the hope that this consumer base will in future influence the art market by creating local demand for art products whether that locality is defined as national or continental. The other projection is to work towards alternative spaces for art production and consuming which can set its own producer lead standards, basically a model promoting a variety is healthier for the visual arts industry as it is more inclusive.

Paul Gilroy in *Trade routes* points out that ‘There is more to be done in order to disabuse ourselves of the illusions that follow from a sedentary understanding of cultural-making. We do not have to be content with the half-way house provided by the idea of plural culture. A theory of relational cultures, and of culture as relation, represents a more worthwhile resting place. That possibility is blocked by the banal invocation of ‘hybridity’, which everything becomes equally and continuously intermixed, blending into an impossibly uniformed consistency’ (1997, p. 25)

Should not the value of art be ascribed to its ability foster a universal understanding and sharing of experiences? Is it not a more authentic method of art production? Is the norm of placing the high value to art that speak of peculiarities thus seen as original and authentic problematic?

These questions above brings us to the distinctions between that what is called high culture and what is seen as low culture and the relevance of such distinctions when talking about art forms of the contemporary. In the sense that these art forms immediately are part of the creative industry as in most cases are conscious of their commercial value, but still reference traditional art forms as in the case of Thando Mama’s videos. He mentions trying to emulate a painterly feel in his work, especially that work that is in full colour namely: *The Revolution is vol 1,2,3, Back to Me, Happy Day and Prayer*.

In paraphrasing Bourdieu in his work on cultural capital in *Distinction A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste* he says that art value is a product of accumulated cultural capital through the networks that an artist’s is exposed too. And he further articulates that it has to be networks that have high cultural capital. The visual art industry is the contemporary space that represents that high capital.

‘This example of the difficult insertion of Andy Warhol into the domain covered by art history also makes clear that cultural and visual studies is not, as is often assumed, restricted to privileging objects or practices from popular or mass culture. It is only
that these objects and practices are no longer excluded. They can be discussed in juxtaposition to or within the same framework as objects and practices of literature or high art. This is not because there are no differences between popular, mass-produced objects and those traditionally construed as 'fine art' but because they arise from the same issues and raise similar questions, which transgress the restricted scope of singular genealogy of either class of object' (Van Alphen, 2005, p. xiv)

One can say that video art is both contemporary practice as well as a ‘fine art’ as well as an innovative way of bringing mass media aware audiences into the visual arts. It is also fair to rearticulate that part of the creative practice of artists is experimenting with materials that are available in their social environment and video art development is part of this process. Thus both the experimentation of the artists and communicating with an audience are parts of the creative process as they are co-dependent to artistic practice.

In an analysis of Hurbet Damisch’s -an art historian- work on art works as thinking Ernest van Alphen says; ‘as beholder, one is invited to think “with” the work of art, which means that one is compelled to start a dialogue with it by articulating questions of a more general- for instance, philosophical, political, or social-nature. Only when the beholder of art poses these kinds of questions will the work of art release its ideas.’ (Van Alphen, 2005, p. 4)

In the process of consuming a work of art one takes the thought process of the art work which its totality is the intention of the artists as well as the audience’s perception of the work. In as much as it is an honest understanding that a work of art is complete without the gaze of the audience influencing the artist’s creative process, it is an incomplete assumption in a time of the contemporary.

The creative process is also an expression of the “industry” it operates in. The visual art still submits to the history of the discipline, for an example when engaging with Mama’s work one needs to be open to the conceptual aspect of the work to understand its critical relevance. The engagement with popular media like television is in the clues that in a sense and to an observant eye are the bridge connecting the art and popular media.

In looking at the visual art within the creative industry is to also having to engage with its potentiality as a popular medium. The concept industry links the space to consumption and the commercial space even though the visual arts industry is based on scarcity as commercial value as opposed to mass production. It is also a critical space where cultural value is measured on the criticality of the product. But like all products there is some art which does well in the market place and some art which does not have a consumer base.
In the South African visual arts industry there is a minimum income generating potential from video art. The majority of contemporary artists use the medium as an accompaniment for traditional art mediums, like painting and sculpture. There is a fascination for video within the visual arts as there will always be a fascination for new technologies, but this has not translated to been a collectable art work, mainly due to the speed that technologies change. This means that it is difficult to preserve and this goes against the very notion of collecting art which is based on its appreciation value, thus an art work that depreciate defeats this logic.

