

Creating the Authentic? Art Teaching in South Africa as Transcultural Phenomenon

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Abstract

The question about what art and craft from Black¹ individuals in South Africa should look like as well as how and for what purposes it could be created was of prominent importance within the contact zone of educational institutions² from the 1930s onwards. Art teachers of mostly European origin established provisional art educational venues for African students first, within the curricula of mission schools and then as workshops and art schools in their own right. They transferred modernistic concepts from Europe into the South African context, yet were also confronted with divergent expectations of their students and the overarching policy of Bantu Education that was launched in 1953.

A closer look at selected case studies reveals complex and ambivalent theoretical approaches that were negotiated and discussed in the seemingly autonomous context of art schools and workshops. The teachers' attitudes seemed to oscillate between the search for an 'authentic' African idiom and the claim to partake in global archives or in the making of an art history that was imagined as universally applicable. Art educational institutions perceived as transcultural contact zones exemplify a genesis of modern art from South Africa that was formed by mutually influencing perspectives apart from the restrictions for and the re-tribalisation of Black people imposed by the apartheid regime.

Keywords: Art education, art school, workshop, South Africa, authenticity, originality, transculturality

Travelling Concepts, Migrating Agents. Sketching the Framework

“I *refuse* to digress from the original design!” In this or a similar way must the South African sculptor, Job Patja Kekana, have answered to his teacher Sister Pauline in 1954. Kekana had been commissioned to carve a ceremonial mace for the *Federal Parliament of Northern and Southern Rhodesia and Nyasaland* and had executed the object according to a given design when Sister Pauline criticised the artless completion of the knob. Kekana nevertheless made up his mind and created an additional pattern, a “trelliswork with dots in each space” (Miles 1997: 109). The new creation was approved even by the original draughtsman, Kekana had his artistic “breakthrough” (Morton 2013: 53) and “was invited to the opening of the Federal Parliament as a guest of honour” (Miles 1997: 109). This kind of nudged self-empowerment was and is commonly perceived as Kekana’s becoming an artist instead of a craftsman only, and it was also spread by him in an article that he wrote two years after the actual incidence. Shortly thereafter the mace was in fact replaced by a gift of the *Commons House of Parliament of Great Britain and Northern Ireland*.³ “This honour is bestowed in the full confidence that the great traditions of parliamentary government which we have inherited are in good hands”, says the news presenter about the ceremonial object. It seems as if only the later mace from the colonial motherland could duly ensure the continuance of authorized rule whereas Kekana’s first version of the object served as a provisional place holder. It was the mace from Europe that must have authentically symbolized the ruling power in the House of Commons’ point of view and not the indigenous model carved of wood.

It is not entirely clear what political incidence exactly provoked this change of mind apart from the fact that a gift cannot easily be refused. It can be assumed though that a very specific political conviction made the replacement of Kekana’s work possible and self-evident. The track of his mace has been lost. Yet, this episode exemplifies the relevance of societal frameworks and their hierarchical structures when following an object’s trajectory in both a transcultural constellation in general as well as a colonial constellation in particular. It also illustrates the impact of a diversity of protagonists, their respective way of thinking and their underlying intentions and expectations. In Kekana’s case the contexts and turbulent situations in which his artworks were produced and circulated constituted the fragile practicability of the aesthetic concepts that surrounded him. These concepts linked objects and agents or social dynamics respectively. In the mission of *Grace Dieu* he was trained to be an artisan.⁴ After adding his own decor to a remittance work for the first time and hence proving his ability for artistic innovation he was discerned as an artist.⁵ And yet on another sociocultural level the art object he produced was obviously not considered appropriate to represent British supremacy any longer and just disappeared. It can only be assumed that Kekana’s mace might have been yet another plaything of the sometimes paradoxical classi-

fications of artistic output from Africa: too eclectic for an ‘authentic’ object, too African to epitomize colonial governance.

“Concepts are flexible”, states Mieke Bal (2002: 22-23) in her theorisation of travelling concepts, “each is a part of a framework, a systematic set of distinctions, *not* oppositions, that can sometimes be bracketed or even ignored, but that can never be transgressed [...]” As such, concepts are negotiable, polyphonic and transformable as they help structuring aesthetic phenomena within the concrete contact zone⁶ of art education and production in South Africa. As Bal notes, they were not dismissed here but actively addressed in sometimes ambivalent and fractious ways.

