The Anthropology of Art and the Art of Anthropology - a Complex relationship

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by

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Thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree

Master of Philosophy

in the

Department of Sociology and Social Anthropology

at the

University of Stellenbosch

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March 2008

DECLARATION

I, the undersigned, hereby declare that the work contained in this assignment is my own original work and that I have not previously in its entirety or past submitted it at any university for a degree.

Signature:  Date: 28 February 2008

Abstract

It has been said that anthropology operates in “liminal spaces” which can be defined as “spaces between disciplines”. This study will explore the space where the fields of art and anthropology meet in order to discover the epistemological and representational challenges that arise from this encounter. The common ground on which art and anthropology engage can be defined in terms of their observational and knowledge producing practices. Both art and anthropology rely on observational skills and varying forms of visual literacy to collect and represent data. Anthropologists represent their data mostly in written form by means of ethnographic accounts, and artists represent their findings by means of imaginative artistic mediums such as painting, sculpture, filmmaking and music. Following the so-called ‘ethnographic turn’, contemporary artists have adopted an ‘anthropological’ gaze, including methodologies, such as fieldwork, in their appropriation of other cultures. Anthropologists, on the other hand, in the wake of the ‘writing culture’ critique of the 1980s, are starting to explore new forms of visual research and representational practices that go beyond written texts.

The thesis will argue that by combining observational and knowledge procuding practices, both anthropology and art can overcome the limits that are inherent present in their representational practices. By drawing on the implications that complexity theory has to offer, anthropology and art can work together in order to offer solutions to problems of presentation that emerge when dealing with complex issues. As an example of such a complex situation, the representational practices of artists engaging in art activism *vis à vis* the onslaught of the HIV/Aids epidemic in South African will be examined.

By combining the methodologies and knowlegde generating practices of art and anthropology, a space is opened in which we can attempt to represent the complex realities of people’s struggle to give meaning to their lives in ways that do not reduce them to scientific statistics or documented reports. Acting from such a position allows us to see besides the taken for granted and challenge us to explore the field of possibilities in new ways. And, as will be argued, therein lies the invitation to reform and to revolutionize our ways of knowing and seeing the world.

Opsomming

Daar word gesê dat antropologie in die spasie tussen grense (*liminal spaces*) funksioneer. Hierdie ruimte kan definieer word as die “ruimte tussen vakgebiede”. Hierdie studie sal die ruimte bestudeer waar die vakgebiede van kuns en antropologie mekaar ontmoet ten einde te ontdek watter epistemologiese en representatiewe uitdagings deur hierdie ontmoeting tot stand kom. Die gemeenskaplike gebied waarin antropologie en kuns met mekaar in gesprek tree, kan omskryf word in terme van die waarnemingspraktyke en die praktyke wat kennis produseer. Beide kuns en antropologie vertrou op waarnemingsvaardighede en verskeie vorme van visuele geletterdheid ten einde data te versamel en voor te stel. Antropoloë publiseer hul data meesal in geskrewe vorm deur middel van etnografiese verslae, en kunstenaars stel hulle bevindinge voor deur middel van kreatiewe en artistieke mediums soos byvoorbeeld deur skilderye, beeldhouwerk, die vervaardiging van films en musiek.

Na die sogenaamde “ethnographic turn” in die vakgebied van kuns, het kontemporêre kunstenaars begin om antropologiese navorsingsmetodes soos veldwerk, te implementeer. Anthropoloë is op hul beurt beïnvloed deur die “writing culture” beweging van die 1980s en het begin om visuele navorsingsmetodes aan te wend wat die geskrewe tekste aangevul en oorskry het.

Die argument in hierdie tesis suggereer dat wanneer waarnemingspraktyke en kennis produserende praktyke van die vakgebiede van kuns en antropologie gekombineer word, sekere beperkings wat inherent teenwoordig is in die onderskeie vakgebiede se praktyke, oorkom kan word. Deur te steun op die aannames wat kompleksiteitsteorie bied, kan kuns en antropologie saamwerk ten einde oplossings te verskaf vir representatiewe probleme wat ontstaan wanneer mens met komplekse situasies te doen het. As voorbeeld van ‘n komplekse situasie word die representatiewe praktyke van kunstenaars in oënskou geneem wat in kunsaktivisme deelneem ten einde weerstand te bied teen die oorweldigende gevolge van die HIV/Vigs epidemie in Suid-Afrika.

Deur die metodologieë en kennis produserende praktyke van kuns en antropologie te kombineer, ontstaan ‘n ruimte waarin dit moontlik is om die realiteit van mense se soeke na betekenisvolle lewens daar te stel sonder om die kompleksiteit daarvan te reduseer tot wetenskaplike statistieke of bloot navorsingsverslae. Die tesis suggereer dat dit juis in hierdie nuwe ruimte is, waar die moontlikheid ontstaan om ou maniere van dink en doen te hervorm ten einde die wêreld nuut te sien en te ken.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank the following people who have contributed to the completion of this assignment:

- My supervisor, Prof. Steven Robins, for his interest, practical guidance and patience. Your commitment to engage with the new struggles South Africa is facing reflects how artfully Anthropology can and should be practiced.

- Prof. Kees van der Waal, for his reserved but persistent and positive way of convincing one that the goal can be reached.

- Prof. Paul Cilliers, for his encouragement and for allowing me to take the time I needed to complete this in time.

- The *National Research Foundation*, for financial assistance.

- My parents, for their encouragement and love.

- Wolfgang Preiser – for finding me when I did not expect it. Without his support and encouragement, this project would certainly never have seen the light.

Anthropologists should not stop writing. But perhaps some problems we face when we write linear texts with words as our only tool can be resolved by thinking of anthropology and its representattions as not solely verbal, but also visual and not simply linear but multilinear.

- Sarah Pink, 2004

Table of Contents

Introduction

> More recently, in contemporary cultural life, art has come to occupy a space long associated with anthropology, becoming one of the main sites for tracking, representing, and performing the effects of difference in contemporary life. From this perspective, the two arenas are in a more complex and overlapping relationship to one another than ever before. (Marcus and Myers 1995: 1)

Linked to Marcus and Myers' notion of the overlapping relationship between art and anthropology, is the suggestion that not only does the overlap contain issues of gathering and disseminating knowledge, but commonalities can also be found in the fact that "both contemporary art and anthropology have 'culture as [their] object'" (Morphy and Perkins 2006: 11).

Based on these common grounds shared by art and anthropology, the thesis will explore how the knowledge producing methods and representational pratices of both fields can influence each other and be woven together in order to represent the contingencies of a complex world more authentically. By examining the relationship between art and anthropology, this study will try to show that both anthropologists and artists need to be more aware of the possibilities there are to learn from each other in order to have a more effective impact when trying to make sense of the complex fields in which both operate.

The thesis will take the form of a transdisciplinary theoretical exploration. Here the term "transdisciplinary" refers to Montuori's (2005:154) description thereof. The following areas are central and distinguish transdisciplinary inquiry from inter-disciplinary and disciplinary approaches. In summary, transdisciplinarity is

- "Inquiry-driven rather than exclusively discipline-driven
- Meta-paradigmatic rather than exclusively intra-paradigmatic
- Informed by a kind of thinking that is creative, contextualising, and connective (Morin's 'complex thought')
- Inquiry as a creative process that combines rigor and imagination" (Montuori 2005: 154).

Taking its point of departure from the understanding that there are different ways of gathering knowledge about the world, the thesis will suggest by combining different strategies and methods of collecting and interpreting knowledge, disciplines could be

enriched by these differences in ways that could change and enrich the knowledge claims that they make. Such a process would involve "the recognition of a *plurality of epistemologies* or positions, each expressing knowledge in different times and space, each in different ways" (Montuori 1998: 22). The dialogue between art and anthropology could inform a kind of anthropology that is not hesitant to use visual strategies in the production of ethnographic records. Text-based ethnographic models would benefit from "a critical engagement with a range of material and sensual practices in the contemporary arts" (Schneider and Wright 2006: 4).

The study therefore promotes an approach that is not wholly of art or anthropology but instead operates around the edges and borders. This study can thus be read as an endeavour to "destabilise from the margins by evoking and re-imagining social, cultural and aesthetic practices not through systematic, social-scientific fieldwork and research but through the capacity of art", anthropology and our common corporeality to "reveal things in social life that would otherwise remain unseen". (Irving 2006: www.anthropologymatters.com).

The anthropological study of art is in the process of moving from a place where it has been viewed as a "minority interest", towards a more "central role in the discipline" (Morphy and Perkins 2006: 1). In explaining why art was situated at the margins of anthropological studies, Morphy and Perkins suggest that "disengagement from art as a subject of study reflected attitudes of anthropologists to material culture" (2006: 1). Difficulties in defining art also contributed to this dilemma. Traditionally art was seen as something that could be defined in terms of Western standards of aesthetic values. As Morphy and Perkins explain, the "conception of art in the mid-nineteenth century was very different to what it subsequently became under the influence of modernism" (2006: 3). Caught up in the process of classifying humanity into civilised European societies and exotic Others, mid-nineteenth century anthropology included art "with other material cultural objects in the evolutionary schema developed by anthropologists such as Pitt Rivers (1906), Tylor (1871, 1878) and Frazer (1925)" (Morphy and Perkins 2006: 3). From Rivers, Tylor and Frazer's understanding of art, "art objects" were defined in terms of their similarity or difference *vis à vis* art forms as found in "contemporary Western art practice" (Morphy and Perkins 2006: 3). This view of art objects has changed over the years and from the 1970s on "(a)rt, broadly defined, provided a major source of information" and offered "insights into systems of representation, the aesthetics of the

body, value creating processes, social memory, the demarcation of space and so on" (Morphy and Perkins 2006: 10).

The tendency of art to "move towards the centre" of the discipline can be ascribed to the fact that art has become "associated almost equally with the two senses of the word 'culture'" (Morphy and Perkins 2006:1). The two understandings of culture are explained as "culture as a way of life or body of ideas and knowledge, and culture as the metaphysical essence of society, incorporating standards by which the finest products of society are judged" (Morphy and Perkins 2006:1). Similarly changes in the Western art world also resulted in a more serious engagement with anthropology. The artefacts that they saw in museums inspired modernist artists' work in the early 1900s. The encounter between modernist artists like Pablo Picasso and African sculpture in Parisian museums and collectors' houses "frequently figures as the prototypical encounter between art and anthropology" (Schneider and Wright 2006: 29). The encounter with artefacts that anthropologists brought back from so-called primitive societies offered "artists the possibility of new ways of seeing" (Schneider and Wright 2006: 32). The encounter with the primitive was instrumental in bringing about changes in "our understanding of what art is and what it does; how it appeals to us, how it affects us, and what we expect from it (Schneider and Wright 2006: 33). Morphy and Perkins (2006: 11) agree with Schneider and Wright when they argue that the "rise of anthropology and the development of modernism in art were related, even though anthropologists neglected to study art either in their own society or in the non-European societies that were the primary focus of their research".

Subject of inquiry and methodology

The thesis will aim to bring together art theory and anthropological theory by investigating current theoretical trends and representational practices within art and anthropology. "Art and anthropology are both made up of a range of diverse practices that operate within the context of an equally complex range of expectations and contrasts" (Schneider and Wright 2006: 2).

It will be argued that when looking at the relationship between art and anthropology, one should adopt a view from complexity theory as proposed by Cilliers (1998) and Morin (2007) in order to analyse and interpret the possible connections. The possibility of a transdisciplinary engagement between the two fields might shed new light upon how to (re)present what has been observed or learned in order to more effectively engage in

processes of knowing and being known. The contention is that the ways in which anthropologists and artists produce knowledge about the world and how they represent the world, should be explored "for their productive possibilities in developing new strategies of representation" (Schneider and Wright 2006: 25).

For anthropologists this would mean opening themselves to the process of engaging with art practices that analyse ways of seeing in a critical manner. Anthropologists will be challenged to embrace "new ways of seeing and new ways of working with visual materials" (Schneider and Wright 2006: 25). The focus on finding new ways of seeing and knowing the world has contributed to a reconnection with art to a broader realm of culture. "Art is no longer seen as an autonomous aesthetic realm, but is firmly embedded in cultural and historical specifics" (Schneider and Wright 2006: 18). This development will be discussed in more detail in Chapters one and two.

Similarly, artists engaging with the methodologies and observational practices of anthropology could learn to observe from a position that does away with the comfortable distance that is offered by their artist studios and traditional exhibition spaces. As Schneider and Wright (2006: 16) insist, "(b)oth artists and anthropologists play with distance and intimacy – an intimacy that is the currency of fieldwork – and both now overtly place themselves between their audiences and the world". By engaging in the logic of complex thought as will be suggested in Chapter three, the dynamic interaction between the fields of art and anthropology could lead to new discoveries in how to proceed when expected to represent a world that is by definition characterised by complexity and paradoxes.

The theoretical outcomes of the study will be tested against a short case study that will investigate what representational practices and knowledge producing methods are being used when artists engage in artistic ways to express the effects of the HIV/Aids epidemic on society. The thesis will argue that our representational practices are informed and connected to what we know about reality and how we know reality. Furthermore, the process of knowing is in return informed by how reality is represented (whether by works of art or ethnographies). The acts of knowing and representing are dialogically connected to one another. How artists thus represent the issues surrounding the struggle against HIV/Aids and how reality is influenced by this struggle, influences the viewers' knowledge of reality. The epistemological framework on which artists thus rely when engaging in producing artworks, influence not only the work they produce, but

also the reality and knowledge of the viewers when they engage with the artworks. Arguing from the logic of complex theory, it could be suggested that artists, curators and sponsors would benefit greatly by engaging with anthropologists who are working in the field of studying the impact of the HIV/Aids epidemic in South Africa. It will be suggested that art activism could utilise and integrate the knowledge that is gained from ethnographic practices when engaging with complex social issues such the fight against HIV/Aids in order to produce representations of reality that does not reduce the complexity of the issues involved.

The study will reflect on the epistemological status of theory (art theory and anthropological theory) and how by combining perspectives, knowledge production and representational practices could be enriched. The insights from complexity theory will support the notion that an approach to work transdisciplinary could deliver results for both fields of study that might contribute to reaching results that might be more accurate in presenting material (research and artworks for example) more authentically. A short case study involving an art exhibition on HIV/Aids in the South African National Gallery in Cape Town will be discussed in terms of the theoretical discoveries made in the study. In some sense one could say that the main focus of the study will be directed toward exploring the "politics of knowing and being known" (Lather 2001: 483) and the politics of seeing and being seen.

Structure of Study

The five chapters of the thesis are arranged as follows:

1. The first chapter explores the notion of art's role in society. In art theory this is an issue that has been discussed since ancient times and volumes could be written about this theme. By briefly looking at four theories of the social functions of art, I hope to offer a better understanding of what one should understand under the term "anthropology of art". The chapter will highlight how developments in anthropological theory changed the ways in which art works should be understood and studied by anthropologists. By briefly examining two theories of art from an anthropological perspective (as proposed by Gell and Geertz) and two theories of art from a critical social theory perspective (Adorno and Luhmann), the chapter aims at extracting from these four theories important elements that should be part of a contemporary understanding of an anthropology of art. From the point of view that art helps to inform our knowledge and representational practices, an anthropology of art should not have the material object and its form or function of

exchange or its social life (Appadurai 1986) as focus of study. Rather, an anthropology of art that focuses on art's capacity to assist us to know the world and to see it in a new way, challenges us to examine the artistic practices themselves (the ideas behind the artwork, its relationship to the ideas it is trying to present and the visual techniques and genres used).

By analysing how the artwork brings across knowledge of the world by means of its representational practice (how the word is being made visible), we can detect what ideology is informing the artist's gaze. Chapter one will thus argue that not even the gaze of the artist is a neutral one, but informed by what he or she knows. In the same way the gaze is influenced by what is known, knowledge is also influenced by how one sees the world.

2. The second chapter will reflect on the representational practices of anthropology and how changes in theory dealing with the notion of observation brought about changes in anthropological practices of knowledge production. By developing from a position of being inspired by positivistic scientific practices to a social research approach that has grown self-conscious about its practices of representation (Atkinson 2001: 2), anthropology has a lot to offer other fields of study that produce knowledge by means of observation. Here the connection with the field of art can be established. The chapter uses the connection between art and anthropology to explore the relationship between knowledge (knowing) and seeing (observing). The chapter will also examine the influence of postmodernism on anthropology and will discuss the consequences that the "interpretative turn" (after Geertz 1973) had on knowledge producing practices. The limitations and insights from a post-structural theory of meaning and its capability to inform knowledge claims and representational practices will also be discussed. The chapter will conclude that in order for anthropology to be able to offer radical critique, it would need to regain its position as critical research method. By adopting a modest form of postmodernism as proposed by Cilliers (2005) which is mindful of the status of its knowledge claims, anthropology as scientific research method could offer valuable contributions in revealing the world. By acknowledging the limits of ethnographic practices, anthropology regains a position from which it offers us a way to focus on the differences and diversity of a complex world, without falling into the trap of relativism. In giving up the urge to control knowledge and by accepting the fact that our knowledge producing practices are limited, the ethnographic enterprise becomes a method by which the limits of representative practices can be overcome.

3. Chapter three will provide a brief introduction to complexity theory. Following the arguments in Chapter one and two that observational and representational practices influence knowledge producing practices and *vice versa*, observational and representational practices are influenced by what we know of the world, Chapter three will explore how knowledge production and representational practices can be enriched when drawing on the logic of complex theory.

Based on the work of Cilliers (1998, 2005) and Morin (2007), complexity theory offers us the possibility to weave together knowledge producing practices from art and anthropology in order to produce representational and observational practices that do not reduce humanity to scientific formulas and mediocre documentaries. By combining the different kinds of knowledge as produced by art and anthropology, new ways of seeing and knowing the world will be made possible.

Suggestions will be made how artists and anthropologists could learn from one another in order to produce a description of the world that challenges artists and anthropologists alike to dare to leave their epistemological and methodological comfort zones. The chapter will demonstrate how the implications of understanding the world and relationships between people as a complex system influence the "politics of knowing and being known" (Lather 2001: 483) as well as and the politics of seeing and being seen.

4. The fourth chapter introduces a brief case study of an art exhibition of the South African National Gallery in Cape Town. The history and context of the exhibition will be described as well as the intention the exhibition has to be activist in nature as attempted intervention within the larger context of the HIV/Aids epidemic in the Western Cape. The results of the theoretical outcomes as suggested in chapters 1-3 will then be tested against the case study in order to evaluate its legitimacy.

Contrary to traditional theses in the field of anthropology, this thesis will not be an ethnographic study. The case study, however, does not attempt to be an ethnography either. It stands for itself as a brief application of the theoretical argument.

The chapter will argue that the activistic drive behind artistic representational practices of South African artists who were formerly involved in resistance art during the time of

apartheid, have not adapted itself to the new struggle against the onslaught of HIV/Aids on the South African society. By using old ways of seeing and knowing and representing, artists are not equipped to deal with the complexities of the new struggle. Nguyen's notion of therapeutic citizenship (2005: 143) refers to the way in which treatment options change "biology, representations of the disease and the subjectivity of those who are able to access (treatment)". The chapter addresses the fact that it does not seem that artists take these changes into consideration. It seems as if artists are stuck in their studios and old ideologies of resistance art and that they have not found new ways of being effective in offering people affected a substantial vehicle with which to engage in activism. The real struggle, in which the artists are entangled however, is not the fight against HIV/Aids, but the struggle of how to express that which one cannot see with the naked eye (i.e. the effects the virus has emotionally and socially). The chapter concludes that by engaging in observational methods and knowledge producing practices offered by anthropology, and by experimenting with new forms of visual comprehension that take the contingencies of people who are living with HIV/Aids into consideration, more effective activist art could be produced.