Besides this production reality in its contemporary time this art medium has the potential to communicate widely in terms of a global audiences and domestic audiences that will not normally appreciate the content of art works. It has shifted the way art is received through its link to television and film industries as it transverses these spaces. The content of Mama’s work speaks to this multiple viewing points for the medium as it samples them as points to appreciating his art.

In our conversation Thando Mama as never sold a video art work but the video work 1994 Next Movement has been collected by Iziko, South Africa’s national museum, which speaks to the relevance of this work as part of the South African archive.

Video art as technologically mediated art practice is a cultural hybrid system in its creation as it involves the culture of its ‘traditional’ creators - illustrates in this first chapter of this paper- as well as the technology ( in terms of knowledge’s) of its users and developers which do not necessarily have the dominant space in global power dynamics. The economy of trust which is support by the theory of social capital has been one of the major driving forces of the practice of video art as it transgresses the work of art and broadcast media with a particular bias to experimentation. One can say it works a bit like open source software.

‘A free software project relies on individual contributions being made by contributors who are good at what they do. With a bit of glue to stick things together, this leads to a combined software system of high quality, even if the individual components are very different – and require very different skills to create. The test of the open source process is if the software that emerges at the end works’ (Ghosh, 2005, p. 5)

In the developing nations with South Africa as an exemplar in the African context at this time the society becomes increasingly more polarised. Those who have access to the products been distributed by the monopolies are associated with higher incomes and better knowledge and those who are perceived to be poor economically are seen to be unknowledgeable. These internal divisions are the roots of class struggles which have spilled over to the cultural sphere.

‘The diversification of the service industry in the 1970s and ensuing deregulation of the market expanded the offer of cultural services and further increased the potential for consumer culture as leisure.... the consumption of culture is tied to economic
achievements. ... Expanded cultural consumption consolidates the mass market for creative goods and reiterates the trend towards the transformation of culture into tradable commodities.... When cultural consumption is viewed in the context of this modernization paradigm, developing countries are usually relegated to the position of consumers of imported cultural goods and services and producers of folklore' (Barrowclough & Kozul-Wright, 2008, p. 313)

As much as they is high consumption of imported creative products in developing nations that reality has be created by low competitiveness of domestic products by systemic undermining local tastes and aesthetics. On the one hand this has lead to the phenomena of reproducing what seen as popular in the market but not meeting the standards that makes the work compatible thus the notion of 'cheap imitation.' Which is the narrative of modernisation and as well as globalisation that a product is developed in the technology rich nations and distributed to the rest of the world who act as receivers try and imitate that product or technology.

Thus there arise the questions of creative authenticity and understanding as it is mentioned earlier in the paper that all technology carries the culture of its producers. This observation does not negate the fact that the high mobility world we live in as created high diffusion of experiences and knowledge thus there is nothing like cultural purity. But power is still concentrated within certain cultural spaces and that is controlled by those spaces, not distributed as widely as the cultural products it creates. Even though the concept of the glocal proposes that the local version is unique, as it is a new product that can speak to the global space whilst preserving a local authenticity.

According to David Hesmondhalgh in The Cultural Industries, this could be attributed to the state been active in the creative industries and the popularity of television post World War Two. The United States invested in its creative industries whilst Europe was recovery from the war.

‘Foreign aid from the USA in the post-war period was tied to stipulations that its cultural exports would be permitted. In addition, the US state contributed enormously to the development of communications infrastructure, such as satellitess... and interventions by the state on behalf of the copyrights interests of cultural industry corporations’ (2007, p. 14)

As much as the individual is the unit agent of their world that one agent is not a power base in a world where social change is about transforming institutions of power. This is a process which needs lobbying and advocacy initiatives. In a world where if you do not have the legitimised resources, numbers and popularity is the next best thing. Power which benefits and exclude by its nature. The developing nations have since struggled with institutions of power and it is still the case today evident in corrupt state institutions as an example. Thus one can expect institutions linked to the creative industries to be immune to the prevalent social ills.
‘The important legitimating symbols of our culture are mediated through a social structure that is largely controlled by centralized, moneyed organizations. This is especially true of our information universe whose mass market is pretty much monopolized by corporate-owned media.’ (Parenti, 2006, p.125)

Thus video artists - if you look at the history of the art medium as articulated in the first chapter of this paper- operated as collectives to create a support system for their practice. This is not new to the video art as art history is periodised by art movements who operated a collective fashion such as the impressionists to the surrealists as so forth.