Apart from the methodological approach to apply to the investigation of travelling concepts a ‘thick’ description⁷ of cultural, political or economic circumstances it has to be acknowledged that the followed trajectories are often disrupted, not traceable anymore or that they suddenly reappear somewhere else within the extended borders of contact zones that constantly assemble new relationships and connections, while losing others. It is, after all, specific agents – taking up and mediating concepts – who migrate. In the case of establishing art historical narratives in South Africa, in particular, pursuing an antireductionist research position implies the excavation and connection of punctual evidences to fashion patterns of temporary conceptual stabilisations. In this essay, I am especially interested in following the formation of such stabilisations that constituted art production in South Africa to a significant extent.

Job Kekana was very well aware of the political situation at the time and its implications on creative production. In a letter, for example, he mentioned that “woodcarving was thought to be a white-man’s job” (Miles 1997: 107). And art historian Elizabeth Morton equally confirms Kekana’s assessment in a recently published article and observes that educational authorities refused to licence a handwork programme for Blacks at the same mission school Kekana was working at because “skilled white labor” (Morton 2013) had to be protected from competition. Kekana witnessed the changing policy of education for Africans in South Africa firsthand. Several mission schools that had started their work from the early and mid 19th century onwards were increasingly met with suspicion among Afrikaners,⁸ notably members of the *National Party* that was founded in 1915. They “had looked with dislike at African education as it had developed under the missionaries and the provinces. It gave the pupils wrong ideas, they said of their place in South Africa. [...] The ‘sound policy’ was ‘that the Natives should be educated in their own manner, and should learn to be good Natives as tribal Natives, and should not be imitators of the white man’” (McConkey 1972: 1).⁹ With the election victory of the *National Party* in 1948 and the establishment of a commission that was sent out to survey the education system, economic, intellectual and subsequent political tensions between different ethnic groups slowly turned, inter alia, into an ideology of preserving ‘authentic’ ethnic ‘traditions’ that found its way

into the art educational realm.¹⁰ Here, the ethnoculturally motivated aspects of a new educational strategy met concepts that were discussed and conveyed by educators of European origin who – from the 1940s onwards – administered a network to exchange staff and ideas. Being equipped with theories that were rooted in Germany and Austria in the late 19th century’s art education movement as part of the so-called *Reformpädagogik*, European teachers operated along similar methodological matrices apart from having different agendas.¹¹ In focusing the research on art education specifically, the aims of educators and aspirations of a Black middle class appear even more complex than following a general history of Bantu Education only. Art education, it seems, ranged from civilizing duties via restrictive and segregating purposes to an experimental pedagogy as playground for concepts of a European zeitgeist yet also as a space for artistic self-affirmation. The investigation of art education in South Africa as transcultural phenomenon first of all seeks to increase the complexity and the impact of differing voices, differing strategies of teaching, mentoring, learning and aspiring as well as the extremely diverse deployment of emerging concepts that accompanied the constitution of new art forms, namely ideas of the ‘authentic’, the ‘African’ or regional genres such as Township Art. Here, misunderstandings, failures and the precariousness of both material and intellectual avenues abound similarly. Artists like Kekana refused to produce certain objects, applied aberrations to original blueprints provided by teachers, repeated appealing and marketable designs or evolved artistically beyond institutional ambits. Educators developed a conglomerate of different pedagogical agendas and had to deal with official policies of the Bantu Education Department along the way. A transcultural approach describes, in this context, the method to engage with ambiguous cultural relationships within a particular contact zone that do not explain cultures from within exclusively (Juneja 2012). Questioning respective concepts that structure such relationships can then expose the dynamics of interplay between participating protagonists, produced objects and the frames of reference that encompass them, between artworks and mediating agents. It thus reveals an alternative art historical narrative in South Africa in which aesthetic concepts are never fixed but mark the struggle for artistic and intellectual self-definition.