5. Chapter five is the concluding chapter and will summarise the study in terms of whether it succeeded in its aims or not. Limitations and shortcomings will also be discussed in order to make suitable recommendations and suggestions for further research to be undertaken in future.

Chapter 1: The Anthropology of Art

"Art is notoriously hard to talk about" (Geertz 1983:94).

Starting to write about art's place and role in society and more specifically its relation to anthropology is as hard as it is to talk about art. Harrington (2004: 1) addresses the huge task that one sets up for oneself in venturing into this territory. Questions such as the following need to be addressed in order to offer a comprehensive study of the role of art in society: "What is art? Can art be defined? How do we know whether or not something is art? Does art consist in universally recognisable qualities, or is art simply what different cultural institutions declare about art? Can art bring about a better society?" (Harrington 2004: 1).

Morphy and Perkins (2006:11) suggest that in order to start the venture on examining what an anthropology of art could look like, two important issues are central to consider: "the definition of art and what characterises an anthropological approach to art. The two are related – an anthropological definition of art is going to be influenced by the nature of anthropology itself". By tackling the first issue the study will subscribe to the following working definition of art offered by Degenaar (1993: 53):

> The term art refers both to the imaginative skill applied to design and to the object in which skill is exercised. Art designates a range of aesthetic objects which have been given a special status according to certain criteria within a particular convention. An aesthetic object refers to material structured in such a way that it moved a human being by involving especially the imagination.

The definition is not intended to be exclusive; rather, it indicates the kind of objects that anthropologists are usually referring to when they focus on "art objects". Components of the definition are likely to be found in most anthropologists' writing about art. For the purpose of this study, the term art will be limited to refer to visual art specifically.

The second issue concerning what characterises an anthropological approach to art will subscribe to the explanation of Harrington (2004: 1), who suggests that "art must be interrogated in the context of the much wider social domain known as 'culture'" (2004: 2). By situating art within culture, the focus of the study shifts from analysing art's form and contents or even notions of how to judge whether something is art or not, to "the lived experience of the individuals whose engagements with art are in question" (Harrington 2004: 3). By placing art in its ethnographic context, the anthropological study

of art is one that approaches art “in the context of its producing society” (Morphy and Perkins 2006: 15).

By mentioning art in the same sentence as anthropology, or putting it in a title such as with which this chapter starts, “art and anthropology”, is to support the idea that art and anthropology form “equal partners in a joint-venture of cognition of the world” (Harrington 2004: 3). Such a statement in turn suggests that art “represents a source of existential social knowledge that is of its own worth and is not inferior to the knowledge of social science” (Harrington 2004:3). As part of a cultural system, art therefore can convey knowledge about certain things in life in a better way than for instance scientific methods of producing knowledge. This does not mean that art is better in producing knowledge, but that its knowledge claims are different and should be taken seriously as equally legitimate and as not being inferior to so-called scientifically generated methods.

Seeing as knowing

An anthropology of art should thereby not just deal with art as an object for observation or as material object, but it should rather be able to tell us more about the kind of knowledge art produce when people engage with art. The politics of “knowing and seeing” are thus here important aspects of observation. An anthropology of art should thus show “how aesthetic frames of perception enter into textual aspects of metaphor, analogy and vignette, into sensuous media of data analysis such as visual images and life-story narratives; and into conceptions of theatrical qualities in social action” (Harrington 2004: 6).

Knowing thus becomes conditional upon seeing (perception). What we know and how we interpret it, is influenced by how we see and *vice versa*, our observational practices are influenced by what we know. The connection between art and anthropology (whose main form of enquiry is the production of an ethnography by means of participant observation) is then established by the notion of seeing / perceiving / observing. The connection is furthermore strengthened by the shared notion of “representation”. Schneider and Wright (2006: 26) support these arguments by claiming that “(a)rtists and anthropologists are practitioners who appropriate form, and represent others. Although their representational practices have been different, both books and artworks are creative additions to the world; both are complex translations of other realities”. At this point one could mention that one of the aspirations of especially visual art is to solve the

puzzle of how to represent the world. Kieran (2005: 99) suggests that "(l)ooking at art tests us, stretches us, deepens our inner lives and cultivates insight into both ourselves and the world". The capacity that visual art has to convey knowledge about the world and how we make sense of the world is also explored in the novel by Paul Auster called *Moon Palace* (1989). One of the characters in the novel is a painter and whilst contemplating how he fits into the world, he stumbles onto the following insight concerning the role of art (Auster 1989: 170):

> The true purpose of art was not to create beautiful objects, he discovered. It was a method of understanding, a way of penetrating the world and finding one's place in it, and whatever aesthetic qualities an individual canvas might have were almost an accidental by-product of the effort to engage oneself in this struggle, to enter into the thick of things.

Auster's description of the purpose of art as explored by the character in his novel, is a very good description of how the act of engaging with art can produce knowledge about the world and how to understand ourselves. As Kieran (2005: 100) explains, "art works can cultivate insight, understanding and ways of seeing the world". The ways in which the artist expresses his or her imagination by means of the how the "physical materials, conventions, genres, styles and forms which vivify" are applied in the art work thus "guide and prescribe our responses" (Kieran 2005: 102) to understanding the world. Hence, the specific knowledge we gain by engaging with works of art contributes not only to an expansion of the "horizons of our minds" (Kieran 2005: 102), but works of art also "challenge our pre-existing beliefs, attitudes and values" (Kieran 2005: 108) that we have of the world. In order to explain how our engagement with art could bring about new knowledge in the ways that Kieran proposes, the following example might help to illustrate the argument.

When one explores the development of certain technical explorations in the history of art, one learns that many artists became famous for the new ways in which they could present "the world" and how we see ourselves in the world. This was made possible by either applying new techniques in textual structure or the way in which depth, light or movement could be presented, the ways in which colours were produced. Another way of presenting new visions of the world can be made possible by introducing new conceptual techniques. Kieran (2005: 16 – 17) uses the example of the Italian artist Caravaggio (1573 – 1610) who was banned from Rome because his paintings depicted the saints of the church as ordinary human beings and not as heavenly saints: "Biblical characters had more traditionally been represented in highly conventionalised, ethereal

ways, marking them out as distinct in kind from those gazing upon the scene. But Caravaggio rejected convention and strove for radical naturalism". By presenting them as being of the "same flesh, the same blood; they are part of the very same world of the viewer, not set apart from it" (Kieran 2005: 16). This assertion of the basic humanity of the church's central figures offered lay people a different perspective on how to interpret the Bible and it also changed the way they saw themselves in relation to religious figures. Religion was seen as not only accessible by holy figures, but also by ordinary human beings who go about their lives in unspectacular ways. Coinciding with Kieran's notion that art can influence a person's understanding of reality is Gadamer's claim that "art and aesthetic experience are forms of knowledge" (Warnke 1987: 59). Such a cognitive understanding of art's function suggests that the experience of looking at the work of art "can be one in which we recognise the truth of the representation, discard our previous understanding of the subject-matter and incorporate our new understanding into our lives" (Warnke 1987: 60).

At this stage it is important to qualify that "knowing by seeing" is not an argument for what is in philosophy known as the "metaphysics of presence". This is a term used in post-structural theories of meaning and especially by Jacques Derrida who criticised Saussure's description of the sign. Saussure insisted "the sign has two components, the signifier and the signified, of which one, the signified, is mental or psychological. This would imply that the meaning of a sign is present to the speaker when he uses it, in defiance of the fact that meaning is constituted by a system of differences" (Cilliers 1998: 42). This notion assumes that one can determine the meaning of the sign (a visual sign for example) or have full knowledge of it, if the speaker or observer is present to the sign. Saussure's understanding of how meaning arises (and the rest of Western philosophy and the tradition of structuralism) rests on the premise that meaning becomes fixed when it is written down (or captured in a picture for example). Derrida, however, insists that meaning can never be fixed, seeing that "the meaning of the sign is always unanchored" (Cilliers 1998: 42). From this point of view, meaning is never present on the basis that "what we see is what we get". By just seeing (or hearing) a word (or for that matter a picture or a person) we can never assume that we know it. Meaning is derived by actively looking for it in the sign's relationship with other signs, how it has been framed, who is acting, in which context it appears. We thus cannot separate what we see (as scientists, artists, and people viewing art) "from the world it describes" (Cilliers 1998: 43). In this study, the understanding of how meaning is

generated and terms such as “knowing by seeing” will be informed by a post-structuralist understanding thereof.

The following (somewhat lengthy) quote will establish the thesis’ argument that the politics of knowing, are strongly related to how the subject sees and is being seen in terms of a post-structuralist understanding of these terms:

> It is seeing which establishes our place in the surrounding world; we explain that world with words, but words can never undo the fact that we are surrounded by it. … The relation between what we see and what we know is never settled. … Yet this seeing which comes before words, and can never quite be covered by them, is not a question of mechanically reacting to stimuli. We only see what we look at. To look is an act of choice. As a result of this act, what we see is brought within our reach – though not necessarily in arm’s reach. … We never look at just one thing; we are always looking at the relation between things and ourselves. Our vision is continually active, continually moving, continually holding things in a circle around itself, constituting what is present to us as we are. Soon after we can see, we are aware that we can also be seen. The eye of the other combines with our own eye to make it fully credible that we are part of this invisible world (Berger 1972: 7-9).

From Berger’s quote it can be argued that the relation between knowing and seeing is a dialectical relation. “Knowing” influences “seeing” and vice versa. The way in which knowledge is produced is thus relational and the meaning that emerges out of the relationship seeing-knowing is not fixed, but always already inscribed and changing according to the context, according to who is looking, according to who is being looked at and according to what the effect of the action is. Seeing and knowing is mediated by the artwork and by the process of the effects of the relationship between seeing and knowing. By establishing the relationship seeing-knowing as dialectical, a possibility is opened for an argument that suggests that the relationship takes place in a complex and dynamic exchange of systems of meaning. Berger’s assumptions also imply that our observational practices (the way we see) are constructed and complex. From this perspective, an anthropology of art should thus examine the relationship between observational practices and knowledge generating practices. Such an examination “should go beyond the mantra of the social construction of facts and should start analysing in depth the ecological dynamics by which communities of practitioners come to share a perception of what they deem as reality” (Pink *et al* 2004: 29).

At this stage the argument is pointing to an affiliation with postmodern positions, for example the deconstruction tradition established by Jacques Derrida. “Deconstruction argues for the irreducibility of meaning. Meaning and knowledge cannot be fixed in a representational way, but is always contingent and contextual. Derrida explicitly links the problem of meaning and context to the fact that these things are complex. The critical understanding of complexity theory presented here, and deconstruction, therefore, make a very similar claim: knowledge is provisional” (Cilliers 2005: 259). Later in Chapter four the characteristics and implications of a complex system will be discussed in more detail.

Three dimensions of culture

By returning to Harrington’s remark as mentioned earlier, that “art must be interrogated in the context of the much wider social domain known as ‘culture’” (2004: 2), the study will continue to investigate the implications of art’s “situatedness within culture”. In order to support the connection between art and anthropology, and furthermore why the study focuses on art to compare with anthropology and not, say, rituals or citizenship rights or the forming of specific kinds of subjectivities, the role of art within a cultural and social system will now be explored.

In his book *Cultural Complexity – studies in the social organisation of meaning*, Ulf Hannerz (1992: 6) qualifies why he uses the term “complex cultures” to describe contemporary society. He insists that it is because of the three dimensions in contemporary culture that it can be explained as being complex. These three dimensions are described as follows:

1) ideas and modes of thought as entities and processes of the mind – the entire array of concepts, propositions, values and the like which people within some social unit carry together, as well as their various ways of handling their ideas and characteristic modes of mental operation;
2) forms of externalisation, the different ways in which meaning is made accessible to the senses, made public, and
3) social distribution, the ways in which the collective cultural inventory of meanings and meaningful external forms – that is (1) and (2) together – is spread over a population and its social relationships (Hannerz 1992: 7).

Art resides in the second dimension of culture, the “forms of externalisation”. From this perspective art (as one of many forms of externalisation) is a mediator of culture. Hannerz furthermore suggests that the three dimensions are interrelated and that the “complexity along the first dimension, in contemporary culture, is in large part a consequence of complexity along the latter two” (1992:9). This suggests interaction between what one sees displayed (dimension 2) and what is known or thought mentally (dimension 1), which correlates with the view as mentioned earlier, that there is a dynamic dialectical relationship between seeing and knowing.

Hannerz also mentions that anthropological inquiry is mostly concerned with studying the first dimension of culture: “understanding structures of knowledge, belief, experience, and feeling in all their subtlety, and in their entire range of variations at home and abroad, is reasonably enough the core of cultural analysis” (1992: 10). The relationship between the first and second dimensions are also researched secondarily, but the relationship between the second and third dimension, which he refers to as “distribution”, has received the least attention.

Art as part of a social struggle

> To look at the symbolic dimensions of social action – art, religion, ideology, science, law, morality, common sense – is not to turn away from the existential dilemmas of life for some empyrean realm of de-emotionalized forms; it is to plunge into the midst of them (Geertz 1973: 30).

Drawing on Hannerz’s augment that art is located within a complex cultural system, the role of art within contemporary society will be explored in the following section. Here the focus will be more on the social function of art than on the aesthetic functions thereof such as pleasure, beauty, taste or form. The latter are topics that are very well researched in theories that focus on art history and the fine arts. By briefly looking at four theories of the social functions of art, I hope to offer a better understanding of what one should understand under the term “anthropology of art”. The following section will highlight how developments in anthropological theory changed the ways in which art works should be understood and studied by anthropologists. By examining the ideas of Alfred Gell and Clifford Geertz in section (i), it will be shown that they tried to break away from the traditional theory that supported the idea that there is a difference between so-called “primitive art” and Western art as informed by anthropologists such as “Pitt Rivers (1906), Tylor (1871), and Frazer (1925)” (Morphy and Perkins 2006: 3).

In section (ii) I will discuss two social theories of art as proposed by Theodor Adorno and Niklas Luhmann in order to compare how the understanding of the role art is defined from a socio-critical point of view. Both Adorno and Luhmann's theories also marked a change in direction *vis à vis* traditional theories explaining art's role in society. The comparison of Gell and Geertz's theories with Adorno and Luhmann's theories is important, seeing that there are ongoing discussions between disciplines regarding how to interpret the importance and relevance of art in society. Anthropological views are not excluded from these discussions. Morphy and Perkins (2006: 5) stress the importance of such a discussion when they explain how anthropological theories changed and developed over time:

> This tension between the modernist avant-garde approach to the arts of other cultures and the anthropological approach remains a continuing theme of debates over the interpretation and exhibition if art. While the emphasis of anthropology has long moved away from evolutionism, the tension remains between the avant-garde view that art speaks for itself and is open to universalistic interpretation, and an anthropological perspective, which requires an indigenous interpretative context.

The ideas of Gell, Geertz, Adorno and Luhmann will be used and combined later in the thesis to suggest how an anthropology of art should look like when informed by theories that support the idea that knowledge is generated by presentational practices that acknowledge the contingencies and complexities of the world we live in.

(i) Anthropological art theory

"Art and material culture were an integral part of nineteenth century anthropology. As a discipline, anthropology developed hand in hand with the cabinets of curiosity, with antiquarianism, and with the widening of European horizons following the Enlightenment" (Morphy and Perkins 2006:11). The following section will explore the theoretical ideas of two contemporary anthropologists who tried to place the study of art within the field of anthropology in a wider context than the traditional theories that looked at art as the material objects of primitive societies.

Alfred Gell: Art and Agency

Any study on the anthropology of art will be incomplete without mentioning the work of Alfred Gell, whose book *Art and Agency – an anthropological theory* (1998) was published posthumously. He begins his discussion on art by arguing that from an anthropological point of view, art works are mainly described in terms of a theory

“dealing with the art production in the colonial and post-colonial societies, plus the so-called ‘Primitive art’ – now usually called ‘ethnographic art’ – in museum collections” (Gell 1998: 1).

Gell continues by arguing that “the ‘anthropological theory of art’ equals the ‘theory of art’ applied to ‘anthropological’ art” (Gell 1998: 1). This is a very important point to make, seeing that this view is still very popular in general as encountered in anthropological journals and works on art’s place within anthropological theory. “Anthropological” art is classified as “non-Western” art and somehow constitutes different forms of classification than those found in classical “western art”. Speaking as a Westerner, Gell is clear about the fact that “(t)here is no sense in developing one ‘theory of art’ for our own art, and another, distinctively different theory, for the art of those cultures who happened, once upon a time, to fall under the sway of colonialism” (Gell 1998:1). Gell asserts that the aesthetic conditions of classification that are valid for Western art should also be valid and applicable to “everybody’s art” (Gell 1998: 1).

In order to reach the point where art from different cultural groups is to be valued on equal terms, it should be appreciated and interpreted by recapturing “the ‘way of seeing’ which artists of the period implicitly assumed their public would bring to their work” (Gell 1998: 2). Accordingly, the anthropology of art should have “an approximately similar objective, except that it is the ‘way of seeing’ of a cultural system … which has to be elucidated” (Gell 1998:2). Hence Gell’s view on an anthropology of art can be viewed as a combination of Berger (“ways of seeing”) and Hannerz’s (art as embedded within cultural systems). Gell elaborates on his argument by suggesting that an anthropology of art should not just focus on illuminating the cultural systems within which art operates, but the social systems should also be considered not to make it an exclusive project. The main argument in Gell’s work, however, is that he views artworks to be mediators of social agency (Gell: 1998: 22-23).

The concept of agency utilised by Gell is “relational and context-dependent, not classificatory and context free” (Gell: 1998: 22). He seems to be drawing strongly on the premises of post-structural theory in which the meaning of signs and subjects emerge due to their relations to other signs and subjects. The artist’s intention of why a work of art is produced is of great importance in Gell’s theory. He also shifts the location of agency in such a way, that it is not just attached to the artist’s intentions, but also to the artwork itself and furthermore to the network of social and cultural interaction in which

the artist and the art works takes part. The “agency” thus moves between the artist, the artwork and the social networks. The agent to which agency is attached is connected to the different contexts. In one context the artist’s intentions could possess agency, in another context it is the artwork itself that possesses the agency (Gell 1998: 22- 23). How the agency is distributed is worked out by very intricate formulas as Gell indicates in his book, but the details thereof are not important for this study.

Drawing from Gell’s ideas, an anthropology of art should thus focus on the “social context of art production, circulation, and reception, rather than the evaluation of particular works of art” which, to Gell’s mind, “is the function of a critic” (Gell 1998: 3). In constructing an “anthropology of art” theory, Gell does not place the art object at the centre of his attention, but rather “the production and circulation of art objects as a function” of agency. He does this in order to explain “why people behave as they do” (Gell 1998: 11). Gell thus argues that an anthropology of art should not be exclusive, but should include a wide variety of cultural and social factors. His argument supports the notion that art is situated in a network of relationships that are more complex than what meets the eye. This thesis supports such an argument.

When reading critiques on Gell’s views, it seems that there is a lot of ambivalence around this subject of “the anthropology of art”. It is also apparent that there is not really a coherent contemporary theory on the subject. Bowden (2007: 319 – 320) welcomes Gell’s view that artworks frequently serve as mediators of social agency, but not that this could be the “primary role of art cross-culturally”. Bowden further comments that “restricting anthropological analyses of art to the way objects mediate agency has the effect of radically impoverishing both art as a cultural phenomenon and the anthropology of art as an intellectual discipline. It impoverishes the anthropology of art as an intellectual discipline since it prevents anthropologists from exploring a whole range of other issues relating to the social role of art” (2004: 320). Bowden surely has a point, but the views of Gell are not only negative and when, integrated into a more holistic description of cultural and social systems, they have the potential to form a good basis for exploring forms of resistance art that are part of social struggles.