Thando Mama practiced within a now defunct art collective, 3rd Eye Vision between the years 2001 and 2004, which was a collective base in Durban South African including visual artists, musicians, writers and fashion designers. The history of African art there has been collectives which are either working within a certain visual art medium to promote their practice and act as each other’s networks, such as the Photographer’s collectives in West Africa. In South African cultural political history there have been art collectives that were multidisciplinary which were creating art that deal with issues concerning the liberation struggle such as Medu.

‘There are only a handful of independent, artists-driven and non-profit project spaces and residency programmes around the country with a primary mission around the exposure of new talent, new ways of working and international exchange and collaboration outside of a commercial, profit-driven framework. These organisations play a critical role in the overall ecology of the visual arts, but operate within a funding environment that is inimical to not only the proliferation and growth of these entities, but also to the basic survival of the few that exist.’ (2010, p. 15 HSRC)

Taking into mind that creative industries are trading in what can be called leisure goods which are reliant on disposable income. This is the core struggle within these industries especially in developing nations and it has and still is a major task of expanding its value to the spiritual well being and intellectual progress of a society. It calls to those in society who does have this disposable income to invest in this intellectual value for the social good. The United States as an industry leader is a case in point on one method to insure investment in its creative industries.

The active government intervention in the creative industries in the United States through foreign policy is both a safeguard and a marketer of domestic products. The issue that needs debate and intervention in this global economy is ascribing a different meaning to fair trade. This is the content of cultural diversity policy documents, but in the global south the ideal market for these diverse products is the global north thus we capitalism ascribes this should meet the tastes for the consumer. The question is what kind of fairness we are focusing on when we speak for developing the creative industries in developing nations and regions?
The creative industries have been seen to have that potential to use old cultural knowledge and skills in an innovative manner as well as engaging with the new technologies.

‘They are beginning to be seen as a way of generating local communities and catalysing entire cities; of diversifying and repositioning traditional or regressing economies; of boosting human capital, skills levels and innovation; and opening a door to the global knowledge economy’ (Barrowclough and Kozul-Wright 2008: 4)

It also important to point the core value of creative production which usually is not clearly articulated at cultural policy level as the focus of developing nations is in the tangible outcomes on any resources spent.

‘Aside from the important real and potential contributions that the visual arts make in, for example, education, public health and urban development, the core contribution of the sector revolves around the generation of compelling representations and propositions related to our understanding of who we are in a complex and rapidly changing world.’ (2010, p. 7 HSRC)

Such instruments are a space for international cooperation even though one can argue that the global north has an advantage as the owner of the communication tools especially the new ones. The Asia continent is an exemplar on how state intervention through policy is changing the global power base within the creative industries. The African creative industries are in fluxed by products from nations developed and developing which have achieved certain levels of ICT development and strategies that promote globalisation at the benefit of its creative sectors.

In light of the value of human solidarity which has proven in history to be able to change power dynamics especially within the liberation struggles ones need to take ones networks as capital to resource social change. Even though one may argue that networks are also exclusive as they largely rely on the currency of trust and institutional trust is based on track record or power in the area of operation. Thus at a micro level it is strategic to build communities of trust and mutual support. The institutions may be operating at a level removed from operators/creative workers. The bureaucratic processes are by large and far complex from social agents or artists unless they are familiar with their operations. This highlights the value of lobby groups and the networks which are created through such efforts. In the case of video artists’ collectives there are lessons to be learned.