Turbulent Itineraries. The Concepts of Originality and Authenticity

Notions of authenticity and originality played an important role in framing art educational institutions as well as their practical and artistic premises in conjunction with religious, economic and, at a later date, political claims. In this regard, concepts of authenticity and originality entailed indeed both discursive as well as factual mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion but at the same time generated assertive or defying manoeuvres of agency. They oscillated between the societal

meta-structure of apartheid's segregational system and variable degrees of freedom of individual designations. Next to the varying dimensions that influenced art educational frameworks and thus have to be included into a thorough analysis of the concepts at hand, I am especially interested in the ambivalent and reciprocal fluctuations in the making of art and art historical narratives. With the attempt to reconstruct aesthetic concepts within the historic structures of art educational venues the highly complex processes of their formation as well as underlying asymmetries of power and concomitant ideologies can be uncovered.

When looking at the formation of concepts of authenticity and originality within discourses on aesthetics in Europe it is striking that it displays a process of constant negotiation and readjustment. Although the concepts' evolution seems to follow a straight line to the point of releasing the aesthetic object as well as the creating and receptive subject from normative controllability while still relating to a social context, they also reveal a turbulent itinerary of upturns, crises and revivals – especially as catchwords of late modernity and modernism.

A genealogy of authenticity's and originality's aesthetic dimensions in Europe was prefigured in the 17th century. Originality was interrelated to ideas of othering and innovation as well as to their potential to generate effects of genuineness within different art systems at an early stage (Young 1759, Duff 1767). In European literature, for example, the idea of an original artwork was already associated with something foreign and even exotic.¹² William Duff then directly linked originality and the inventive act to the figure of the artist in his *Essay on original genius* from 1767. Here, he described creative subjectivity as the initial point of originality. In the artistic context originality thus exhibited a transcendental quality, something inborn that could not be acquired, rather than a learnable one as it was used in philosophical discourses. The emphasis on inner realities eventually led to a disassociation of the term from principles of imitating nature. It was finally presented by Johann Gottlieb Fichte as "ideal individuality" (Ritter and Gründer 1984: 1375) in the 18th century.

The concept of authenticity was introduced into the discourse on aesthetics by authors like Jean Baptiste Du Bos in 1760 who challenged the tradition of classicistic and objectivistic representations in dramatic arts and addressed the interplay between actors and audience. It played a major role in debates on the credibility of art and the subjectification of taste (Ostermann 2002). Here, authenticity was defined by means of its effects on the human psyche and human emotions. Similar to Young's and Duff's valorisation of the artist as creator, 'authentic' art could be created by the artist's decision about the orchestration of objects and material. In contrast to originality though, the concept of authenticity attained a much wider dimension and was eventually connected with ethical questions, emotion and empathy by Jean Jacques Rousseau (Ferrara 1985). For Rousseau, authentic behaviour could collide with societal expectations and thus marked the complex relationship between the self and normative parameters of societal structures. Authen-

ticity was conceived to incorporate tensions and the human being's inherent aberration from the ideal.¹³ At the beginning of the 20th century notations of the pristine and 'primitive' found their way into art discourses in Europe and were not only searched for in objects that were produced outside the continent but also, for example, in the art of children or blind persons (Bisanz 1985, Löwenfeld 1939, et al.). Eventually, concomitant approaches in art education were adapted and implemented into the contact zones of workshops and art schools in South Africa and elsewhere (e.g. Grossert 1953 and 1968, Meyerowitz 1936).

The perception of the authentic individual as responding to its own inner disposition laid the foundation for following elaborated and adjusted definitions of the artist as genius, as lateral thinker, intellectual rebel or – in the African context – as being equipped with the naïveté and unchangeability of indigenous creativity.¹⁴ However, structural analogies of these concepts cannot obscure the fact that they were used in completely different spatio-temporal and hierarchically organised surroundings. In the colonial and postcolonial era the concept of authenticity within art production from Africa in particular became highly charged because of the ascriptions and desires that were projected onto respective objects on the part of a European art system and anthropological classification. Some objects were credited with certain 'tribes' while others were marketed as singular works by an individual, yet still 'authentic' African artist depending on demand and marketing strategy (e.g. Bewaji 2003). Art dealers and artists from Africa often participated in this kind of cultural economy and maintained fictions of authenticity with the help of conformed artistic and narrative strategies (e.g. Steiner 1994).¹⁵ 'Authentic' stories were invented to trade art and craft (Kasfir 1999: 105). And several scholars have just recently criticised persistent ascriptions of an African authentic to contemporary artists from the continent since they would merely appoint them to a rather passive, reacting position (e.g. Oguibe 2004, Okeke 2001: 30).