Clifford Geertz: Art as Cultural system

> The realization that to study an art form is to explore a sensibility, that such a sensibility is essentially a collective formation, and that the foundations of such a formation are as wide as social existence and as deep, leads away not only from the view that aesthetic power is a grandiloquence for the pleasures of craft. It

> leads away also from the so-called functionalist view that has most often been opposed to it: that is, that works of art are elaborate mechanisms for defining social relationships, sustaining social rules, and strengthening social values (Geertz 1983: 99).

The quote above stems from Geertz's book called *Local Knowledge* (1983). In *The Interpretation of Cultures* (1973) Geertz introduces the notions of "thick description" which advocates for a more interpretative approach to ethnographic research. Following on the influence structuralism had on anthropology, which claimed that all knowledge could be assimilated if one tried hard enough and looked at all the relations, Geertz argues that "data" should be presented in a more meaningful way. "Analysis, then, is sorting out the structures of signification…… (t)he point now is only that ethnography is thick description. What the ethnographer is in fact faced with – except when he is pursuing the more automatized forms of data collection – is a multiplicity of complex conceptual structures, many of them superimposed upon or knotted into one another, which are at once strange, irregular, and inexplicit, and which he must contrive somehow to first grasp and then to render" (1973: 9 – 10).

The importance (and critique) of the interpretative turn, which Geertz introduced with his notion of "thick description", will be discussed in more detail in chapter two. What is valuable from this new insight is that Geertz added new theoretical insights informing the way in which ethnographic research should be tackled. He argued that human behaviour should not just be analysed in terms of their contingencies, but instead interpreted and explained in order to "establish structures of meaning in terms of which people do such things as signal conspiracies and join them" (Geertz 1973: 12 – 13). In order to describe how the ethnographer should go about when in the act of observing human behaviour, which he qualifies as being symbolic action (the human behaviour that is), he uses the following metaphors – "action, which, like phonation in speech, pigment in painting, line in writing, or sonance in music" (Geertz 1973: 10). The act of observing as ethnographer becomes an act of looking for the fine nuances in how people act.

In his attempt to illustrate how the webs of meaning in which people organise their existence are connected, Geertz extends his gaze to all these webs. One of the webs (systems of meaning), which he specifically investigates in *Local Knowledge*, is that of "art as cultural system" (1983: 94). Just like Gell, he also addresses the fact that anthropology traditionally looked at so-called "primitive" art as something exotic and not being in the same category as the "fine art" of Western civilisations. Geertz also argues

that although the aesthetic framework in which the so-called primitive societies work are not the same as the aesthetic framework of Western art, the meanings certain techniques or forms and objects have, are the same. Artworks in “primitive” art are not just random contingent objects, but follow strict rules and aesthetic standards in the same way that Western art submits to certain standards and rules in order to fit into certain genres. Geertz, like Gell, contends that the work of art should be studied from within the local knowledge of the cultural system from which it emerges (Geertz 1983: 97). Geertz agrees with Henri Matisse, that “the means of art and the feeling for life that animates it are inseparable (Geertz 1983: 98).

By placing art within the local knowledge system, the collective ways in which a certain group of people define “social relationships, [sustain] social rules and [strengthen] social values” (Geertz 1983: 99) are made visible. Hence, for Geertz the connection between art and collective life is not situated on an instrumental level, but on a semiotic level: “Matisse’s colour jottings and the Yoruba’s line arrangements do not differ, save glancingly, and celebrate social structure or forward useful doctrines. They materialize a way of experiencing; bring a particular cast of mind out into the world of objects, where men (sic) can look at it” (Geertz 1983: 99). From this point of view it becomes apparent then, that artistic expressions and aesthetic forms, whether it is “Matisse’s yellow or the Yoruba’s slash” (Geertz 1983: 99), and the way it is understood within the context of the specific culture, are ideationally connected to the society in which they are found. This is not simply a mechanical process (Geertz 1983: 99).

To conclude, Geertz’s understanding of an anthropology of art suggests that there is not an objective way in which one can interpret art works. Art does not stand for itself or for “art’s sake” as is sometimes believed. According to Geertz, art forms part of a specific society’s cultural system and express the collective ideas of how the people of that society ascribe symbolic meaning to their actions. Aesthetics thus become “semiotics” (Geertz 1993: 118). In order to decipher the semiotics embodied by art works, it is the task of the ethnographer to learn how to “see” in order to “know” (referring here to the notion of “seeing as knowing” mentioned earlier). An anthropology of art should be equipped with “a new diagnostics, a science that can determine the meaning of things for the life that surrounds them” (Geertz 1983: 120).

(ii) Social theories of art

In the process of building an understanding of what an anthropology of art should look like one should not forget how other disciplines deal with the same questions. From the theories of Gell and Geertz this thesis takes a position that supports the notion that art is situated within a complex cultural context that is not disconnectable from the social relations in which it is embedded. Based on such an understanding of art, an anthropology of art should therefore also consider social theories of art in order to be comprehensive or "'meaningfully adequate' to the lived experience of the individuals whose engagements with art are in question" (Harrington 2004: 3).

As defined by Harrington (2004: 4), social theory is understood to be "that agency of reflection" that "refers valuations of works of art to social facts about different changing contexts of social institutions, social conventions, social perception and social power". Explaining why it is important to study the role of art in society, Harrington (2004: 6) argues that not only is it important to know how works of art influence political values, processes of cultural production and valuation, but in the process of finding out how society is influenced, the researcher herself is influenced by studying the "frames of perception". Harrington argues that studying art's situatedness in culture is not only a "fertile thematic subject of enquiry", but that by in the process of studying "ways of seeing", the researcher is equipped with "ways of seeing" (he calls it "frames of perception" (Harrington 2004: 6)) which offers important contributions in the practice of academic writing and reasoning. "The significance has already been demonstrated for (other) disciplines such as history, ethnography and anthropology, by scholars such as Paul Ricoeur (1985-8), Clifford Geertz (1973) … and it has always been a central consideration for classical figures in sociology and social theory such as George Simmel, Walter Benjamin, Siegfried Kracauer and Theodor Adorno" (Harrington 2004: 6). According to Harrington "all these figures show how aesthetic frames of perception enter into textual aspects of metaphor, analogy and vignette; into sensuous media of data analysis such as visual images and life-story narratives; and into conceptions of theatrical qualities in social action" (2004: 6). The link between how the study of art not only tells us more about art, but also about how we perceive the world, is the link between how an anthropology of art (knowledge about art) can contribute to a better way of practising anthropology (the art of anthropology).

In order to supplement the notion of what an anthropology of art could or should look like, the following section will explore the ideas of two social theories that influenced

ideas in art production and perception (especially in the field of resistance art and conceptual art) particularly after the Second World War. The theories of Niklas Luhmann and Theodor Adorno will be discussed briefly. By combining their insights on art's role in society with the views of Gell and Geertz, a comprehensive anthropology of art will be established.

Theodor Adorno: negative dialectic and autonomous art

Adorno's uncompromising critique of mass culture as product of a culture industry should be viewed on the background of the cultural landscape of his time. Adorno's critique of the blinding domination of instrumental rationalism should be understood in the context of post World War II Germany. The ideals of the Enlightenment - freedom from nature and emancipation of myth due to knowledge by means of rational thought - resulted in the objectification of man and as a result the atrocities of the Holocaust (which was the rational extermination of Jews based on scientific knowledge and advancement in technology) could be legitimised by means of rationality. This kind of rationality which Adorno and Horkheimer call instrumental rationality, is an instrument that devices the self-destruction of Enlightenment. Rationality becomes a means to an end and through its inherent character, this reversal is accounted for.

The role of art in a time of blind domination caused by mass produced cultural goods, is a focus point throughout Adorno's critique of Enlightenment reason. Adorno conceives of art as "the emphatic assertion of what is excluded from Enlightenment's instrumental rationality" (Bernstein 1991: 6).

Adorno's engagement with aesthetics and the role of art can be traced back to his *Habilitationsschrift* which was titled *Kierkegaard: The Construction of the Aesthetic* (1933). Being a trained music composer and accomplished musician himself probably also contributed to stimulating his concerns with art and aesthetics.

Adorno's first criticism of the culture industry was published in his essay titled *On the Fetish-Character in Music and the Regression of Listening* (1938) where he responded to the ideas of his friend, Walter Benjamin who argued in favour of the culture industry's "transformative potential of film and radio to radicalise the masses" (Emerling 2005:43). In *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction* (1936) Benjamin suggested that film, sports, and other forms of mass entertainment were "creating a new kind of

spectator, able to critically dissect cultural forms and to render intelligent judgement on them" (Kellner and Durham 2006: xviii).

Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno were two influential members of the Frankfurt School of Critical Theory. Together with Max Horkheimer, Adorno developed a critique of "the culture industry" in their book *The Dialectic of Enlightenment* (1947). The central argument suggests that the culture industry brings about a change in the commodity character of art. "The cultural commodities of the industry are governed… by the principle of their realisation as value, and not by their own specific content and harmonious formation" (Bernstein 1991: 99). Cultural entities are thus not produced as being a "labour of desire", as Marx would suggest (Emerling 2005: 21), but as a commodity that can be promoted and sold to consumers who have also been objectified under capitalism. Once art and cultural products are being marketed, standardised and institutionalised, the internal economic structure of cultural commodities shifts. In Marxist terms this means that the mass-produced object loses its use value. Products produced in the culture industry have their use value replaced by their exchange value.

In *The Dialectic of Enlightenment* Adorno's position on aesthetics and the role and nature of art are closely linked to his critique of instrumental reason. Under the influence of instrumental reason (viewed as the objective form of action which treats the object simply as a means and not as an end in itself) capitalism is rationalised to the extent that it affects all of life's spheres. The production and consumption of cultural goods are driven by economic and political motives. The pleasures offered by the culture industry are only an illusion and the real motive behind production and consumption is the quest for making more profit and "the further exploitation of the masses" (Emerling 2005: 43). The culture industry becomes integrated into the capitalist society. Under the domination of capitalism and the uniformity of cultural consumption, everything becomes identical, stereotypical and standardised. Adorno and Horkheimer's immanent critique of culture exposes the fact that it does not live up to its inherent promises to society. Instead of offering quality entertainment, liberation of the unconscious, diversity, spiritual nourishment and emancipation from institutionalised conformity, as promised, the culture industry becomes another form of economic and structural domination.

For Adorno the only hope of a radical emancipation lies in the notion of what he calls autonomous art. To counter his somewhat pessimistic diagnosis of the mass deception of the Enlightenment, Adorno puts forward the notion of "true art" as the "diametric opposite of popular media and culture" (Emerling 2005: 43).

When keeping in mind that Adorno rejects any form of art that affirms the "evil world of capitalism", it is not surprising that Adorno argues that:

> "(i)n a radically evil society one task of art must be to make people more consciously unhappy and dissatisfied with their lives, and especially to make them as keenly aware as possible of the dangers of instrumental rationality and of the discrepancy between their world as potential paradise and their world as actual catastrophe" (Guess 1998: 300).

Adorno's argument thus supports a Hegelian view of art which suggests that art has a higher vocation and amounts to more than just providing entertainment. Adorno goes even further than Hegel (who suggests a very positive view of the world) and argues that art's vocation lies in the fact that it should be "radically critical, negative not affirmative" (Guess 1998: 300). With the term negative, Adorno means that the criticism should be an internal form of criticism, meaning that it should direct its criticism towards the internal principles of society. The concept of "negative criticism" does not equate to the notion of art as being a form of propaganda directed to influencing or mobilising people towards political action. The efficiency of propaganda could be measured in terms of whether the propaganda worked or not, and standardised forms of what is good forms of propaganda could be set up. Strictly speaking, this would "reduce art's autonomy and subject it to the categories of instrumental thinking" (Guess 1998: 301). Adorno's notion of a radical criticism and negative art suggests that works of art should innately be useless. A negative art should "present an 'image' (*Bild*) of a kind of meaningfulness and freedom which society promises its members, but does not provide" (Guess 1998: 301). When art has no meaningful, rational function, it internally violates the principles of the Enlightenment project. Adorno thus ascribes to art a kind of dialectic characteristic. It is as if art should open up the possibility of freedom by offering immanent critique in cultural and social matters. Autonomous art engages in a critique of society by means of its uselessness which is committed to itself, for itself. In aiming not to promote political ideals and change, it has the possibility to actually do so.

Although Adorno's ideas on the redemptive capability of autonomous art is often criticised for being too utopian and idealistic, one should not criticise his work too one-sidedly. His criticism of instrumental rationalism and the kind of (mass) culture it produces is often seen as the catalyst for postmodern strains of thought whose point of departure helped launch critiques on the totalising, grand theories of modernism. Adorno's challenge to bring the hidden forms of domination of mass produced culture to

the surface, and to expose how it fails to fulfil the promises it makes in terms of its own character, remains a very important insight into the dialectical contradictions inherent in grand designs and totalising theories.

Niklas Luhmann: Art as a social system

Another theorist who ascribes an autonomous type of art, and who also argues against totalising theories, is Niklas Luhmann. Published originally in German in 1995, Luhmann's book *Art as a Social System* appears to contain similar ideas to those Geertz conveys in a chapter in *Local Knowledge* entitled "Art as a cultural system" (1983: 94). Although Luhmann and Geertz both draw their understanding of the notion of "social systems" from Max Weber's interpretative sociology, these are the only similarities that they appear to share. Drawing on Luhmann's theoretical understanding of what a social system is[1], one learns that humans are, for instance, not part of a social system. Humans are categorised into a system called psychic systems, and they form part of the environment of the social system. Social systems are made up of communicative processes. Communication refers however "not only to linguistic communication" (as found between human individuals), "but also to global information circulation between complex societal configurations, such as between the market and the state, civil law and public policy, and so on" (Harrington: 2004: 199). Art systems form a sub-system in relation to social systems that are functional systems – the law or economics are also similar sub-systems. How Luhmann qualifies the differences between certain types of systems, and how they communicate and operate, will not be explained here. What is important is his view that art has no function in society as such. This understanding has important consequences for how art is approached and this understanding will be used later in this study to complement the argument that the relationship between art and anthropology is not as ambiguous as often thought to be the case.

Luhmann (2000: 2) describes social systems as being "self-creating or 'autopoietic'" (also understood as "self-organisation"). Autopoiesis is understood as a characteristic of a complex system due to the nature of the internal structure of the system (Cilliers 1998: 19). In order for an autopoietic system to function, it has to be operationally closed. Luhmann (2000: 134) argues that "art participates in society by differentiating itself as a system, which subjects art to a logic of operative closure – just like any other functional system". This leads to the reason why Luhmann is "not primarily concerned with

[1] Luhmann's elaborate theory of social systems is explained in his seminal work: *Social Systems*. (1995). Stanford University Press, Stanford.

problems of causality, of society's influence on art and of art on society" (Harrington 2004: 200). Hence, modern art is autonomous, but not in the sense that Adorno describes its autonomy, which boils down to "art for art's sake". Luhmann (2000: 149) suggests that "(o)nce art becomes autonomous, the emphasis shifts from hetero-reference to self-reference – which is not the same as self-isolation, not *l'art pour l'art*. Art has no ambition to redeem society by exercising aesthetic control over an expanded realm of possibility… The function of art is to make the world appear within the world".

Harrington (2004: 200) explains Luhmann by saying that Luhmann's understanding of autonomous art implies that art's main function "is to assist in the construction of a distinction in social consciousness between 'reality' and 'imagination'". This understanding of art illuminates the development of art movements such as twentieth century *avant-garde* art and conceptual art. Art becomes self-referential and "incorporates what is traditionally seen as opposed to art, namely ordinary objects, 'junk material', 'trash'" (Harrington 2004: 200). Luhmann argues that proposing art as a self-organising, self-referential system, it remains autonomic. To Luhmann this "new social system of art communicates the limits of communication; that is, in communicating the breakdown of stable representation systems" (Harrington 2004: 200).

The breakdown of the system of representation (semiotics) lies in the fact that "every time something is made available for observation something else withdraws, that, in other words, the activity of distinguishing and indicating that goes on in the world conceals the world" (Luhmann 2000: 149). This is the paradox of seeing and observation that exposes the human possibilities of perception and argues for a view that "striving for completeness or restricting oneself to the essential world would be absurd" (Luhmann 2000: 149). This view is closely related to Berger's view of the dialectical nature of how we see and that "our vision is continually active, continually moving, continually holding things in a circle around itself, constituting what is present to us as we are" (Berger 1972 :7). Luhmann's understanding that meaning is never fixed by the act of seeing (also an argument against the metaphysics of presence) is closely related to a post-structuralist theory of meaning.

As mentioned by Harrington (2004: 201), Luhmann's theory has its flaws, seeing that it does not say anything about art institutions, galleries, dealers and publishers (the network that Gell focussed on) "and even less about important cross-penetrations of art by other social systems, such as commerce, politics and the media". Luhmann's

argument that art no longer has the function to offer a critique of society such as highlighted by Adorno is also contestable. Nonetheless, the important contribution Luhmann's theory makes, is the fact that the act of seeing or observing is paradoxical. The notion that "the world" is made visible in the world by means of artistic expression, is a very valuable contribution that suggests that art's role can be described as a way of witnessing (observing). Art as witness of what is visible and invisible in this world is a notion that will be explored further in Chapters four and five.

The politics of knowing and being known and the politics of seeing and being seen are thus central when looking at art's role in a complex contemporary society. As Morphy and Perkins (2006: 22) argue, "art is an integral part of most, if not all, human societies and that by failing to study it anthropologists deny themselves access to a significant body of information. It can provide insights into human cognitive systems – how people conceptualise components of their everyday life and how they construct representations of their world". An anthropology of art should thus include how the practices of observation, representation and interpretation, which point to the dialectical relationship seeing-knowing as discussed in this chapter, could inform anthropological methodologies.

The elucidating properties inherent to art, its power to propose a new vision of the world, and the way in which it teaches us to see and direct the gaze, are important contributions for any fieldworker who is aiming at translating the realities of her subjects of study. From the perspective that art is part of our cultural and social practices, an anthropology of art should include "studying how pictures are put together and make statements about this world" (Pink *et al* 2004: 3). By understanding that the representational practices in art are not value-free, an anthropology of art should be able to offer an implicit critique of the approaches used when applying visual and representational methods. An anthropology of art should thus consider the "processes of research and representation" in order to "invite new ways of working with people, words and images" (Pink *et al* 2004:3).

The next chapter will explore how ethnographic methods have changed over the past years and how the awareness that visual information could be valuable in the process of generating anthropological knowledge has been incorporated into ethnographic practices.

Chapter 2: The Art of Anthropology

In chapter one the connection between art and anthropology was established based on the shared notion of their representational practices (Schneider and Wright 2006: 26). This chapter will focus on the representational practices found in anthropology and especially how changes were brought about due to the fact that our understanding of observational practices was influenced by changes in theory. The focus of the study will be to address these changes in terms of the dialectical relationship between knowledge and practice. Examples mentioned are thus chosen for their relevance in this relational framework. This chapter will not attempt to map out a "concise history of ideas" found in the development of anthropology, but will look at moments in which change took place. A complete history of all the different trends in anthropology (both in social and cultural anthropology) would amount to a task which would need much more space to address. The author therefore acknowledges that what follows does not mention important developments in the building of anthropological theory (for example the movement from evolutionism to cognitive approaches or from transactionalism to functionalism). This chapter will start by looking how anthropology emerged as part of a positivistic project and how it changed to internalise anti-positivistic understandings of culture and knowledge production.