The creative process is informed by the artist’s engagement with his immediate community and how that community can be a reference group whilst providing the knowledge necessary to create. This community stretches from an institution such as the tertiary institution providing the initial skills to networks of artists as they provide the discourse and resource support, relevant to the actual environment of the work.
Castells in *The Rise of the Network Society* succinctly explains the workings of a network referring to information technology by saying:

‘... networking logic is needed to structure the unstructured while preserving flexibility, since the unstructured is the driving force of innovation in human activity. Moreover, when networks diffuse, their growth becomes exponential, as the benefits of being in the network grow exponentially, because of the greater number of connections, and the cost grows in a linear pattern. Beside, the penalty for being outside the network increases with the network’s growth because of the declining number of opportunities in reaching other elements outside the network’ (2006, p. 70)

In a world of inequality it is relevant to note that the value of networks themselves is not immune to the influences of dominant cultures. If the idea is to used ones connection for ones advancement the connection should have the necessary social capital to be of value. In a case of the visual arts sector in South Africa valuable connections could be those that links one to knowledge in terms of latest practices and the global market for exhibition and residency programmes. This is dependent on what the market dictates as innovative practices and markets by legitimising certain practices and geographical locations and its discourses at a particular time. In a time of globalisation as a development model the market as a means of global social and economic ordering plays an important role.

‘... dominant functions and process in the Information Age are increasingly organised around networks. Networks constitute the new social morphology of our societies, and the diffusion of networking logic substantially modifies the operations and outcomes in processes of production, experience, power and culture’ (Castells, 2006, p. 500)

The art forms such as video art if looked as a product on its own it falls out of the current scope of the creative industries. If it is looked as a set of skills which can lend to related industries such as audiovisual, music, software and advertising which are at the core of the industries than it has a competitive chance. Due to video art’s close relationship with technology which afford it to be replicable and easy transportable through the internet. This has the fascination of the art world had with the new technologies in the 1960’s and 1970’s and it still holds ground today. The possibility of broadcasting video art thus been part of the media industry was also on the minds of the early video artists and the intention of the artists was the possibility of reaching an audience beyond ones community.

‘the appeal of creative industries to policy-makers come from the many externalities which creative industries has produce, but also from the fact that the consumption of creative goods and services has become a form of social participation with particular appeal to the various Diasporas of the globalized economy’ (Barrowclough & Kozul-Wright, 2008, p. 306)
The realities of growing a creative industry in a technologically weak context is that access to markets becomes difficult even though starting barriers are much more favourable. Such a weakness also indicates weak global connectivity which means that county or location is on the negative side of the digital divide. This scenario perpetuate the inequality of some nations or location been consumer or audience for other countries and location without having the same access for their markets. This situation might be beneficial in the immediate term for those holding monopolies, but on a social level their domestic audiences become increasingly knowledge poor as their understanding of the increasingly globalising world is one dimensional.

Conclusion

An artist is a reflection of his social conditioning if we have to follow arguments within the discipline of the social sciences, like all human beings. In the case of this paper the research further says that the social conditions which produces one's social capital greatly contributes to an artist's life span in addition to talent.

In an interview I had with Mama he categorically stated that the creative process of an artist only refers to the making of the art work, this excludes research and the taking of the work to the market place.

He defined a creative process as ' how to best represent something.... It's about presentation.... You need to keep a key point that is why you need to know your theme, your subject matter, one to two issues that you want to say, it could revolve around a character, a setting/place or them.... When creating something you thinking about best materials to push the work, for an example best paper, filters, canvas, paint that responds to what you want to do as your creative process. You find yourself been engages in the process, the most satisfying is too immense yourself in that process until you basically just tied and you want to do something else.' (T. Mama, personal communication, August 29, 2009)

We differ on this point as I say that the whole process from the idea of creating a work of art to its production and even showing and selling the work is part of the creative process and each step informs the other and eventually links back to the production of the next work.

The time, resources and the knowledge gain in this process makes the artists skills set, including the interaction with the creative industry which most successful artist leave to curators and/or gallerists. This aspect is the financial capital that makes production of other works possible. Creative work does not happen out of context to the social reality of the artists. The choices that an artist makes is aided or limited by access to the necessary resources. If we look at the case of Thando Mama's work one has to recognise the manner he has acquired these said resources that place
him in high cultural capital institutions, including a tertiary institution that provided his introduction to video art which is recognized in its higher education community as worthy to offer such tuition to its students. This takes us to the social networks that come with such institutions in the form of fellow students, teachers, the gallery space and technical infrastructure that enable the first videos. This also includes recognition as an artists and awards that infer that he is a good artist.