In the South African context it is crucial to acknowledge the economic dimension of an art world that was dominated by protagonists of European origin and the fact that the choice to become an artist most often led to existential problems especially for Black people. The actual selling of one's artworks was essential to make a living. And prior to some scattered first attempts to establish a curriculum that was entirely dedicated to the education of Black artists from the early 1950s onwards¹⁶ the only art education available was that for teachers or artisans. Artistic freedom as well as being original or authentic in a European sense was thus not only limited by material restrictions and the lack of access to cultural and art historical knowledge but also by the appreciation and goodwill of mostly European buyers and collectors.

Job Kekana's workplace at *Grace Dieu* where he obtained a regular employment as craftsman can be considered a safe albeit not completely autonomous surrounding since the marketing strategies of the woodcarving department were clearly aligned with a concrete demand for religious craftwork with an African appear-

ance. The mission of *Grace Dieu* in today's Polokwane only gradually developed first into a teacher training college, then offered an industrial course for Africans and eventually progressed into an art workshop in the late 1920s. The experimental character of this workshop and others was emphasized by several scholars and exemplarily mirrors the various ideas and ideals which informed the pedagogical programmes of such venues. Morton, for example, stresses the educational and professional artistic background of Reverend Edward Paterson who was teaching, advising and designing at *Grace Dieu* and who launched the policy of the *Arts and Crafts Movement* in England. However, he was only partly able to translate the movement's paradigms into the South African context. Design and execution, Morton writes, were separated along ethnic parameters and not combined within an integral production process. It is not without irony that Paterson's anti-industrialist ethos mutated into a modified repetition of exactly those industrialist circumstances he wanted to avoid when taking into account that several mission-trained artists later mass-produced objects for the curio trade in what Marshall Ward Mount called the "souvenir style" (Mount 1973: 44). Also, the supposed incapability of Black South Africans to design and invent appropriate religious images later became the argumentative basis for an emphasis on the 'authentic' inner voice of African artists in educational contexts with a more secular conception. Design did not have to be provided anymore, but an innate talent had to be awakened. Yet, beyond the mission environment there were a number of artists who likewise launched their own businesses¹⁷ and art careers and started to create works of art apart from the primary scope of production. Some directly satisfied the demand of an emerging art market (Rankin 1992: 41), others tried to establish themselves as internationally acknowledged artists with according residencies abroad.¹⁸ In each case and with every artist and every tutor involved a locally specific framework for the production of a variety of objects was configured that conjured up new art forms and constituted part of South Africa's recent art history.

Research on Art Education

To date art education in South Africa has been described mainly with reference to its material outcome, such as by Elizabeth Rankin in her essays on the Africanisation of Christian imagery (Rankin 2003, 2009, et alii). Only in 1992, though, did she write about the necessity to research venues of art education for Black people other than the *Polly Street Art Centre* or the *Rorke's Drift Art and Craft Centre* and their impact on the formation of a Black middle class. It is also worth mentioning that art schools did not displace education in the missions but rather flanked them, as for example the *Mariannhill Mission* in Natal which was founded in 1882, offered art classes from 1942 onwards and established the *Mariannhill Art Centre* in 1978.