Anthropos + logos: Knowledge of human beings

> In social and cultural anthropology, a distinction is usually made between 'ethnography' and 'theory'. Ethnography is literally the practice of writing about peoples. Often it is understood to mean our way of making sense of other people's modes of thought, since anthropologists usually study cultures other than their own. Theory is also, in part anyway, our way of making sense of our own, anthropological mode of thought (Barnard 2000: 4).

One might be tempted to think that in a field like anthropology whose main method of inquiry is participant observation, there would be no need for theory. In his discussion about the relationship between theory and ethnography, Barnard (2000: 4) mentions that "theory and ethnography inevitably merge into one". This understanding of the relationship between theory and ethnography could serve as an analogy for the discussion that started in chapter one, regarding the relationship between seeing and knowing. Here it becomes important to qualify, that by using the term "seeing", its synonyms are also implied: the faculty of seeing, sight, vision as well as the act of

acquiring insight, observing (whether by the act of seeing or by using all other senses). The following chapter will explore how the "politics of knowing and being known" (Lather 2001: 483) is at work within the observational techniques and practices of the ethnographer who is concerned about the politics of seeing and being seen.

In chapter one it was contended that what we know and how we interpret it, is influenced by how we see. A synonym for seeing is of course, observing. When speaking of observing in anthropological terms, the notion of "participant observation" is not far away in one's mind, which can be described as the empirical resources used to construct an ethnography of what was observed. On answering the question why participant observation is important, Dewalt and Dewalt (1998: 265) argue that "the apprenticeship experience results in 'ways of knowing' and 'learning to see' that are distinct from less participatory approaches". The anecdote of anthropologist Ivor Kopytoff who met several Suku intellectuals in Belgium who were children forty years ago when he did fieldwork in their village in the Republic of Congo, helps to further establish the connection between ethnography and visual representation. For the modern Suku, the importance of Kopytoff's work in their village lay in his preservation of "a picture of their society as it had been several decades ago ... in an way that rang true to them in terms of what they themselves knew" (Kopytoff quoted in Climo and Cattell 2002: 10). In a sense it can be said that Kopytoff's ethnographic work constituted a mental "picture of their past" which contained important meaning for their lives. Hence from this example one could derive that written down ethnographic accounts resemble pictures or visual images (*Bilder*, in German, is a better word that also refers to mental images) of what has been observed.

To linger a while longer on the idea of connecting anthropological practices and modes of representation with "ways of seeing" and the notion of "seeing as knowing" as mentioned in Chapter one, a short excursion to the roots of anthropological knowledge production is undertaken.

When one thinks of the fact that the observations (field notes) of the ethnographer become the raw empirical material and resources of the ethnography, one realises that the "birth" of anthropology correlates with the Enlightenment project of modernity and its positivistic practices of measuring the world and putting things into nameable categories. "As a discipline, anthropology developed hand in hand with the cabinets of curiosity, with antiquarianism and with the widening of European horizons following the Enlightenment" (Morphy and Perkins 2006: 3).

In trying to render a “history of vision”, Crary (1992) investigates the role of the observer as well as technological developments in optical devices (such as moving cameras, microscopes, stereoscopes etc.) that influenced the production of knowledge during the past two centuries. His very interesting study however also tries to relate how the study of the development of mechanical devices cannot only be reduced to studying the technical and mechanical practices. The role of the observer and how the notion of “subject vision”, which he explains as “the role played by the mind” (1992: 9), influences what we see, and should also be analysed. The notion that there is a dialectical relationship between seeing and knowing “pervaded not only areas of art and literature but (is) present in philosophical, scientific, and technological discourses” (Crary 1992: 9).

The implications that this has for knowledge production within the sciences and elsewhere is stressed when Crary (1992: 9) remarks that “rather than stressing the separation between art and science … it is important to see how they were both part of a single interlocking field of knowledge and practice”. When looking back at the history of ideas that led to the Enlightenment, Crary (1992: 9) argues that “(t)he same knowledge that allowed the increasing rationalization and control of the human subject in terms of new institutional and economic requirements was also a condition for new experiments in visual representation”. The very important conclusion Crary makes on this point (which is also of importance for establishing a relationship between artistic and anthropological representational practices), is the fact that he suggests that “an observing subject … was both a product of and at the same time constitutive of modernity in the nineteenth century. Very generally, what happens to the observer in the nineteenth century is a process of modernization” (Crary 1992: 9).

In many disciplines, the notion of a positivist quest for knowledge was assisted by the practice of filing and categorising images. The *Mnemosyne Atlas* created by Aby Warburg (1866 – 1929) is a good example of such a practice. Warburg went on many extended fieldtrips to collect images of the people he was studying. In his library, Warburg collected all kinds of images and sorted them according to certain themes (Belting 2001: 51). What was important in his cataloguing venture was not the artistic quality of the image or the aesthetic excellence, but the motive and meaning of the image (Müller and Knieper 2001: 15). This form of clustering images together changed the characteristic of the source of the image. In Warburg’s atlas the images became

sources of bygone realities (Müller and Knieper 2001: 15). Such modernistic formalization and standardization of knowledge of the observer led to “forms of power that depended on the abstraction and formalization of vision” (Crary 1992: 150).

In its quest to generate order and categorise what humans know about nature, positivism created subjects that also wanted to categorise their own kind. Crary remarks that “(v)ision, rather than a privileged form of knowing, becomes itself an object of knowledge, of observation. From the beginning of the nineteenth century a science of vision will tend to mean increasingly an interrogation of the physiological makeup of the human subject, rather than the mechanics of light transmission” (Crary 1990: 70). The science of vision thus becomes anthropological – knowledge of mankind.

More than what meets the eye

“As the eye, such the object” (Crary 1992: 70)

The dialectical relationship between seeing and knowing can thus be traced back to the roots of anthropology. How mankind has observed (and developed techniques and devices to see better) and consequently asked different questions about what was seen, has had a direct influence on the generation of knowledge. Barnard (2000: 13) argues that “much of the history of anthropology “can be characterised by “a history of changing questions”. Anthropology has always been sensitive to developments and changes in terms of the status of knowledge, due to the fact that anthropology is based on a practice that has to stand its ground amidst the messiness of real life. Anthropological theory underwent many chances since the “crisis of representation” in the 1980s as asserted by Marcus and Fischer (1986), which followed the “interpretative turn” introduced by Geertz (1973). Having survived the representative and interpretative “turns”, anthropology also had to withstand the onslaught of post-structuralist and postmodernist theory on anthropological thinking and practice. Climo and Cattell (2002: 10) discuss how “ethnography has endured these – and many other – transformations because ethnographers are open to ‘the surprise of fieldwork’, to the discovery of other cultural worlds and other perspectives that we can use in our comparative framework”.

Somehow anthropology is “proof” of the fact that there is a dialectical power at work in the relationship “seeing-knowing”. Whilst observing and interpreting, not only the knowledge about the subject changes in a dynamic way, but also the understanding of the self (as scientist and the science in which it operates) changes to become aware of

the politics of seeing and knowing that influence the process of knowledge production (Dewalt and Dewalt 1998: 291).

The power of this dialectic is also apparent to artists who are open to how their work is seen and what influence the act of seeing their work would have on its audiences. South African artist, William Kentridge is someone who uses this dialectic when producing his works of art, which usually challenges viewers to see in new ways. His extensive use of moving images, mirror stereoscopes, cylinder anamorphoses and multi-dimensional sketches are set up in such a way that they work as puzzles on the viewer. For Kentridge (2007: 39) seeing "is always a process of meeting the world halfway, in which we counteract the reports of the world onto our eyes with the pressure of the existing knowledge, understandings, prejudices and fixed ideas streaming out of us... ." Whilst reading this quote from Kentridge, the image of the eye as interface between what is seen and our inner ideas and knowledge meet each other, comes to mind. Here the quote at the beginning of this section can now be invoked again: "As the eye, such the object" (Crary 1992: 70)

New perceptions and prescriptions

If the gaze is turned on anthropology, one will see how changes in viewing the object of study, changed anthropology itself. By following the changes that the concept of culture underwent in the history of anthropology, one learns that "theoretical frameworks and research concerns have led to differing views on culture, research methods and ethnography" (Climo and Cattell 2002: 9).

The new perceptions (here referring to the word in its etymological depth: knowledge that arises from seeing, observation, but also the state of being aware, understanding) that developed in literature and art were translated into anthropological practice and epistemology. Climo and Cattell (2002: 8-10) give an account of how anthropology operates in "liminal spaces" which can be defined as "spaces between disciplines, and is carried out in 'liminal practices' or 'hybridized' methods'". The notion of liminality is also supported by Victor Turner who explains it as embracing "the idea that being in interstitial spaces, betwixt and between, promotes creativity" (Climo and Cattell 2002: 7). This analogy is used to describe the influence other theories from different disciplines had (and have) on anthropology. "The basic method of participant observation … has

come to embrace a wide range of methods, many borrowed from other fields, especially history and sociology" (Climo and Cattell 2002: 7).

The work of Clifford Geertz (*Interpreting Culture*, 1973) and Victor Turner (*The Forest of Symbols*, 1967) had their roots in structuralist and linguistic theories of meaning and were important catalysts for understanding how concepts of culture changed. There is general agreement that "(t)hese interpretative and symbolic approaches foreshadowed postmodern anthropology, which abandoned earlier views of culture as homogenous, well bounded units, and proposed a view of culture as ambiguous, filled with inconsistencies, only partially shared, and often contested" (Climo and Cattell 2002: 9). As in literary and art theory from which the postmodern way of viewing the world originated, the authority of the person who produced the text, work of art, and in the instance of anthropology, the ethnography, was questioned. Ethnographies were subjected to the same scrutiny as texts and images – meaning could only be derived upon after working through all the layers of interpretation that the text produced. Issues such as that of "voice and representation, power and hegemony" (Climo and Cattell 2002: 9), as well as issues such as self-presentation and reflexivity, were relevant aspects to consider when extracting meaning.

Moore and Sanders (2006) offer a critical view of how the changes in understanding the concept of culture were received within the different strains of Anthropology. The view of culture that is expressed by Geertz highlights the notion that social groups are "tied together by expressions of shared values, meanings and symbols" (Moore and Sanders 2006: 10). This understanding of culture is problematic, because it neglects the fact that culture is also power. Geertz (1973: 14) clearly states that "culture is not a power…, it is a context, something within which social events, behaviours, institutions and processes can be intelligently (thickly) described".

By neglecting the power-principle from the equation, Geertz does not offer anthropologists a way of seeing that deems questions such as "why some ideologies become powerful and persuasive and how they come to serve the interests of some groups over others" (Moore and Sanders 2006: 10) as being important and necessary questions to ask. Geertz's argument points toward an understanding of culture that is coherent and in which there is a sense of consensus, when in fact "there exists social difference and even discrimination" (Moore and Sanders 2006:10).

The theories of by Pierre Bourdieu[2] and Michel Foucault[3] uncovered power relations that could be located within the "movement and experience of the body" (Moore and Sanders 2006:11). They contributed in important ways to shape understandings of lived experience (Bourdieu) and how power is traced in the structures of social action on both interpersonal levels and at institutional levels (Foucault). The contributions to anthropology from Bourdieu and Foucault will not be the focus of this study, but it is important to note that their theories had a huge impact on expanding the concept of culture to be not just the values and modes of expressions that people use, but to include the ways in which they use it.

Following the work of Foucault and Bourdieu, post-structuralist and postmodern theorists contested totalising theories, dominant ideologies and the assumption that meaning can be fully known. Postmodern theory acknowledges the fragmentary, ambiguous and uncertain quality of how individuals experience the world in which they live. These feelings are also projected in the cultural texts the "postmodern subject" produces. According to Barker (2000: 22) texts are "typified by self-consciousness, bricolage and intertextuality" and produce "the blurring of cultural boundaries". Cultures are thus not whole, unifying entities, but fragmented and scattered and meaning is contested. The differences internal to one culture, its individuals and meaning making practices are also highlighted.

The post-structuralist way of seeing was also inspired by the understanding that knowledge can never be complete. The presence of the observer in relation to what is being viewed, can never be interpreted as an innocent act and that "the gaze does not take us into more enlightened realms of radiant knowledge, as Descartes still assumed" (Kentridge 2007: 45). This understanding of the relationship of seeing-knowing correlates with what was mentioned in Chapter one, that the relationship should not be interpreted as an argument in favour of a metaphysics of presence. As mentioned earlier, William Kentridge's work shows us, meaning is never fixed, constantly in a change of flux and reinterpreted each time, just as his images "disintegrate into dust so that another can emerge from it" (Kentridge 2007: 47).

The usual critiques against post-structuralist and postmodernist theories are that they are relativistic and dismiss any grounded position for producing any form of scientific

[2] Notably Pierre Bourdieu (1990). *The Logic of Practice*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
[3] Notably Michel Foucault (1991). "The Bodies of the condemned", in Sheridan, A. *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison.* London: Penguin Books.

knowledge. As will be argued in Chapter three, this is not the understanding of a "rigorous" kind of postmodernism (Cilliers 2005: 257). In the following section, the influences on anthropology after postmodernism will be discussed.

Ethnography after *Writing Culture*

In order to start with how postmodern theories could have and influence on anthropology, it is important to qualify how the term "postmodern" will be understood in this study. In the scope of this study the term "postmodern" refers to the style of thinking that accepts the fact that we can no longer provide a single description of "the world" and its domination by a common morality known to all rational beings. When discussing postmodernity from a socio-philosophical point of view, the disbelief and disillusionment in such a position is not based on a chronological understanding of the prefix "post". Here the definition of Anderson (1995:6) refers to the term as "a world that does not know how to define itself by what it is, but only by what it has just ceased to be".

This notion of "ceasing to be" can be linked to how Cilliers (1998 and 2005) claims that arguing for a postmodernist position is not the same as taking up a relativist position. There are certain understandings of the term postmodern that works with a lot of excess and the notion that "anything goes". Cilliers however proposes a more rigorous sort of postmodernism that makes certain knowledge claims, but is willing to see the limits of these claims:

> We can make strong claims, but since these claims are limited, we have to be modest about them. This does not imply that they should be relative, vague or self-contradictory, nor does it imply a reason to cringe in false modesty. We can increase the knowledge we have of a certain system, but this knowledge is limited and we have to acknowledge these limits. The fact that our knowledge is limited is not a disaster; it is a *condition* for knowledge. Limits *enable* knowledge (Cilliers 2005: 263).

To translate the above into anthropological terms, means that postmodernism would be sceptical and critical towards positivist ventures that claim that truth is objective and "out there", and that science should just work hard enough in order to discover it. A postmodern approach in anthropology would also imply the rejection of "both grand theory … and the notion of completeness in ethnographic description. On the latter score they oppose the presumption of the ethnological authority on the part of the

anthropologist" (Barnard 2000: 168). Consequently approaches that include an attitude of reflexivity would also be characterised as "postmodern".

Barnard (2000: 169) argues that anthropology's "premier postmodernist text is *Writing Culture*" (Clifford and Marcus, 1986). In the introduction, James Clifford attacks the notion of ethnography "as a representation of the wholeness of culture and stresses the incompleteness of ethnographic expression" (Barnard 2000: 170). In this manner Clifford argues that the act of writing up the ethnography should be tackled in the same way as one would approach writing a literary text in which the focus would be "the narrative character of cultural representations" (Barnard 2000: 170).

In his essay which explores the influences Clifford's *Writing Culture* had on ethnography, Spencer (2001: 450) remarks that surprisingly "a formularized version of postmodern ethnography, alternating between stock passages of ethnographic self-consciousness and (carefully edited and positioned) 'voices', is in danger of becoming the disciplinary norm". This is the result of students who are being trained to read the canon of classical theorists with huge amounts of critique and also because the "stereotype of the 'colonial ethnographer has become as familiar a figure as the caricature 'armchair anthropologists' invoked by Malinowski and his successors" (Spencer 2001: 450).

By inserting postmodern approaches to ethnography as a mainstream position, it loses the initial critical edge and conviction it had as it did in the mid-1980s. Having made the "postmodern" method of doing things a mainstream way of approaching ethnography, it is not surprising that "genuinely radical experiments with the mode of ethnographic representation remain as rare as ever" (Barnard 2000: 450).

Another feature of this mainstream position is that after *Writing Culture*, the notion of culture itself changed. As Barnard remarks, it has become problematic for ethnographers to write about their subjects "as if they lived in sealed, often timeless, bubbles called 'cultures'" (2000: 450). This notion itself is problematic, seeing that from a modest kind of postmodernism as mentioned above, the notion of making culture a boundary-less open field of who-knows-what, destroys the notion of culture. In order for something to have meaning, it must differentiate itself from something else. The limits (or boundaries) enable meaning. Moore and Sanders (2006: 18) are also critical of the notion of culture being indistinct, and suggest a more nuanced view thereof: "Culture as a concept is both stabilizing and negotiable, both about long-run cultural values and

systems and about lived daily practice and the determinations of the moment". This dialectical and contested nature of culture is congruent with a modest understanding of the term postmodernism.

In light of the fact that the postmodern approach has lost its initial critical moment and power of conviction, Spencer suggests that in order for anthropology to remain relevant and effective in the world, one should engage in a modest kind of critical ethnography that not only internalises the contested nature of culture, but that is also grounded on a "strong reflexivity which recognizes that the ethnographer and his or her language are inevitable a part of the phenomenon that is being investigated" (Spencer 2001: 450). Spencer furthermore suggests a kind of ethics of representational practices that is sensitive towards the "responsibility to recognize complexity and difference" (Spencer 2001: 450) rather than hide them behind excessive notions of being overly and blindly "politically correct". Spencer (2001: 450) remarks that with this sense of responsibility comes a liberty that enables the ethnographer to "write extraordinarily rich, and even sometimes extraordinarily readable, ethnographies that are quite open about their limitations and partiality, and which manage to acknowledge the complexity of the world". This view of a postmodern approach to anthropology coincides with the notion supported by Cilliers (2005: 263) who claims that "(t)he fact that our knowledge is limited is not a disaster, it is a *condition* for knowledge. Limits *enable* knowledge".

Proceeding beyond prescription

> "Is it possible for anthropology to be different, that is, to forget itself and to become something else … or must it remain as a partner in domination and hegemony?" (Lather 2001: 482).

The direction of the argument up to now in the study followed a slow journey to map out the development of epistemological changes in anthropology. The changes can be traced from the point where anthropology started out as a part of a positivistic process to gather all there is to know, to a postmodern understanding of knowledge that reflects on the actual process of gathering knowledge that claims loss of authority and coherent wholes. As mentioned in the foregoing section, even this politically correct postmodern way of approaching the act of gathering data and writing up results is not unproblematic. The fact that this newly found position has now "settled into an historical occasion" (Lather 2001: 477) and becomes the new prescriptive authority, consequently leaves postmodernism in a place where it has lost its critical and transformative energy due to

its “own containment” (Lather 2001: 477). The following section will deal with this “loss of innocence” (Lather 2001: 485) and will look at finding ways forward to get beyond this predicament.

Lather (2001: 477) addresses the above mentioned issue at length and the discussion will now proceed to unpack what she writes about the predicament of this “current order of knowledge”. Drawing strongly on Derrida’s logic of deconstruction, Lather suggests that the “ruins of postmodernism, science and, finally ethnography itself” (2001: 477) could be turned into something hopeful and useful to get beyond the “stuck places” (or liminal spaces as mentioned earlier) in which “practices of knowing” (2001: 477) are in at present.