It is a common lament that South Africa and Durban in particular where Mama started his career as an artist has little catchment spaces for artists post tertiary institutions. They are a few galleries and in the past been not interested in experimental art which is hard to place a price tag on. This situation is said to be more difficult for black artists who do not have access to informal network with high financial a cultural capital. This been the case some artists find means and ways to break out of this mould by creating social capital rich spaces which facilitated their careers.

Thando Mama and the research met as members of an art collective which is now defunct called 3rd Eye Vision. The collective organised shows that were multi-disciplinary to include all its members and those who wish to be associated. Thus provided a space for artists to practice, network with each other through each other access resources which might be in the custodian of tertiary institutions, galleries or others with recognised cultural capital. In the spirit similar to the early video collectives of the 60s and 70 mentioned in this paper what each had access too it was shared for the advancement of the arts, especially black people.

It was a testimony of the political climate in the arts of wanting to represent ourselves and our stories as black people and to learn from each other. Mama says when referring to political influence in his work, which as the general approach that 3rd Eye Vision expressed without categorically taking a formal stand on the issue '... what it means to be black in a society that is dominated by whatever mainstream... but not activism, not trying to save the world or trying to get as much support for a cause through this kind of work. It was purely conceptual...' (T. Mama, personal communication, August 29, 2009)

The notion of Sankofa was a prominent motivator for the collective as it loosely means looking back to your past to understand where you are going. The collective had a mix for older more experienced artists and younger artists who were at the beginning of their art careers and this also speak to learning from those who have travelled the past and also new ways through experimentation that the younger members were interested in.

Thus collaborative work was most of the work produced, even though artist maintained their individual practices for financial stability and prosperity within the creative industry. The influence of 3rd Eye Vision went beyond its life span to
fostering close friendships, artists' collaboration and means of some of its member to be able to speak a language that is broader that one's chosen art discipline.

In the manner similar to most artists collectives mentioned in this paper the pull of industry and the actual necessity to travel as an artist’s to increase your own social capital dissolved the collective. The capitalist spaces we live and work in accommodates individuals more than groups and as social begins in this contemporary time we have been conditioned to place importance on the individual more than the collective. Thus for the sake of survival in the creative industry and financially member went in various directions. The strong ties and accumulated weak ties which are part of Thando Mama’s social capital speak to his interaction with various formal and informal cultural institutions.

In the time that the visual arts industry has coffered recognition for Thando’s work notable with the work in produce of the celebration on 10 years of democracy in South Africa in 2004, one maybe ask what happens after you have reached that stage in your career? This industry is fickle especially if you do not have the backing of a gallery which acts as manger and marketer of your artistic products. It is a common lament by visual artists that gallerists exploit their artists by charging high commission, the standard been in the region of 30%. As well as using 'star' - meaning the young experimental artists whose work does not have a buying market but draws audiences draw to their galleries and shows -even though that might be a 'front' as their revue is derived from more traditional art like painting and sculpture and established names in the market.

Thus some artists out of chose have chosen to work outside the gallery system, but Mama has been particular about a approaching a black gallerist in the spirit of the preoccupation of his work and in South Africa at the time of this attempt in 2006, there was only one black gallerist, which is Gallery Momo in Johannesburg.

‘The poor working conditions and rewards for creative work have been obscured by the fact that, in the complex professional era, very generous rewards are available for symbol creators who achieve name recognition in the minds of audience members. This over rewarding of stars derives in part from the need to confront risk through branding’ (Hesmondhalgh 2002, p. 58)

Even though artists in South Africa struggle with identifying themselves as workers with the association of having an employer and also the fact that creative workers do not fall neatly to the definition of worker based on the normative industrial worker. On a psychological level I will say there is an assumption that this identification will erase the privileged autonomy that artists associate themselves with and thus broadly understood to have by society.