Building on her analogy of ruins, Lather suggests that the “failures of ethnography” (Lather 2001: 478) are not retraceable to being failures of method, “but of epistemology” (2001: 478). By this she implies that the whole discussion that was driven by the “reflective turn” was based on criticising ethnography as the method for gathering and writing up knowledge. Consequently the self-conscious postmodern ways in which ethnographies are being produced in fear of misrepresenting the subject, loose sight of the fact that “textual experimentation will not be the ‘silver bullet that slays the dragon of misrepresentation’” (Lather 2001: 485). This point resonates with Spencer’s argument that unreadable texts and evasive and self-abjecting and self-estranged styles of writing do not do enough to represent the “complexities of the world” (Spencer 2001: 450). By exposing the constraints the mainstream postmodern prescriptions put on the ethnographer and conscience of the researcher, Lather suggests a way in which one could break free and proceed beyond these restraints.

(De)limiting the field – from postmodernism to postmodernity

The way that Lather sees out of the “aporia[4] of practice” (2001: 482), is to deconstruct the logic of postmodernism and its consequences for anthropology and to use it against itself. Lather starts by making a distinction between deconstruction and ideological critique (which reaches its peak in postmodernism). To Lather (2001: 479), ideology critique as founded in Marx’s writings and its different versions thereof “is about uncovering hidden forces and material structures and salvaging determinism and conflict

[4] “Aporia” is a term Derrida uses and defines it as being “an undecidability, a double bind” (Lather 2001: 482). The notion of aporia can be connected to the notion of “liminality” as used by Turner, explained earlier, who calls it “the betwixt and between” (Climo and Cattell 2002: 7).

theory. It endorses foundational criteria for science and a binary of textual/material in its calls for grounding our knowing in some real assumed knowable outside of the rhetoricity of language." Operating in a different logic and not as critique, "(t)he deconstructive sense of task is to move to some place interrupted, out of balance, extreme, against the levelling processes of the dialectic and for the excesses, the non-recuperable remainder, the difference, in excess of the logic of non-contradiction" (Lather 2001: 479 – 480). To Lather's mind, the logic of deconstruction is "another logic to that of dialectical opposition" (2001: 480). Caputo's effort to explain deconstruction as being "post-critical", aims at proposing an attitude that is a "continued commitment to critique and demystification of truth but with a meta layer of being critical of demystification itself" (Caputo quoted in Lather 2001: 480). By deconstructing the normalizing effect of postmodernism's logic and for exposing it as being constraining for the last word it has on things, Lather demystifies it. She suggests that the term "postmodern modernity" (2001: 480) would not be a bad word to describe a deconstructed postmodernism. This term can be connected to Cilliers' notion of a "modest" form of postmodernism mentioned earlier. This is an approach that does not so much focus on the failures of the methods, but more so, on the failures of epistemology. Lather (2001: 480) explains this in the following manner:

> 'Past the post' of epistemological wrestling with representation, blurred genres and the ethics of the gaze, such a sense of crisis asks how we come to think of things this way and what would be made possible if we were to think ethnography otherwise, as a space surprised by difference into the performance of practices of not-knowing.

The fact that the reflective turn started questioning the "very space of ethnographic knowing" (Lather 2001: 482) resulted in the notion that the ethnographic texts themselves became the "site of the failure of representation" (Lather 2001: 481). For Lather, redemption lies not in producing textual experiments (as practised by postmodern writers) to counter the knowledge of unequal power that lies in the researcher *vis à vis* the researched, but in acknowledging the limits of the ways in which knowledge can be obtained. "Attempting to be accountable to complexity, thinking the limit becomes our task and much opens up in terms of ways to proceed for those who know both too much and too little" (Lather 2001: 482). This understanding of the epistemological status of knowledge claims once again resonates with Cilliers' notion of limits that are enabling as mentioned earlier. For Lather the answer of moving beyond the postmodern constraints, lies within (de)limiting epistemological knowledge claims.

Locked up in what seems the failure of ethnography lays the key to unlock new possibilities of dealing with "the politics of knowing and seeing".

The Art of Anthropology: Seeing as not-knowing

> How might we think ethnography as 'an art of being in between', of finding ways of using the constraining order, of drawing unexpected results from one's abject situation, of making the dominant function in another register, of diverting it without leaving it? (Lather 2001: 481).

The study took a long detour to come to this point – not because of a postmodernist streak of the author behind it, but in order to work through the logic of how deeply entrenched research practices and the production of knowledge are with constraining and politically loaded devices – even if it claims to be free of it and giving voices to the voiceless.

Lather suggests that the inherent capacity of ethnography to be "open to the surprise of fieldwork" (Climo and Cattell 2002: 10), situates it as an ideal place to present itself as limited practice of representation. What has seemed the failure of ethnography now becomes an enabling characteristic. By situating "ethnography as an experience of impossibility" (Lather 2001: 482), it becomes the ideal liminal space to work through the aporias of representation. It becomes the way of gathering and presenting knowledge in a way that exposes a practice that is about "ontological stammering, a praxis without guaranteed subjects or objects, orientated toward the as yet incompletely thinkable conditions and potentials of given arrangements" (Lather 2001: 482). What Lather is trying to express, is that even the effort to want to show how "politically correct" we are in our efforts to represent others, we fail deeply. What we learn from ethnography is the fact that we can NEVER know the other or his or her conditions ("arrangements") fully – no matter how "objectively" we go about the process. Even in our attempts to show our concern for the power relations and frames of references, we utterly fail to represent the "picture" of how it is to be X living in this specific location dealing with this specific problem. By admitting that our knowledge of the reality of the other's life is not complete, we "come clean" of the prescriptions of the postmodern constraints. Lather (2001: 486) argues that even in our attempts to be practising reflexive/interpretative ethnography, ethnography "authorizes itself by confronting its own processes of interpretation as some sort of cure toward better knowing, while deconstruction approaches 'knowing through not knowing'".

At this stage the whole discussion of the relationship "seeing-knowing" takes on a logic that connects with the art work of William Kentridge, which explicitly aims at giving the viewer the experience that what is happening in front of him or her is so complex, that one can not see everything (this is especially apparent in his production of Mozart's *The Magic Flute*)[5]. As mentioned in Chapter one, the "seeing" referred not to a logic that is equated with the metaphysics of presence, but refers to "seeing" that supports the notion of a deconstructive logic. Thus, the understanding of the notion of the "limit of communication" supported by Luhmann in Chapter one comes into play now when he mentions that "this new social system of art communicates the limits of communication; that is, in communicating the breakdown of stable representation systems" (Harrington 2004: 200). He explains that the breakdown of the system of representation lies in the fact that "every time something is made available for observation something else withdraws, that, in other words, the activity of distinguishing and indicating what goes on in the world conceals the world" (Luhmann 2000: 149). This is the paradox of seeing, which exposes the human possibilities of perception and representation. And as Luhmann says "a view that strives for completeness or restricting oneself to the essential world would be absurd" (Luhmann 2000: 149). From this perspective, "seeing" thus becomes "not-knowing".

The contribution that art thus offers to anthropology is the opportunity to express this aporia. To offer new and other ways of seeing and knowing to be internalised in an ethnography that does not strive to control knowledge, but one that "marks the limit of the saturated humanist logics of knowledge as cure … that determines the protocols through which we know" (Lather 2001: 487).

The art of anthropology thus lies in actively looking for ways to undo the aporias marked by the loss of innocence of ethnography and the crisis of representation. Such efforts "work the ruins of ethnography as the very ground from which new practices of ethnographic representation might take shape" (Lather 2001: 485).

[5] In the concert program for the production of Mozart's *The Magic Flute*, Kentridge writes "even in (opera's) most reduced and minimalist form, it is an overload. In this production we ask you to listen to the orchestra, the singers, the spoken text, to watch the singers, to read the subtitles above the stage, and also to watch the projections behind and around all of this. It is clear that this is too much. The best advice I can give is to let your eyes and ears follow as they will, and accept that a part of the production will be missed. This acceptance is better than any anxiety about not taking everything in" (2007).

The next chapter will look at how, when situated in the awareness of the limitations of our representational practices which manage to acknowledge the complexity of the world, art and anthropology have a lot to offer when their deconstructive capacities are combined.

Chapter 3: Complexity theory: weaving together ways of seeing

"Complexity is a problem word and not a solution word" (Edgar Morin, 1993)

Chapter one started with a confession about the near impossibility to talk and write about art. Setting out to speak about complexity in itself is also characterised by overcoming some difficulty in speaking about it at all, due to the fact that one might fall prey to committing the performative contradiction (i.e. doing exactly that which one claims is impossible to do). Speaking about complexity effectively in a limited framework such as that which this thesis allows, asks for reducing the concept, its history and development, its inner workings and implications to a huge extent. And reducing complexity is precisely what cannot be done. In other words, "the complex cannot be summarized in a single word that which cannot be brought under a law of complexity, reduced to the idea of complexity" (Nicolaus 2007: 333).

The aim of this chapter is to build on the main concepts with regards to "ways of knowing" as mentioned in chapter one and two. Seeing that "the first meaning of the word (complexity) comes from the Latin *complexus*, which means what is woven together" (Morin 2007: 6), this chapter hopes to weave together the notions of Chapters one and two. This approach is based on the understanding of knowledge that is supported by complexity theory as an attempt to "move beyond" the "postmodern predicament" as mentioned in Chapter two. In order to map out a way through the predicament, it would be important to offer some general understanding of complexity and the characteristics of a theory that is informed by it. Once a clear description of what complexity theory has to offer has been sketched, the chapter will explore how an anthropology of art and the art of anthropology combined, can give us directions for more authentic (mis)representational practices and knowledge production in our scientific endeavours.

The birth of systems theory

In an attempt to describe how systems theory became an interesting and valuable tool in dealing with epistemological issues, Rasch and Wolfe (2000:1) start with Adorno and Horkheimer's discontent with the Enlightenment project. Their contribution of "negative dialectics" as form of immanent critique against the onslaught of positivism and the reforms in theoretical thinking that took place after that up to postmodernism, suggests an interesting point of departure for understanding the birth of a systems theory

approach. The fact that the workings of the negative dialectic left us with a “legacy of the so-called “loss of reference” with its dislocation of epistemological security” (Rasch and Wolfe 2000: 8) presents us with a puzzle to solve. To Rasch and Wolfe (similarly as by Lather) this aporetic position should not be viewed as a dead end but rather as “an opening and an invitation to a philosophical and political pluralism, one whose commitment to democratic difference may be gauged precisely by the extent to which it squarely faces the loss of the referent and the contingency and materiality of knowledge” (2000: 8).

It is suggested that a general systems theory as posed by Luhmann, possesses the necessary tools to “think through the breakdown of the representationalist world” (Rasch and Wolf 2000: 14). Systems theory offers the possibility “of a theory of knowledge that can count with greater range and power for the complex interactions of human beings in what Bruno Latour calls the ‘hybrid networks’ of social systems in which we will find ourselves enmeshed in the coming years” (Rasch and Wolf 2000: 17). By studying the work of Niklas Luhmann as posed in his epic work, *Social Systems* (1984), it is shown that his notion of defining society in terms of system-environment differentiations places systems theory in a good position to deal with “general epistemological problems of description, observation, and interpretation” (Rasch and Wolfe 2000: 10).

The change in thought about the importance of systems theory came from Luhmann's investigations into how the natural sciences dealt with the problem of objective observation. The breakthroughs in quantum physics and its epistemological implications for the nature of observation led to a new understanding of how systems function and how differences in transferring information could be qualified in terms of the laws of thermodynamics (Rasch and Wolfe 2001: 10 – 13 explores this in more detail). The intricacies of all of these developments will not be discussed within the context of this study. Cilliers (1998) also goes to great length to explain the factors that contributed to the results that led to how systems theory is understood today. More important than the exact details for this study, is the fact that the epistemological problems that emerged within the social sciences, were not unique to the social sciences, but that the natural sciences also struggled with problems of representation and observation when it came to knowledge production. What is remarkable is the fact that the social sciences recognised this similarity and internalised the solutions which came out of the natural sciences’ explanations and suggestions about the value of adopting a systems theory approach. The next section will explore what a general theory of complex systems looks

like and what the implications thereof are for fields like anthropology and art that deal with knowledge production based on observational and interpretative practices.

Sketching complexity theory

In explaining why it is not easy to talk about the notion of complexity, Cilliers (1998: 2) refers to Luhmann's description thereof which states that "complexity entails that, in a system, there are more possibilities than can be actualized". Literature on complexity theory in general does not give a well-packed and trimmed word for word definition of complexity. Instead, characteristics of what complex systems comprise of are offered as attempts to describe what one can expect. Morin states that within the emerging science of complexity there are two different understandings of the notions of complexity. A distinction is made between a "restricted form" of complexity and a "general complexity". The first understanding of complexity argues that one can recognize complexity by "de-complexifying it" (Morin 2007: 10). This kind of approach supports the notion that even though things are complex, it is possible to still find order in it, by measuring it in terms of mathematical models (Ingham 2007: 7-8). From this perspective, one is confronted with highly technical jargon that relates to the milieu of chaos theory[6].

Both Cilliers (1998) and Morin (2007) argue against a "restricted" form of complexity by saying that due to the structural nature of a complex system, it cannot be reduced or quantified. This might become clearer after elaborating on how Cilliers characterises "general complex systems". According to Cilliers' understanding of what comprises a complex system[7], he suggests that a postmodern society (seen as a complex system) would be summarised in terms of the following characteristics (1998: 119 - 120):

1. Complex systems are open systems.
2. They operate under conditions far from equilibrium.
3. Complex systems consist of a large number of elements.
4. The elements in a complex system interact dynamically.
5. The level of interaction is fairly rich.
6. Interactions are non-linear (this is a pre-condition for complexity, especially where self-organisation, dynamic adaptation and evolution are at stake.
7. The interactions have a fairly short range.

[6] For more on this type of thinking, see for example Johnson, N. 2007. *Two's Company, Three's Complexity*. Oxford: Oneworld Publications.
[7] See Cilliers, P. 1998. *Postmodernism and Complexity: understanding complex systems*. London: Routledge: p. 3-5.

8. There are loops in the interconnections.
9. Complex systems have histories.
10. Individual elements are ignorant of the behaviour of the whole system in which they are embedded.

On first glance it might seem that the description of the characteristics of complex systems might not have much to do with what has been discussed so far. Contemporary human society exhibits many of these characteristics. It can be understood as a system with individuals and groups of individuals as the elements. There is a high level of interaction during which information is constantly exchanged between subjects. One cannot conceive of an individual as being in isolation; the isolated self has very little meaning. Each element or self is constituted in a system of differences and is moreover in itself a complex heterogeneous system. Each person finds himself fragmented into various contextual sub-elements created by the variety of his potentially conflicting contextual interests, resulting in internal uncertainty and conflict. There is a dynamic competition for the attention of each agent. This dilemma contributes to the tentativeness, provisional nature and moral uncertainty characteristic of our times (Cilliers. 1998: 6).

Cilliers thus draws from what looks like technical descriptions from a textbook on thermodynamics, and translates this into the frame of social sciences. He argues that "(t)hese insights have important implications for the knowledge-claims we make when dealing with complex systems. To *fully* understand a complex system, we need to understand it in all its complexity" (Cilliers 2005: 258). Seeing that complex systems are characterized as open systems that interact with their environment in a dynamic way, and due to the fact that this interaction is non-linear, we would also need to "understand the system's complete environment before we can understand the system, and, of course, the environment is complex in itself" (Cilliers 2005: 258). As Cilliers points out rightly, this is an impossible task to do for any human.

So in order to extract meaning, and to have any understanding of the system, one has to construct a model in order to have knowledge of the system. A model can be explained as the way in which we frame the system in order to gather knowledge. The term "model" thus refers to the knowledge generating practices such as observation and interpretation.

Cilliers (2005: 258), however, argues that "in order to function as models – and not merely as repetition of the system – they have to *reduce* the complexity of the system. This means that some aspects of the system are always left out of consideration". What is left out of the description is not unproblematic, seeing that according to the characteristics of a complex system, what is not included, could interact "with the rest of the system in a non-linear way and we can therefore not predict what the effects of our reduction of the complexity will be" (Cilliers 2005: 258). This implies that it is impossible to have complete knowledge of a complex system and that we can only know the system in terms of the models that are used to frame it. The dilemma lies in the fact that the frameworks are chosen by us, the researchers, and coincides here with the notion of self-reflectivity – that we are aware of the constructedness of the frameworks and models as mentioned in chapter two. Thus, when making any knowledge claims, it would only be ethical to acknowledge that our models have limits.

By now it becomes apparent that what the implication for the status of knowledge claims coincides with a deconstructionist understanding of the incompleteness and provisionality of knowledge and meaning as proposed in chapter two. Derrida (quoted in Cilliers 2005: 259) explicitly links the problem of meaning and context to the fact that these things are complex. "The critical understanding of complexity theory presented here, and deconstruction, therefore, make a very similar claim: knowledge is provisional". (Cilliers 2005: 5). This notion of Cilliers that knowledge is always incomplete and only provisional resonates with Lather's argument that by "(a)ttempting to be accountable to complexity, thinking the limit becomes our task and much opens up in terms of ways to proceed for those who know both too much and too little" (Lather 2001: 482).

Complex thinking

> "Whether we are happy with calling the times we live in 'postmodern', there is no denying that the world we live in is complex and that we have to confront this complexity if we are to survive, and, perhaps, even prosper" (Cilliers 1998: 112).

As we have learned from the previous section, trying to reduce complexity is not a way to confront the complexity in the world. By acknowledging the limits of the models we are using, new possibilities are opened up in which to approach a way of doing scientific research without invoking metaphysical truth claims. In spite of the new space that opens up, a number of "between and betwixt" places still remain to be explored.

The concrete question at this stage of the study still remains, why art and anthropology? And why complexity theory? In the next section, the connection between these three terms will be established based on what Morin terms “complex thinking” (2007: 28). This type of thinking can be connected to what Derrida calls a “double movement” (Culler 1983: 150) which suggests that one thinks the concept and its counterpart (the yes and the no) simultaneously. Morin (2007: 20) calls this the “logical core of complexity” which is dialogical of nature: “separability-inseparability, whole-parts, effect-cause, product-producer, life-death, homo sapio-homo demens, etc”. However, the complexity lies not in thinking one in terms of the other in binary motion, but in terms of how the one is dependent and determined by the other. The art lies not in describing opposites when making knowledge claims, but in thinking both at the same time. It is in this way of thinking that “the dialogic is not the response to these paradoxes, but the means of facing them, by considering the complementarities of antagonisms and the productive play, sometimes of complementary antagonisms” (2007: 20). It challenges a type of thinking that does not disconnect opposites, but thinks of them as part of a unity. In order to be able to reach this style of thinking, Morin calls for us to “deeply reform all our ways of knowing and thinking” (2007: 25).

An example of what the notion of truth would mean, when explained dialogically, is what Morin calls a “(d)ialogical truth: a truth continuously in transit that one reaches only in the sense of having to still look for it (Maldonato 2007: 282)”. Such an understanding of truth implies an understanding of knowledge as also being dialogical. This is explained by playing a word game with the word “encyclopaedia”. Regarding the incompleteness of scientific knowledge, Morin defines "en-cyclo-peding" as “to place knowledge in cycles” (Rogerro 2007: 130). This dialogical notion of Morin connects with the notion of Derrida’s understanding that everything is interpreted, so there is no original *arche* knowledge. Meaning is always already derived from past interpretations and will change as it moves into the future (Culler 1983: 103).

This dialogical logic of complex thought, and the understanding that epistemological certainty can not be guaranteed, links up with what Lather calls “difficult knowledge” 2001: 486): “Asking hard questions about necessary complicities, inadequate categories, dispersing rather than capturing meanings, and producing bafflement rather than solutions, I put deconstruction to work as ‘difficult knowledge’, knowledge that works against security and certainty by inducing breakdowns in representing experience. Here accepting loss becomes the very force of learning and the promise of

thinking and doing otherwise". It is also in stating with the logic as deconstruction that Lather suggests knowing by not-knowing (refer to Chapter two).

At this stage it is important to qualify that the uncertainty of "not-knowing" is not a license to invoke a relativist position. By rejecting the totality of knowledge or truth or possibility to represent something fully, does not mean that one rejects knowledge or truth or the possibility to represent. It just means that even if we work as hard as we can (and we must) to collect all there is to know about a system with the best possible models and methods that we have at our disposal; there will always be something that we can not know. The dialogical nature of the complex thought allows us to have our truths, our knowledge, our way of seeing and the art of representation, but it challenges us to know the limits thereof and to re-evaluate it every time we use it and to re-invent it if necessary.

This "crisis of knowledge" is not the result of our politically correct ways of postmodern thinking, but it is "a direct result of the complexity of our postmodern society" (Cilliers 1998: 121). Thus the challenge to reform our ways of thinking and knowing is a direct challenge to move on beyond the postmodern predicament. Morin suggests that "complexity does not put us only in the distress of the uncertain; it allows us to see besides the probable, the possibilities of the improbable, because of those which have been in the past and those that can be found again in the future" (2007: 29). And lastly, "complex thought is a fundamental preparation for any truly transdisciplinary project" (Rogerro 2007: 130).

Thinking art and anthropology simultaneously

> Artists and anthropologists are practitioners who appropriate form, and represent others. Although their representational practices have been different, both books and artworks are creative additions to the world; both are complex translations of other realities (Schneider and Wright 2006: 26).

Based on the connections that have been discovered up until now in the study, it can be argued that the relationship between art and anthropology should be reviewed in terms of what both fields of study can offer each other in terms of their representational and knowledge generating practices. Having situated art and anthropology on the same level of enquiry, this study will argue that the "crossing of the borders" between the two would entail more than just artists engaging in fieldwork and anthropologists discussing aesthetic interpretations of art works as objects of study.

As Marcus and Myers (1995: 35) state, “(i)n the past, the anthropological study of art has been essentially a marginal occupation. This should no longer be the case. In contemporary cultural life, art is becoming one of the main sites of cultural production for transforming difference into discourse, for making it meaningful for action and thought. Especially because anthropology has also seen this as its role in the production of cultural knowledge, we argue that critical understanding and a new relationship between art and anthropology are required”. Morphy and Perkins (2006: 11) are also convinced about the possibilities of collaboration between the two fields of study and suggest that “(t)he future of anthropology of art must re-engage with those methods and problems that led a different generation of anthropologists to reject the study of art in the first place”.

When looking at the development of anthropology and the role visual material played in it, Schneider and Wright (2006: 23) recall that during the early 1900s visual material used in ethnographic accounts was “cut short by anthropology’s attempts to establish itself as scientific discipline and the visual was largely abandoned because of its positivistic colonial associations”. It is only in the 1960s that the interest in using visual modes of representation got more attention. The influence of anthropologist-filmmaker Jean Rouch on ethnographic filmmaking should not be underestimated when looking at the development of visual representations in anthropology. Together with Edgar Morin, Rouch produced the first “*cinema vérité* film combining the ideas of Flaherty with those of Soviet film theorist and practitioner Dziga Vertov” (Ruby 2006: 395). In these films the process of filmmaking was part of the film and the filmed subjects became collaborators in the process of deciding what will be represented and how it will be represented. “Jean Rouch wanted to produce a shared anthropology in which those in front of the camera shared power with the director” (Ruby 2006: 396). Not only had Rouch inspired artists such as French New Wave directors Chris Marker and Jean-Luc Goddard, but his work also inspired collaborators, such as Edgar Morin to develop the notion of a complex anthropology which supports the notion that knowledge producing activities should not be reductive of nature, but it should expand the understanding of what it is to be human.

When thinking about both art and anthropology, the argument stresses that artistic visual representations should not take the place of just having “auxiliary functions to the ethnographic monograph” (Schneider and Wright 2006: 23), but that through its own inherent properties, it should be used to create “a system of meaning parallel to, but

different from that of written ethnographies" (Schneider and Wright 2006: 23). Thus, the contribution that art could play in anthropology is in terms of the difference of its representational practice and mode of knowledge production, which means much more than just using films and photos as supportive material. McDougall argues that the substantial challenge to "anthropological thought comes not simply from broadening its purview but from it's entering into communicative systems different to the 'anthropology of words'" (McDougall quoted in Schneider and Wright 2006: 23).

When anthropologists venture into using more visual representations in their work, the visual representations should be able to speak for themselves. This could lead to the effect that it would be necessary for anthropologists to study "ways of seeing" more closely in order to offer material that could translate finer tones and nuances in the visual representations. For anthropologists who are engaging with ethnographic film as a medium of representation, the "objective capability of the camera" (Harper 2006: 83) that implies the use of single-device recording and projection could be supplemented by "the use of more than one camera, or multiple projection devices, such as artists use in installations" (Schneider and Wright 2006: 8).

There are a number of studies where anthropologists give cameras to, for example, street children to take pictures of their environments. The object of study then becomes how the children see and look at their environment. Projects like these could also assist anthropologists to explore a wider range of "visual strategies in gathering, producing, and exhibiting work" (Schneider and Wright 2006: 23).

Artists on the other hand who dare to learn more from the anthropological methods of systematic fieldwork and participant observation could address the context of their subjects in more "authentic" ways. After the "reflexive turn" in the art world, artists became more aware that their work should be more self-conscious and should comment on what is happening in society. Art as a form of resistance and space in which struggles could be voiced grew especially after the Second World War. Artists who are embedded in "real life" situations by means of participant observation could render stronger comment if they are more familiar with the particularities of the situation. The famous documentary photographer Robert Capa is well-known for saying "if your pictures aren't good enough, you're not close enough".

The closeness that ethnographic fieldwork methods offer is ideal for producing material that captures the ambivalences and private struggles people go through. As example one could use the work of the South African photographer Gideon Mendel[8] who is now famous for his photographic exhibitions of people who are living with HIV/Aids. When he started this project, he was commissioned by his agency, Network Photographers, to photograph people living with HIV/Aids in England. After the success of the exhibition in the United Kingdom, the exhibition was moved to South Africa with the condition that a section of photographs taken of the African HIV/Aids epidemic should be added (Godby 2003: 17). As he started spending more time with people, it became clear that he had to change the ways in which he would photograph his subjects. Mendel became aware of the fact that he was a first world photographer "with the power to represent his Third World subjects in any way that he chooses, and the subjects have little control over the creation of their images" (Godby 2003: 17). In the exhibition that became known as *A Broken Landscape: HIV and AIDS in Africa*, the relationship between photographer and the photographed is also presented. The images do not stand for themselves, but with text added next to them, the context was made explicit. Even Mendel's relationship to the funding agencies was revealed in the exhibition. "True to this spirit, Mendel's photographs are arranged in short essays that represent the same people – the patient and his or her family – over a period of time, thereby showing the people involved in different situations and relationships that obviously suggest more complex identities that single photographs could ever show" (Godby 2003: 18). The complexities of the lived experiences of the people involved are depicted in Mendel's work.

The depth and sophistication with which he depicts the devastation of AIDS also contain activist impulses that call on the viewers to start acting and become involved in the struggle against HIV/Aids. Mendel's closeness to his subjects is the ingredient for the success of his powerful and striking photos, of which one picture truly says more than the proverbial thousand words. Mendel was criticised by art critics (Godby 2003:20) for adding the context in which the subjects were photographed and by revealing his relationship to the subjects (as sponsored photographer). Godby, (2003: 20), however argues that the critics were short sighted "not to recognise, for example, that the images and the texts are in fact part of the same project, and that the photographer, in radically changing his methods of photography, is actively engaging with both his medium of representation and the institutional frameworks within which he is working: at the same

[8] For more information on Gideon Mendel's work see: http://www.gideonmendel.com/

time, he may be seen to be actually transforming the institutional space of the gallery or museum from a repository of 'relics' to an active political platform".

Gazing into the future of art and anthropology

For both artists and anthropologists to learn how to enter into that space where their representational practices keep up with the complex world in which we live, Morin urges that it is necessary "to learn to go beyond disciplinary frameworks whenever necessary… to "re-link" different types of knowledge" (Ruggeri 2007: 130). Morin also argues that the artist and scientist should never lose sight of what it is to be human and that the work we produce should reflect our humanity more than the politically correct ways of being self-reflexive about objects and subjects. Our representational practices should expand the notion of what it is to be human and not reduce it. Morin states that "science does not cover the entirety of human experience. … This is why man who is also a being with desires, beliefs, passions and with the ability to create, can not be reduced, except in a way that is very abusive" (Rogerro 2007: 130).

At this stage it might seem that artists have the monopoly when it comes to dealing with the means of visual representation. Hans Belting (2001: 18-19) however moves into the direction that Morin points out, by arguing that images do not only belong to those who produce them, and that images only come into being when in the presence of humans. The argument suggests that human agency brings the image to life and human agency also has the power to transform images. Belting (2001: 30) uses the ideas of Regis Debray which he developed concerning the "gaze", according by which the gaze is seen as the mechanism by which images of mental nature are transmitted. Debray focuses on the dissemination of the image not only in its material form, but also in terms of the mental images that originate in our minds and imaginations. According to Debray, it is due to the force of the gaze that pictures are turned into images (Belting 2001: 30). It is argued "that any fabricated image is dated by its fabrication as well is by its following reception. But (this) also allows for an equal discussion of all those images which only live in our thinking and in our imagination" (Belting 2001: 18). The image draws its meaning from the gaze, much as the text lives from reading." The gaze, for him, is not just a social technique close to violence such as the one between the sexes, but implies the living body as a whole. Drawing from Debary's theory of how and where images originate and how they are transmitted and received, Belting suggests that the human body can be described as the place where images come into being (Belting 2001: 32). As we interact with other people, the way we go about in our daily routines of life and in

our lived experience, these images interact with other images to form the mental picture we have of the world. Belting also mentions that the mental images we carry around with us, form part of our individual and collective memory. These images differ to the images or pictures we consume and forget everyday (here referring to pictures and images seen on television, magazines, newspapers, advertisements) (Belting 2001: 32). The mental images that we carry in our minds are attached to the symbolic meaning that arises from our lived experiences.

Belting's notion of the image as not only being a perceivable object, but also as "something" that we carry around in our memories and mental faculties gives another meaning to the concept of "visual anthropology". The visual is not only what is "out there" but also what is "in here". The image is thus more than just a product of observation, but rather the outcome of a personal or collective symbolization. Human beings are not seen as being in control of images in the way that they interpret and allocate meaning to them, but by being the place ("Ort der Bilder") in which they exist, "human beings are possessed of images" (Belting 2006:12).

Belting's understanding of the image links the study of images (visual experience and perception) not only to the material, but also to the corporeal. An anthropology of art thus would also need to locate the way in which humans make sense of the mental images they carry with them. The art of anthropology will then lie in finding creative and authentic ways of expressing these corporeal images by bringing them to life with ethnographic practices that will elucidate them in a way that would enable others to also see these hidden images. Here both anthropologists and artists have a shared task in re-thinking their representational practices. Each would have to delve deep into the resources that they have in order to achieve the task. By combining efforts and by exchanging knowledge producing practices, our lived experiences could stand a chance of being represented in ways that do not reduce our humanity to scientific formulas and mediocre documentaries. For anthropology this implies that anthropologists "need to develop an approach to images that is aware of what they want, that acknowledges and productively makes use of their affective powers, and develops new ways of using them" (Schneider and Wright 2006: 8). For artists this imply that they should be able to leave the safe space of their studios and to get closer to their objects of study so that the distance between them can be breached with intimacy – this intimacy which "is the currency of fieldwork" (Schneider and Wright 2006: 8).

By engaging in the “weaving together” of art and anthropology and by acknowledging that as artists and anthropologists we are always in the aporetic position in which our knowledge and forms of representing that knowledge will always be limited, we are truly moving beyond the predicament of the postmodern. In such a way our limits are not reasons for not trying to move beyond the “betwixt and the between”, but they become enabling when we are open to learn from other disciplines and other ways of seeing and knowing (or not-knowing).

By attempting to artfully represent that which is both seen and hidden, "(t)he field of perception must be broadened, because knowledge is not nourished solely by scientific truths. Knowledge is everywhere and can be found in various forms, including common sense. We must have the courage to confront the dogmas of scientism to open the universe of thought to all forms of thought that populate our existence. Dreams, religion, art, love, illusion, all these make up what we call real” (Da Silva 2007: 308).

In conclusion, the weaving together of art and anthropology leads to the position where both art and anthropology can operate from a common ground. This common ground is found in the way in which human beings as complex systems in themselves operate and how their ways of making meaning will never be predictable and fully knowable for scientists or artists. The claim that our understanding of complex systems cannot be reduced to calculation means that there will always be some form of creativity involved when dealing with complexity. The role that the imagination and intuition play in bringing forth ‘creativity’, “should not (only) be understood in terms of flights of fancy or wild (postmodern) abandon, but also in terms of a careful and responsible development of the imagination” (Cilliers 2005: 264).

In order to imagine the future of art and anthropology, one would need to be willing to take some risks and the nature of this risk “will be a function of the quality of our imagination” (Cilliers 2005: 264). Hence it is therefore important that we start imagining better futures, and for that we need better imaginations. The role that an engagement with “(r)eading books, listening to music, appreciating art and film” play in our lives, should not be viewed from the perspective that it just forms part of “entertainment to be indulged in after we have done our serious work” (Cilliers 2005: 264). These creative activities have an influence on the imagination and thereby transform the politics of knowing and being known by means of its power to change and constitute “the frameworks we apply when apprehending the world” (Cilliers 2005: 264).

As Morin thus says, the view from complexity not only puts us “in the distress of the uncertain, it allows us to see besides the probable, the possibilities of the improbable, because of those which have been in the past and those that can be found again in the future” (2007: 29). By thinking art and anthropology simultaneously, the “deep reform of our mental functioning, of our being” (Morin 2007: 29) is put into action which offers both artists and anthropologists the potential to renew and revitalise petrified ways of knowing and representing the world. Hence, the logic of complexity opens up opportunities to explore the possibility of hope within the field of art and anthropology. The concluding remark belongs to Morin who encourages us in this venture that “we can always hope and act in the direction of this hope” (2007:29).

Chapter 4: Case study - Art Activism in a time of ARVs

In this chapter the theoretical arguments made thus far will be tested against the outcomes of a case study. The case study will explore how the exhibitions of the South African National Gallery (SANG), located in Cape Town, engage with the issue of HIV/Aids.

The point of departure is the understanding that works of art evoke “ways of seeing, ways of making sense out of the experience we already have” (Harrington 2004: 198) as mentioned in the foregoing chapters. In the thesis the notion has been established that visual representations are two-directional, meaning that works of art not only present ways of seeing and knowing, but also ways of being seen and known. By investigating the knowledge producing practices behind the works of art exhibited by the SANG, I will attempt to show that artists and curators are still using cognitive concepts (knowledge structures) that are inherited from the fight against apartheid. By transferring these concepts and strategies to the production of activist art in a time of HIV/Aids, works of art are being produced by using outdated knowledge producing practices. Drawing on the theoretical conclusions of the thesis, I will suggest that by combining the visual strategies and representational practices of art with the observational and knowledge producing practices found in anthropological methods of fieldwork and ethnographic accounts, new possibilities could arise to more effectively portray the complexities of a society struggling against the devastating effects that HIV/Aids has on its people.

As the thesis did not engage with theories and questions concerning how works of art should be interpreted and judged, the case study will not include discussions and interpretations of the works of art as they appeared in the SANG’s exhibitions. The thesis’ main focus was concerned with the issues of knowledge production and observational and representational practices. I have compared the ways in which the fields of art and anthropology produce knowledge respectively and how these knowledge producing methods influence the observational and representational practices in both fields of study. It has been suggested that when operating from a paradigm incorporating the contributions of complexity theory, the weaving together of the methods of knowledge production and observational and representational practices offers both artists and anthropologists opportunities to know and see the world more authentically. Therefore the case study includes the protocol and quotes from the interview and paper of Mrs. Marilyn Martin and the artists, because what they say and explain about the context in which the works of art was viewed and framed, reveals the

knowledge producing practices upon which the artists and curators draw when engaging with the subject of HIV/Aids. In this context, an “anthropology of art” thus means (as suggested also in Chapter one) an analysis of the knowledge producing methods and representational practices implemented by the artists (and curators). By focussing on the politics of knowing and being known and the politics of seeing and making visible, the case study will not engage with the material in order to produce a theory of art activism. Neither is it the aim of the case study to come up with suggestions as to how to read certain works of art. In simple terms, the importance of the case study lies in the manner in which it will expose the fact that works of art are informed by what is known and how that knowledge is produced. This in turns is connected with how the subject is presented (made visible) and how it can be known by viewers. Thus, the image and knowledge that people carry around with them regarding the subject (in this case the struggle against HIV/Aids) are affected by the way in which the artist knows and sees and portrays the subject.

In light of the above, the aim of the case study will be to answer the question “do the artists see and know correctly in order to present works of art that allows the viewer to see and know in ways that correlate with the reality of a society affected by the HIV/Aids epidemic?” The importance of the case study lies in exploring how by drawing on knowledge producing practices used in anthropology, activist artists can look at and portray complex issues (such as found in the struggle against HIV/Aids) in such a manner that the works of art offer us new ways of seeing (looking at) and knowing the realities of a society grappling with a devastating epidemic.

The following case study will be situated against the backdrop of the above-mentioned theoretical framework.

Situating the case study

The idea for this study developed whilst being part of a post-graduate course entitled “AIDS, Activism and Social Capital”. The main focus of the study aims at exploring how people who are HIV positive, the health care system, activist groups and related organisations cope with the onslaught of the epidemic in the Western Cape. My original intention was to look at how the media is developing intervention strategies and how people who are HIV positive use the media in order to make sense of the devastating effects of the epidemic.

After having visited numerous events relating to “the fight against HIV/AIDS” (academic conferences, non-governmental organisations meetings, media releases, concerts, workshops and exhibitions) it became apparent that “the fight against HIV/AIDS” developed its own sphere of life. Whether at meetings or conferences or concerts, the people who gathered there were always the same people. Seldom the actual people about and around who the events were staged were present, but the people doing research on the topic and who at the same time saw it their role and duty to support these events always pitched.

In a way I became one of these people. Attending book launches on the theme of HIV/AIDS, concerts, film screenings, conferences, art exhibitions and lectures became my way of “taking part in the struggle” whilst at the same time looking for an “unresearched” topic in the field, which in itself is a daunting quest. International universities with budgets much larger that any university in South Africa could offer are flooding the field with students to undertake studies in every aspect of how the HIV/Aids epidemic is impacting on the South African society.

One observation I made during these past four years is that it seems that the people who are involved in mobilising the “new struggle” are mostly people who were also part of the struggle against apartheid before 1994. Many of the former liberal left academics and activists are now engaged in researching the effects of the pandemic and actively looking for new and innovative ways to make sense of how the epidemic affects people’s lives. My personal background is slightly different than those of the people I encountered at the gatherings. I stem from a white middleclass Afrikaans speaking community and mostly found myself amidst a crowd that is predominantly English speaking and stemming from an academic and or politically engaged background. As a side remark, it seems that being involved in the new struggle is part of a longer cultural tradition of historically being involved in activist actions. It seems that the white Afrikaans speaking academics and society leaders are still struggling to find their place in the new South Africa and that participation in the “new struggle” against HIV/Aids takes place on a different level. Fighting for the right of the Afrikaans language to remain recognised, and whether or not old Boer generals could be invoked to lead a lost generation in new territory or not, makes up the public discussions within the mainstream Afrikaans speaking community. The struggle against HIV/Aids does not feature in the public

domain of the Afrikaans speaking civil society in the way that it does in the predominantly English speaking non-governmental and civil society environment.