‘the spaces in which fine art circulates are, of course, similarly delimited and are circumscribed by such factors as the art market and its institutions and by its
recourse to a visual language that rely on a vocabulary truly accessible only to a cognoscente. At the same time, artists operate within a highly privileged realm that provides a certain license (which is not to say that they do not take real risks), and this sometimes enables them to work through taboos and contradictions in a relatively 'safe' space in ways that other arenas do not permit.’ (Coombes, 2003, p. 12)

Thando Mama is an experimental artist according to the visual arts industry as video works do not have a market outside of large institutions, like National Galleries or Museum and they are not avid collectors of such works in South Africa. This has been attributed to low art commissioning and buying budgets with most of the budget dedicated to maintain personnel and physical infrastructure.

This particular industry is based on creating scarcity of its products as means of providing its incomes by selling symbolic high value products and high costs and is averse to mass production as it undervalues these symbol products. This comes back to the tension mentioned in the first chapter of this paper that video has with the visual arts. Video by its nature is reducible, transferable thus is easy to mass produce and more over the technology it is based on becomes outdated overtime. Thus the industry is hasn't been able to solve this tension of how do you ensure increased value or posterity of video works. The functioning logic used is to limit the number of copies to create scarcity but preservation for posterity is still a challenge.

Thus Mama like many artists who are facing the same challenge and have skills which are transferable to other work in the industry is employed in a technical capacity in one of the cultural institutions in Cape Town. His current challenge is balancing the time he spends been employed and time dedicated to creating new visual art work. Video because of its technological demands is an expensive medium and it is hard to accessing the necessary resources.

South Africa has very little public funding for the arts and the arts are largely funded privately or by international cultural organizations. In order to even access this small pool of funding specific technical skills are required from artists outside creating art works. There is a big gap which could be filled by professional development programs, but the funding pot also needs to grow. One’s social networks can only help so far they need a viable climate to function

‘The negative properties of networks have long been known among social scientists. Group identification can also involve stereotyping of outsiders, with damaging consequences... We have also seen that bridging social capital can nurture insider networks and thus reproduce inequality’ (Field, 2003, p. 83-88)

Taking the negative side of Social Capital it is important to remember that in a context of cultural struggle on relies on those one can trust and communities are built
on the same understandings. Thus one’s networks chosen or not have the capacity to enhance your life or become a hindrance in accessing what seen as different.

Video art by its nature is a hybrid art form incorporating the high art value of the visual arts as well as the low art value of the popular medium of television. In his creative process Thando Mama uses this hybrid quality of the medium and it’s the medium’s vice and attraction for its users.

The representation of blackness in South Africa art is valued by all artists whether regardless to the sentiments of artists like Thando Mama, who feels that black experience can only be legitimately represented by black people. Even though there is a limited current interest of extending the concept of identity representation by white South African artist to represent whiteness as a political statement outside of the norm of representing self identity without calling it whiteness. The current art market that is selling South African art is largely selling to the European and United States market. There is also an assumption based on South Africa’s recent political history, that South African art is black art.

The concept of freedom of expression is been challenged by the question, who has the right to represent who in their artistic work? This has been a thorny point in the cultural struggle in South Africa. In the past it has be largely those who have access to resource had the power to represent who they choose to represent. In contemporary art that has not change it has just been challenged.

Thando’s video beyond the intention of the artist speaks of not only the chosen subject matter of the artists but because of its relation to its social environment it could be read in multiple ways. It is a representation of the preoccupation of the art world with the legacy of apartheid and artists who used that as a departure point in their work. Issues of masculinity are part of his work which speaks of the burdens of been a black which encompasses arrange of gender identity politics.

The work is indirectly a testament of how collectivity can intellectually contribute to a creative process. How ones social capital can coffer legitimacy to an artist’s work as well as bring audiences beyond those directly involve in the creative process and documentation of the work.

Video Art is an art form that does not generate financial stability for the artists, but can pave a way through its status as highly technical and experimental art form thus has high cultural capital. It as the scarcity value as South Africa does not have many practicing video artists beyond documentation purposes. It potential as communicator between popular media like broadcasting and the visual arts has not been given much of an opportunity, but video art students in tertiary institution are groomed for the private sectors of advertising and film production. Thus its job creation potential is been promoted in institutions that teach the medium. This
particular link is a direct response to national policy to producing skills that relate to the job market.

Bibliography