After having attended another exhibition, and after again having experienced that the exhibition coordinator's motivation for choosing to engage the gallery with the thematic of HIV/Aids is part of an ongoing ethic that stems from her work in resistance art during the time of Apartheid, I decided that I would like to look into the role of art as vehicle for resistance as a case study. The fact that the curator's motivation to get involved in the new struggle was not totally new in itself was interesting for me.

By being confronted with this new type of "resistance art" that aims at responding to the effects of the epidemic, and thus fulfilling one of the social functions of art, I became interested in how art can contribute to the production of knowledge about the HIV/Aids epidemic. The notion of how knowledge is produced and presented led me to the connection with anthropology and how ethnographic accounts (which are representations of observations seen and heard) and artworks (which are also representations of the artists' impressions, observations and outcomes from speaking to others about the topic) can be related. Both art and ethnography are thus "interpretative exercise(s) in 'thick' descriptions" (Spencer 2001: 445).

Methodology

It might be important to note that the case study cannot be compared with an ethnographic study. No fieldwork was undertaken in the traditional sense. One could say that this is a multi-sited study, seeing that empirical data was collected on site at the SANG on two occasions, via the internet, by consulting art exhibition catalogues and via email messages and one telephonic interview with the director of the SANG, Marilyn Martin. Getting access to Ms. Martin was not very easy and most correspondence took place via email. I had one telephone interview with her and during that interview it became clear that there would not be any further opportunities to speak with her due to a busy schedule. As promised, she sent me an unpublished article that she wrote. The paper is a summary of SANG's engagement with HIV/Aids and discusses the motivation behind SANG's involvement in the new struggle against HIV/Aids.

The idea behind using a case study is thus mainly to link the theoretical discussion with a practical example. Having been involved in a project that investigated what

interventions followed the roll-out of antiretrovirals in the Western Cape after 2004, I became aware of the fact that organisations on all levels of civil society were getting involved in the fight against HIV/Aids. I was interested in how the South African National Gallery (SANG), which is in fact a state organisation (as part of the *Iziko Museums in Cape Town)*, engaged with the topic, seeing that it fits in the framework of using art as a vehicle to engage in social issues.

SANG and *Iziko Museums in Cape Town*

The way in which official cultural institutions such as museums contribute to issues of representation, knowledge production, and public participation, is not unimportant in a transitional society like South Africa. These issues relate closely to the challenges of enhancing democracy and citizenship as part of the creation of a new society. This understanding of the role of museums in society has been supported by researchers[9] who suggest that "the ethical role of museums" should not just be "as sites that preserve memories and artefacts, but also as actors engaged in protest and mobilizing new social movements" (Coombes as discussed by Levine 2004: 907).

The *Iziko Museums in Cape Town* is an organisation that makes these issues their central concern in their exhibitions and policies regarding social responsibility. The SANG covers the art collection division of the museums. As mentioned on the Iziko website, the word 'Iziko' "is an isiXhosa word, meaning "a hearth". Since the hearth of a typical African hut usually occupies the central space, Iziko symbolises both a hub of cultural activity, and a central place for gathering together South Africa's diverse heritage" (http://www.iziko.org.za/iziko/ourname.html). Iziko is a national heritage institution established under the Cultural Institutions Act. It is governed by a Council appointed by the Minister of Arts and Culture.

The SANG is South Africa's premier art museum and houses valuable collections of South African, African, British, French, Dutch and Flemish art. "Selections from the Permanent Collection change regularly to enable the museum to have a full programme

[9] Important literature in the field of studying museums, is the work of Bennett and Karp:
Bennett, T. 2006. 'Civic seeing: museums and the organisation of vision', in S. MacDonald (ed) *Companion to Museum Studies*, Oxford: Blackwell, 263-281;
Bennett, T. 1995. *The Birth of the Museum : History, Theory, Politics.* London and New York: Routledge.
Karp, I. (ed). 1992. *Museums and Communities: The Politics of Public Culture*. Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press

of temporary exhibitions of paintings, works on paper, photography, sculpture, beadwork, textiles and architecture. They provide insight into the extraordinary range of aesthetic production in this country, the African continent and further a field" (http://www.iziko.org.za/sang/about.html). The exhibition program is complemented and by a range of alternating temporary visiting exhibitions as chosen by the director of the SANG.

AIDS ART at the SANG

> The Iziko South African National Gallery has a proud history of curating exhibitions and acquiring works of art dealing with HIV/Aids, going back to 1994. In the early days, and for many years to come, few South African artists engaged with the pandemic and our holdings increased slowly. This has changed dramatically as HIV/Aids has spread and touched more and more lives (Marilyn Martin on www.iziko.co.za).

Under the directorship of Marilyn Martin the SANG's engagement with the topic of HIV/Aids has produced several ground breaking exhibitions. In her unpublished paper titled *Curating HIV/Aids at the Iziko South African National Gallery* (2007), Martin discusses why she feels it important to engage with the thematic of HIV/Aids by stating that she is "a firm and committed believer in the potential of art as a transformative power. In South Africa we have not assessed the worth of our society by the quality of art produced, but rather the quality of the art in relation to society and in particular the extent to which art is a reflection of, and a catalyst within, society" (Martin 2007).

During the apartheid years in South Africa Martin utilised the SANG as space in which artists could express their resistance against the apartheid system of the time: "We know that art played a role both inside and outside South Africa in the struggle for political liberation, beginning with Dumile Feni (1939-91) in the 1960s. The 1980s saw the production of an extraordinary body of work stimulated by opposition to apartheid and made in the face of adversity. Artists found technical, formal and expressive ways to engage political and social questions, affirming that art and culture can interrogate centralised processes and developing ideas and metaphors that can influence and change society. It made the world sit up and take notice" (Martin 2007).

By continuing in this spirit of resistance, Martin supports and mobilises exhibitions that lives off the energy and impetus of the resistance art during the apartheid regime. Many

of the artists who engaged in the struggle against apartheid, have also been commissioned to produce work that would express resistance against government's lack of involvement in preventing adequate health services and access to antiretroviral treatment. Artists like Sue Williamson, Penny Siopsis and Clive van den Berg have taken part in the most recent exhibition, to name but a few.

In the book based on the collaborative work with Kyle Kauffman, Martin and Kauffman explain how art's engagement as activist activity changed during the years that followed the end of the apartheid regime:

> Before 1994, much of the art produced in South Africa was confrontational and political in nature. For the politically engaged artists under apartheid there was no doubt about the identity of the target. After 1994, both the challenges and the possibilities have become more complex, ambivalent, and unpredictable. The course of South African art changed from confrontation to reconciliation and during the honeymoon years of the new democracy there were calls for artists to put aside political considerations and to find new themes and images (Kauffman and Martin 2003: 5).

The importance of the production and exhibition of resistance art during the apartheid years should not be under estimated. Art became one of the sights where people could express resistance in a non-violent way. Today art plays an important role in the creation of an open, democratic culture within which freedom is possible. This is not a simple process, but one full of tension, embedded within the civil society of our daily existence. In this it is however still positioned over and against *violence*. Violence entails the denial of the political dimension.

There is however some point of concern for Martin when it comes to getting artists involved in the process of producing work commenting on the political and personal issues that surround the HIV/Aids epidemic. Kauffman and Martin (2003: 5) write that "(f)ew confronted the Aids crisis. Why? There is a range of possible answers. Perhaps, many artists do not feel the deep personal connection to the issue of Aids that they did to apartheid. … Whatever the reasons, the production of art works on the subject of HIV/Aids is surprising low, given the importance and impact on society".

One should also not loose sight of the fact that many important artists lost their lives to the HI virus in the early years of the 1980s. It also seems that there is a change in how

people view art that was produced before the availability of antiretrovirals *vis à vi*s work produced thereafter.

A short discussion on the conceptualisation and impact of the exhibitions that was held at the SANG follows below.

Positive Lives: Responses to HIV
1 December 2001 - 31 March 2002
In collaboration with the Terrence Higgins Trust and Network Photographers.

The first international photographic exhibition 'Positive Lives: Responses to HIV' was hosted at the SANG in 1995. Initiated by Network Photographers in 1993, it explored the complex individual and social responses to HIV/Aids in Britain, with a special section by Gideon Mendel.

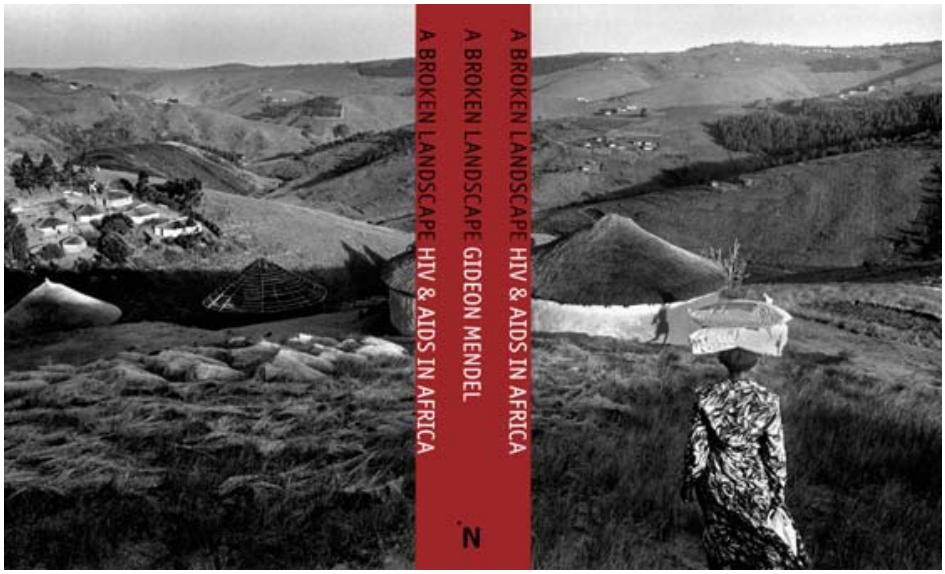
POSITIVE LIVES' collection of photographs focused on the human stories of those at the heart of the HIV/AIDS epidemic. It opened at the South African National Gallery on International AIDS Day. The images and text present the personal experiences of different people, reflecting the issues and emotions that confront them in living and working with HIV/AIDS.

source: (www.iziko.co.za)

On International Aids Day, 1 December 2001, Zackie Achmat, Chairperson of the Treatment Action Campaign (TAC) opened a different 'Positive Lives' exhibition at the SANG. In a powerful, emotional speech he added his voice to the struggle of the Gallery to convince the South African public and the authorities that a work of art not only has the power and capacity to speak for itself, but also to speak to and for individuals and society. Martin adds that "(e)ducation is the key to building and changing attitudes and perceptions and to alleviating ignorance. Far-reaching education programmes, workshops, film screenings, an excellent brochure and the presence of HIV positive people as volunteer guides at the Gallery formed part of the exhibition" (Martin 2007). This exhibition also prepared the way for Gideon Mendel's project. "The heart of

'Positive Lives' was occupied by 'A Broken Landscape'" (Martin 2007). Mendel's photographic essays were added in the Liberman room of the SANG.

A Broken Landscape, HIV & AIDS in Africa by Gideon Mendel
1 December 2001 – 14 April 2002
In association with ActionAid and Positive Lives



(Book cover of the images exhibited at the SANG)

source: http://www.iziko.org.za/sang/exhib/poslives/broken/frameLMbook.html

The importance of Mendel's work was discussed earlier in Chapter 3. For Martin, the exhibition of Mendel proved to be more than just an exhibition of static images. The key concept of Mendel's installation was that people living with HIV or Aids could be intimately involved in the creation of an exhibition rather than being passively depicted as victims. As macro events moved in court and in the public domain, he included them. The end result was an unorthodox and groundbreaking social art project. "The artist created a positive activist environment in the national art museum on the doorstep of parliament. The launch of the project on 16 February 2002 was an exciting and moving experience. Together we broke new ground in our shared vision – and commitment – to making a difference, to offering solutions in a crisis" (Martin 2007).

For Mendel the status of the national art museum and its location near the South African parliament offered a remarkable opportunity to create a radical, stimulating and newsworthy project. In Mendel's words, the exhibition became a 'live documentary space' (quoted by Martin 2007)

When listening to Martin, one clearly recognises her involvement in activist activities during the apartheid years and that the "culture of activism" as I will call it, remains very

strong in her drive to be involved in the new struggle against HIV/Aids. The following is a quote from Martin's account on the closing ceremony of the exhibition on Saturday, 13 April 2001 that double acted as the launch of the book *A Broken Landscape: HIV and Aids in* Africa by Mendel:

> Organised by the *Mail & Guardian* newspaper and the Treatment Action Campaign (TAC), it had all the energy and power of a political rally during the apartheid years (indeed the TAC has its roots in the anti-apartheid movement and the organisers are accustomed to mass mobilisation and strategies that strike chords in society). There were songs, announcements and testimonies interspersed with "Viva!" and "Amandla! Awethu! (Martin 2007).

From this example it is clear that the activist impulse behind the event was drawn from the performative energy and same form of engagement that could be found in similar activist events that took place during the apartheid years.

AIDSART/South Africa
29 November – 16 February 2004
In collaboration with Wellesley College, Wellesley, Massachusetts

Left, a photograph of Victoria Cobokana, housekeeper, with her son, Sifiso, and daughter, Onica, in June 1999. Victoria died of AIDS on Dec. 13, 1999. Sifiso died of AIDS on Jan. 12. Onica also has AIDS.
Photo by David Goldblatt
Source: Kauffman and Martin (2003: 15)

After having met Kyle Kauffman at the Boston auction in 2000, Martin was invited to collaborate on 'Artists for Aids' with him and Jeremy Fowler of the Davis Museum and

Cultural Centre at Wellesley College, Wellesley, Massachusetts, USA. Martin explains that she accepted the invitation to collaborate with enthusiasm. “I was enormously grateful to have another opportunity of engaging some of South Africa’s foremost visual artists to identify with and focus on the subject of HIV/Aids. Informed by the Bristol-Myers Squibb and Harvard AIDS Institute project, we selected the artists – ten from South Africa and one from Botswana” (Martin 2007). The guidelines for the project were simple: each artist would receive an amount of money for a two-dimensional work, no larger than one meter by one meter and would provide biographical information as well as a brief statement on the work. All the artists accepted the invitation and David Goldblatt generously donated his photograph (depicted above).

Although the guidelines for the commissioned work may have been straightforward, the demands were not. The artists were asked to aestheticise and present a complicated, and increasingly political and controversial, public issue. Martin (2007) argues that “the challenges remain greater and more penetrating than the immediate situation in South Africa. HIV/Aids have forced a wider discussion of varied sexual practices. It has detonated and compelled changes in sexual behaviour and conventions (e.g. condom use and male privilege in demanding sex), as well as a re-assessment of our private and public views, consciousness and taboos”.

Kauffman and Martin were pleased with what came back from the artists and argue that the diverse use of material and methods (photography, painting, drawing, collage, embroidery, silicon sand, carboniferous material, lead, salt, and latex) became “a metaphor for the diversity of views and voices in the struggle against HIV/Aids” (Kauffman and Martin 2003: 6). In concluding their review of the exhibition, Kauffman and Martin suggest that the project, which was the first to not only work with photographic material, offered a platform that served as a space in which those who are caring for people living with HIV/Aids could engage with different perspectives of how the epidemic influences lived experiences. More importantly, Kauffman and Martin (2003: 9) believe that the project “succeeded in harnessing the creative energies of some prodigious talents for HIV/Aids and has revealed a new face of artistic activism”.

Embracing HIV/AIDS
1 December 2006 – 31 January 2007


Virus i (2005) lambda print by Churchill Madikida

The *Embracing HIV/AIDS* exhibition was the most recent exhibition and also the first exhibition that took place after the formal rollout of antiretroviral medication in the Western Cape in 2004. *Embracing HIV/Aids* was conceptualised as being a point of departure for education programmes and special walkabouts. It drew NGOs into the work and vision of SANG and aimed at sensitising visitors to the challenges faced in South Africa.

Once again the artists represented in *Embracing HIV/Aids* used many different media – photography, sculpture, drawing, painting, new media – to concretise their conceptions. Martin (2007) explains that the "works revealed a great variety of ideas and approaches: some are hard-hitting, didactic and powerful, while others are abstract, subtle, thoughtful, poignant, personal, intimate and enigmatic". In this collection, art once again merged private and public experiences and "embraced the social and activist domains, while transcending perceived and constructed boundaries with regard to race, class, creed, gender and sexual orientation" (Martin 2007).

An important contribution to the collection by Churchill Madikida, explored a personal journey, yet it reflected on millions of other people's experiences: "I have watched the annihilation from the sidelines. My sister lived with HIV for more than nine years … her death made me realise the extent of the despair the virus is causing to millions of people both infected and affected by it" (Madikida quoted by Martin 2007). The central image in Madikida's *Virus* series (image depicted above) is the microstructure of the HIV virus itself and alludes to the spread of HIV within the body and throughout communities. "The human figure (the artist) morphs, multiplies, integrates with and is ultimately consumed

by the treacherous surrounding structure. The morphing and multiplication signify the mutation of the virus that is a key element in the HIV/Aids catastrophe. The human being cannot escape the virus once it enters the body; the viewer cannot escape the horror and trauma of the pandemic" (Martin 2007).

Also Madikida's work is informed by activist intentions as practiced during the apartheid years. He believes that his work can "play a role in breaking the silence about HIV/Aids and creating a climate of greater tolerance: Art played a critical role in the fight against apartheid and I feel that it can play an even bigger role in the war against HIV/Aids" (Madikida quoted by Martin 2007).

The work has impacted far beyond the confines of the Gallery and South Africa. *Status* by Churchill Madikida was requested for loan to the *documenta 12* exhibition in Kassel, Germany as part of a bigger installation by the artist, after which it will travel to Spain.

The exhibition included other artists such as Berni Searle, Clive van den Berg, Diane Victor and cartoonists Zapiro. Works ranged from photography to sculpture, paintings and drawings. Works by David Goldblatt, Gideon Mendel, Penny Siopsis and Hentie van der Merwe that were acquired previously were also included.

Art and the struggle against HIV/Aids

source: http://www.cartoonist.co.za/zapiro.htm

The cartoon by Zapiro above (of which the original can be seen at the SANG) is actually commenting on the fact that former president Nelson Mandela's works of art became very popular after his term as president and that many of his artworks were sold in the cause to raise money to support projects engaging with HIV/Aids. It also comments on the fact president Mbeki is not doing much in this respect and that he was criticised for his lack of insight in the whole situation by former president Mandela. Much more can be said about Mbeki's role in the whole misrepresentation and confusion of facts in the public debate, but there is no scope in this study to look into this complex issue. The cartoon also comments on a different level – a level related more closely to the thematic of this study, to the role that art plays in the struggle against HIV/Aids.

In order to link the case study up with the theoretical background against which it is situated, it is important to look at how representational practices changed over the years. The argument that I would like to put forward is the fact that representational practices had changed after the rollout of ARVs.

It is suggested that it is possible to argue that the way in which the art works are viewed and produced since the rollout of ARVs have changed in comparison to the works produced and viewed before the rollout. The impact that the images have on the viewer might also have changed after the rollout. As Robins states, "South Africa now has an

ARV program as well as a national HIV/AIDS social movement, which offers the prospect of a more optimistic script, one in which HIV-positive people are able to access life-enhancing drugs that can return the patient to health and the possibility of reintegration into the social world" (Robins 2006: 312). The emotional impact that images had on viewers of suffering and dying people prior to the rollout of antiretrovirals made a strong connection with the knowledge that being infected with the HI virus implied a certain death sentence. As seen also in first world countries after the effective implementation of ARV's the understanding changed to the view that being infected with the HI virus is no longer an immediate death sentence, but viewed as being a treatable disease (although not curable) with good prospects of living a fairly normal life for a good number of years if the infected person is compliant to treatment possibilities. This understanding of the epidemic somehow takes away the immediate emotional urgency from people and the tragedy of the matter is deferred.

Nguyen (2005: 143) supports this notion and argues that "(t)reatments influence biology, and through these embodied effects representations of the disease, and in turn the subjectivity of those who are able to access them". Nguyen (2005: 143) expands this notion further and states that "(i)ncreasing drug availability will have a multiplier effect, as the voices of people with HIV are no longer extinguished by illness but grow louder as their bodies respond to the treatments". The relationship of the biological effects of the drugs with the social relations with which it is connected brings forth what Nguyen (2005: 143) calls "an example of biosocial change".

The biosocial changes brought about by the epidemic have begun to express itself in a notion of ''therapeutic citizenship''. Nguyen's notion of "therapeutic citizenship" focuses on how people who have access to treatment use their social networks to campaign for people who do not have access to treatment" (2005: 143). The notion of therapeutic citizenship serves here as analogue for how biosocial changes also influenced the public image, as well as the images people carry around in their minds of the epidemic. Treatment options also opened up new possibilities of understanding and representing the epidemic. Artists are challenged to express the complexities of the living and not the dying. This change of attitude is even visible in the name of the most recent exhibition (2006/2007) at SANG entitled "Embracing HIV/Aids". During the apartheid years there would never have been an exhibition called "Embracing apartheid". The activist intention behind the works, as I deduct, has changed from being confrontational to suggesting

“how we are going to live with this condition” – almost more in line with the art that came out after the 1994 elections which focused on reconciliation and nation building.

When looking at the works produced in the “Embracing AIDS” exhibition, it can be argued that artists are caught in an aporetic space (as mentioned in Chapter two earlier). There is a tension in terms of which side of the struggle one should reside on. On the one hand, there is still the urge and intention to want to shock and provoke and on the other hand, to reconcile viewers with the idea that one should “embrace” the epidemic and also those who are affected by it. This last position would also advocate a message of abolishing ideas concerning stigma and social taboo. It seems that the biosocial changes also infiltrated the domain of the artist and that artists are challenged by the complexities of these changes.

The conclusion that this study would like to make is the fact that the “activistic” drive behind artistic representational practices can no longer be informed by the same knowledge producing methods and inspiration that fuelled the anti-apartheid activist culture. If artists and curators would only base the representational practices from these former ways of representation, they might end up in a place where the work and activities are reducing the complexities of the new struggle. Activistic art’s fight against HIV/Aids is not about bringing down repressive systems of governance, but more about how the representational practices also “emerged as a rallying point for transnational activism in a neo-liberal world in which illness claims carry more weight than those based on poverty, injustice, or structural violence” (Nguyen 2005: 143).

Arguing from a complexity point of view that supports the “logic of complex thought” as mentioned earlier in Chapter three, art activism in the time of antiretrovirals, should be watchful that the artworks and exhibitions do not fall prey of “petrified ways of thinking”. The artworks of some of the old apartheid artists lack the sense of complexity that accompanies the HIV/Aids pandemic. It seems that these artists are producing works representing the struggle against HIV/Aids that draw their inspiration from the same energy and conceptual struggles that inspired their anti-apartheid engagement. Instead of changing their ways of looking at the contingent issues in this new struggle and coming close to them, artists seem to be trapped in the old ways of seeing and knowing. The issues at hand are not represented in new ways, seeing that the artists are not being “close enough” to the realities and complexities of people who live and deal with the epidemic on a daily basis. Somehow the more conceptual works come over as if

they are “art for art’s sake” (following Adorno’s strategy). The real struggle, in which the artists are entangled however, is not the fight against HIV/Aids, but the struggle of how to express that which one cannot see in a way that does not reduce the complexity of that which is hard to represent visibly.

At this stage one could even go into the discussion about asking the question concerning “who are the people who have access to these exhibitions?” One learns from Martin’s reports that a lot is being done to bring the work to people who do not usually visit art galleries and also to engage policymakers, sponsors, teachers and volunteers with the exhibitions. This is very commendable and I think that the strength of artworks lie especially in the fact that they serve as a place of departure for further discussions and engagement.

It is not the intention of the study to engage with the issue of agency and access now, although these are very important issues. In research done on how visual anthropological methods as practiced by means of documentary films could inform people about finding ways in which to deal with the complexity of how to ”engage with processes of finding a range of resolutions to grappling with HIV/AIDS in the everyday” (Levine 2007: 3-4), special care should be taken when applying these methods. According to Levine, one should not assume that people would engage in the same ways. When having activist motives behind making and screening the films (for example), producers and educators should engage in the “logic of complex thought” (Morin 2007) in order to make sure that “(d)ocumentary films (that) offer respect to their audiences’ interpretive abilities” because only then “will (we) begin to break the silence, and move people beyond current denialist tendencies” (Levine 2007: 4).

Arguing from the logic of complex thought, it seems that artists, curators and sponsors would benefit greatly by engaging with anthropologists who are working in the field of studying the impact of the HIV/Aids epidemic in South Africa. The intimate knowledge that is gained from ethnographic practices would remove the distance between the artist’s concepts of the new struggle and the actual complexities of the struggle where people’s lived experiences are very real and sometimes very invisible.

The importance of art as mediator of images and knowledge (as discussed in Chapter one) plays an important role in how people relate to and know the world. When the works of artists do not translate ideas and lived experiences in a way that does justice to

it, one could state that their representational practice is in a crisis. Art's power lies in the fact that it can afford "experience" which "may convey to me what having an experience of an expressed emotion, feeling or attitude is *really* like even though I may not myself have felt it before" (Kieran 2005: 117). For artists engaging in representing the ambiguities of what it might be to live with HIV/Aids, the act of conveying real feelings, experiences and attitudes becomes a huge challenge. Just because the struggle against HIV/Aids has been politicised, one cannot assume that it is the same political struggle that took place during the apartheid regime. The process of engagement via activist forms might be an appropriate response, but the representational practices and knowledge producing practices are different. Kieran (2005: 120) stresses the importance of good representational practices when he argues that "(art)works can get us to grasp certain truths, insights or possibilities, and make us realise their import in psychologically immediate ways, in ways pure reason rarely does". The deduction one can make from Kieran's claim, is that "if the artistic means utilised are poor, clumsy or impoverished, then a work has failed to realise the affective understanding we value in much great art" (Kieran 2005: 120).

When looking at the artworks in the past exhibitions of SANG, one recognises that many of the works are conceptual pieces (see the works of Andries Botha, Lien Botha, Senzeni Marasela, Jacki Mcinnes, Karen Nel, Penelope Siopsis, Clive van den Berg in Kauffman and Martin (2003: 11 – 30)). The characteristics of conceptual art is the "concern with ready-made or mundane objects, the primacy of ideas, the foregrounding of language, the use of non-conventional artistic media, reflexivity and the rejection of traditional conceptions of sensory aesthetic experience" (Kieran 2005: 131). By using eminently disposable materials, conceptual art highlights the way in which "seemingly harmless and personal" objects "may be highly politicised" (Kieran 2005: 133). Thus, conceptual art draws on established forms of representation in order to subvert them to make a political statement. Kieran explains that "conceptual art requires the standard assumption about artistic value to be in a place in order to have any value at all" (2005: 133).

It is my view that in order to produce activist artwork when engaging with the theme of HIV/Aids, artists should make sure that they know what the values are that they are trying to subvert. When activist art is still informed by anti-apartheid ideals and modes of representation, it is clear that these ideals will not address the issues at stake as found in the struggle against HIV/Aids. Artists should learn to observe again. By getting closer

to the lived experiences of people living with HIV/Aids, who have to deal with getting access to treatment and social grants, and struggling to hide their status, artists could develop new concepts that would represent the realities of the struggle in more authentic ways. Some artists such as Gideon Mendel did manage to change the ways in which he observes and presents his observations. In doing so he managed to cross the boundary of old ways of thinking and entered into the space where knowing someone's reality is equated with being where that person is and taking time to know his/her world. By patiently looking at the reality and contingencies of the world of people living with HIV/Aids, an artist like Gideon Mendel succeeds in giving the viewers of his work the opportunity to "look at and respond to (such) pictures (which) make us more discerning perceivers" (Kieran 2005: 147). If the conceptual artworks could manage to engage more intimately with the lives of people who are living with HIV/Aids, their work would offer us the opportunity to cultivate perceptual capacities that would help us know the world in a new way.

By finding new sources of inspiration for artistic activism, the old modes of expression and symbolic imagery, allegory and mental images could be turned into practices that draw on different knowledge's. The fact that one can actually never really represent the truth of the person living with HIV/Aids, is closely related to the understanding that knowledge can never be complete. Here the understanding that Luhmann offers about art becomes very applicable. Depicting the aporia artists are faced when engaging with HIV/Aids points to the "paradox of seeing, which exposes the human possibilities of perception and representation" (Luhmann 2000: 149). From Luhmann's point of view, "seeing" (and making visible) thus becomes the act of "not-knowing" and not being able to represent the situation correctly.

Earlier it was argued that the contribution that art offers to anthropology is the opportunity to express this aporia. To offer new and other ways of seeing and knowing to be internalised in an ethnography that does not strive to control knowledge, but one that "marks the limit of the saturated humanist logics of knowledge as cure … that determines the protocols through which we know" (Lather 2001: 487). Through this case study, it becomes clear that the representational and observational practices of anthropology would be able to influence and direct artists' practices in exactly the same: activist art would be given an opportunity to express and work through its aporetic position.

By thinking art and anthropology simultaneously, artworks and ethnographies enter into a new space. Their role as social activism or scientific report transcends the level of "wanting to represent" reality. By drawing on Lather's deconstructive theory that supports the understanding that even in our attempts to be practising reflexive/interpretative ethnography and or art, our representational efforts authorize themselves "by confronting its own processes of interpretation as some sort of cure toward better knowing, while deconstruction approaches 'knowing through not knowing'" (Lather 2001: 486).

Framed from the theoretical perspectives that this study has offered, art and anthropology practised by means of the logic of complex thought, become the vehicles by which the invisible are made visible and by which the visible are made invisible. Thus by admitting that our knowledge is not complete, that we are stuck in the place of not being able to ever know fully, we become free to say that any attempt to offer a representation of any situation will at some level misrepresent it. Lather argues that this is the more responsible position to act from, seeing that misrepresentation is "part of telling stories about people's lives, our own included" (2001: 485). By negotiating this tension and by refusing to "play the expert" and by assuming a modest position as Cilliers suggests, the knowledge claim and representational practice do not become more important than the reality of the persons' real life contingencies that are at work.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

As mentioned in the introduction, this thesis used a transdisciplinary approach in order to explore how by combining insights from art and anthropology, research practices could be influenced to overcome their limits of producing representations and knowledge of the world. In Chapter one and two the thesis argued that developments in observational practices in both art and anthropology changed from being positivist in nature to a position where they adopted the understanding that the process of "seeing and knowing" is dialectical in nature. The process of observing influences the ways in which we know the world. Vice versa, our knowledge of the world influences how we observe the world. This study thus attempted to destabilise traditional notions of knowledge and representational practices as found in both fields of art and anthropology, and argued that by learning from each other, their own methodologies can be enriched and rethought in order to engage in representational practices that offer a more authentic picture of the world.

By having explored the relationship between art and anthropology based on the perspective from complexity theory, this study attempted to argue that there is a direct and dialectical relationship between knowledge generating practices and observational and representational practices. In Chapter two the dialectical relationship between seeing and knowing was traced back to the roots of anthropology. How mankind observed (and developed techniques and devices to see better) and consequently asked different questions about what was seen has had a direct influence on the generation of knowledge.

It was argued that an anthropology of art should not just deal with art as a material object under observation, but it should investigate what kind of knowledge art produces when people engage with art. A move away from traditional notions of art anthropology that studies how "primitive cultures" produce works of art was suggested. By having situated art within the cultural system of a society, an anthropology of art should investigate "the lived experience of the individuals in terms of their engagement with art and the ideologies that are communicated via the work of art.

Similarly the observational and representational practices of artists, could inform anthropological observational and representational practices. This understanding was informed by Schneider and Wright (2006: 26) who claim that "(a)rtists and

anthropologists are practitioners who appropriate form, and represent others. Although their representational practices have been different, both books and artworks are creative additions to the world; both are complex translations of other realities".

The argument was made that anthropology has always been sensitive to developments and changes in terms of the status of knowledge, due to the fact that its knowledge producing practices are rooted and informed by the changes that take place at the sites of observation. The intimate knowledge that is gained by fieldwork experiences informs the knowledge we gather in ways that are valuable for artists who have the possibility to "provoke thoughts and show us possible ways of perceiving or conceiving of their subject matter" (Kieran 2005: 107).

Based on the insights gained in chapters one and two, chapter three suggested that complexity theory provides a basis from which a transdisciplinary approach opens up the possibility to combine the lessons learned from art and anthropology. The weaving together of anthropological and social theories of art with a modest kind of postmodern approach (as advocated by Cilliers (1998, 2005) and Morin (2007)) to anthropological theory offers one the possibility to make knowledge claims that acknowledge the limits scientific inquiry are up against. By acknowledging the limits of the models we are using, new possibilities are opened up in which to approach a way of doing scientific research without invoking metaphysical truth claims. Understanding and approaching the world from a kind of thinking that does not disconnect opposites, but thinks them as part of a dynamic unity, informs a style of thinking that challenges old models of representing the world. The notion of "complex thought" as proposed by Morin (2007) challenges the artist and anthropologist to reform their ways of thinking and to consider different ways of getting to know the world. The weaving together of art and anthropology opens up a space where both art and anthropology can operate from a common ground founded in the complexities of the lived experiences of their subjects of study. The claim that our understanding of complex systems cannot be reduced to calculation means that there will always be some form of creativity involved when engaging in "the politics of knowing and being known".

By re-linking different types of knowledge (knowledge gained from artistic practices and knowledge gained from anthropological practice) artists and anthropologists are challenged to enter into a space where their representational practices keep up with the complex world in which we live. Informed by the characteristics of complexity theory

artists and scientists can engage with representational practices and knowledge claims that have the capacity to expand the understanding of what it is to be human.

The brief case study provided a test site on which the theoretical arguments could be applied. It was argued that current activist art dealing with the issues of HIV/Aids are still being produced by ideological paradigms that were inherited from the time in which artists and curators engaged with resistance art during the time of apartheid. It was suggested that a "thought reform" is necessary when engaging with the complexities of people's lived experiences *vis à vis* the HIV/Aids epidemic in South Africa. Old ways of thinking and knowing do not represent the issues poignantly enough in the new struggle against HIV/Aids, seeing that the subjectivities of the lives being represented have changed. Although the fight against HIV/Aids has been termed the "new struggle", one cannot translate the methods of intervention and resistance of the old struggle (against apartheid) to the new struggle. In order to produce work that would effectively address the issues people living with HIV/Aids are dealing and struggling with, artists need to re-invent the ways that they gather knowledge about these issues, as well as re-invent their representational practices

Arguing from the logic of "complex thought", the study suggested that artists, curators and sponsors would benefit greatly by engaging with anthropologists who are working in the field of studying the impact of the HIV/Aids epidemic in South Africa. Art activism could utilise the knowledge that is gained from ethnographic practices and it would remove the distance between the artist's concepts of the new struggle and the actual complexities of the struggle where people's lived experiences are very real and sometimes very invisible.

By thinking art and anthropology simultaneously, new sources of inspiration could be uncovered to inform artistic activism. Old modes of expression and action could be transformed into practices that draw from the "intelligence of complexity". As Morin (2007: 29) insists, acting from such a position would "allow us to see besides the probable", because the "intelligence of complexity" compels us to "explore the field of possibilities, without restricting it with what is formally probable". And therein lies the invitation "to reform, even to revolutionise" (Morin 2007: 29).

Limitations of the study

True to the claims made by a theoretical perspective informed by an understanding of complexity, it would be necessary to acknowledge the limits of the claims made in this study. Seen from a typical traditional view of anthropologic inquiry, this study is not informed by any formal fieldwork activities. The study would have been able to give a more detailed account of how the theoretical concepts could be applied to the processes of production and circulation of art objects and the ways in which people engage with art, were it possible to undertake a formal field study over a longer period of time.

Interviews with artists, museum visitors and staff members and people living with HIV/Aids would have enriched the outcomes of the study and it would have been able to ground the concepts more effectively. It might therefore be said that the validity of the theoretical suggestions could be questioned seeing that the study does not explore the implementation thereof in much detail.

The study does not include a comprehensive overview of how an iconography of HIV/Aids has developed since the start of the epidemic. Important work has been done on this issue by Deborah Lupton[10], Douglas Crimp[11] and Sander Gilman[12], and it would have been valuable to have incorporated their findings, although that would have given the study a different focus. The study also did not engage in a discussion with current theories and trends in visual anthropology directly, but it is hoped that the study's outcomes could contribute to that body of knowledge. More could also have been said about the political and social implications of applying the arguments of the study, seeing that arguing from a view informed by complexity theory always involve an ethical dimension by which political and social (and activist) action should be informed.

Further research & Recommendations

This study could be seen to act as a starting point from which the theoretical orientations could be explored in more detail. It is strongly suggested that an extended fieldwork project should be undertaken to enrich and ground the arguments in the study.

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[10] Lupton, D. 1994. *Medicine as Culture: Illness, Disease and the Body in Western Societies*. London: Sage Publications.
[11] Crimp, D. 1991. "Portraits of People with AIDS," in Grossberg, L., Nelson, C., Treichler, P. (eds.). *Cultural Studies*. London: Routledge.
[12] Gilman, S. 1987. AIDS and Syphilis: The Iconography of Disease, in *AIDS: Cultural Analysis/Cultural Activism*, Vol. 43, pp. 87 – 107.

A comparative study could also be undertaken to explore how artistic and activistic practices in other African countries cope with the demands of representing issues surrounding HIV/Aids. South Africa's artwork is informed by a specific context that does not draw on religious values and judgements, but rather on reducing stigma and mobilising people towards taking action. This is very different in other African countries where works of art are still informed by deeply seated religious norms and values.

Further research could also be undertaken to analyse the role that formal and informal social networks, which are structured around works of art, play in informing knowledge and representational practices. The notion of social change has not been discussed in this study and it would be very interesting to explore whether changed ways of seeing and knowing contribute to processes of social change or not. It would also be valuable to know whether new subjectivities are formed or not and whether or not people engage with art in order to access certain rights or not.

It would also be important to investigate whether by combining anthropological methods with other scientific research practices, different fields of transdisciplinary approaches could be developed or not. By collaborating with different academic disciplines anthropology could be more accessible and applicable in different fields of study. By recognising that anthropology can provide methodologies, insights and understandings that are not available from other disciplines, anthropology would surely increase its academic and public profile as being an indispensable partner when embarking on the journey of learning and understanding how to know and the see the world.

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Internet Resources:

Centre for Cosmopolitan Studies and Dept of Anthropology
http://www.anthropologymatters.com/reviews/irvine_2006_art.htm, Review by Andrew Irving, Concordia University, Montreal [Date of Access: 2007-08-06]

Iziko Museums in Cape Town
http://www.iziko.org.za/ [Date of Access: several times during the period from 2007-03-06 until 2007-10-31]

Zapiro Homepage
http://www.cartoonist.co.za/zapiro.htm [Date of Access: 2007-09-03]