Another line of scrutiny addresses the ambivalence of educated Africans between modernity and tradition. Lize van Robbroeck, for example, writes that the “distance between the educated [Black] Christian [...] and the ‘ordinary African’ he gazes upon, is indicated by his search for an ‘authentic Bantu’ free of Western influence” (Robbroeck 2008: 224). And Sidney Kasfir and Till Förster acknowledge that “[...] there is a wide variety of possible workshop constellations that crosscuts the divide between tradition and modernity” (Kasfir and Förster 2013: 4) in their recently published book on *African art and agency in the workshop*. “We argue”, they continue, “for a differentiated analysis of the workshop as a particular institution that shapes the reproduction of art in many African societies” (Kasfir and Förster 2013: 4). I would like to add that the very definition of art and artists was vividly negotiated, contested and transformed in specific art institutions. Their connection to and delimitation from politics with its ideological implications moulded them into discursive spaces for art-related concepts such as cultural authenticity or ethnic marketing.

When looking at the educational situation for Black artists in South Africa and elsewhere pedagogical approaches have been highly individual and dependent on respective tutors from the outset. Yet, these attitudes were never set in stone. Teachers influenced each other and were influenced by their students. Concepts of European origin adjusted over time, also in response to restricted material availability. Art education in particular was an experiment. It was an experiment shaped by numerous different factors. One of these elements was the mostly conflicting mindset of both European teachers and African students in the face of questions on coeval art production or how to deal with heritage, of economic necessities or the demand of the art market and of political constraints. However, in contrast to political guidelines that culminated in the 1953 *Bantu Education Act* the art educational environment appears as a rather intricate and relational discursive scope. Art schools and workshops influenced their students and teachers by interaction, experience, ideas, feedbacks and expectations. Kasfir and Förster (2013: 12) define the workshop as “a social space in which individuals cooperate. [...] it is a sphere in which interpretive processes unfold.” I would like to specify this interpretive aspect within art production as having been accompanied by translational efforts that unfolded as various experimental agendas, too.

Another conceptual ambivalence that characterised co-operations in art educational venues evolved from the fact that several art teachers of European background campaigned for the equality of Black students while at the same time categorising them by means of concepts that they brought along and thus claiming specific modes of production as well as omitting others.

In this connection, I would like to take a closer look at one of the most influential educators in the history of art schools in South Africa, John Watt Grossert, who in 1948 founded the *Ndalen Art Centre*. With this brief case study I would like to indicate that European teachers stretched a complex and ambivalent discursive

sive net that combined definitions of art as a modernising and therapeutic factor with inclusionary attempts in regard to art as a fundamental human activity.

Dedication and Limitation. The *Ndalen* Training College

An independent Wesleyan mission had already been established in 1847 at Ndaleni near Richmond in KwaZulu-Natal that was later developed into a teacher training college under the administration of the Department of Bantu Education. The *Ndaleni Art Centre* not only provided the possibility for teachers to complete advanced training but also became breeding grounds for later artists or those teachers who wanted to pursue an art career in addition to their regular breadwinning. A specialisation in art and craft also entailed an increase in salary and a higher professional status. “[...] aimed at training prospective art teachers [...] it came to be perceived as a significant art school in its own right”, notes art historian Juliette Leeb-Du Toit (1999: 4) in a retrospective catalogue. And Elizabeth Rankin mentions that:

The Ndaleni course was primarily aimed at the training of art teachers, not artists, but in the context of the 1950s it offered probably the most programmed art training available to Black students, who were drawn from all over South Africa. The course was wide-ranging in its scope, including classes in art history, design, picture making, clay modelling, crafts and wood carving. (Rankin 1992: 44)

It also generated other kinds of art entrepreneurs and thus helped disseminating art appreciation among Black South Africans. “The first suggestion that village industries should be officially encouraged were made as early as 1852 by a commission on Native affairs in Natal, which put forward a recommendation for the establishment of training centres for crafts as an integral part of Bantu education”, writes Grossert (1968: 85) himself and emphasises the economic policy behind the idea of providing creative education to Africans. At the time he helped founding the Ndaleni Art Centre and started to offer a special two-year course for art teachers in 1952 Grossert had to be concerned with an increasing competitive dynamic with regard to art market mechanisms yet also concerning aesthetic concepts that were underlying the creative production of different art educational institutions.¹⁹ Christian training colleges such as Grace Dieu that were equipped with their own craft departments and were oriented towards economic success as well as the mediation of religious images advertised an approach that Grossert tried to avoid. While he was seeking to implement ideas of artistic achievement mission schools split the creative production process according to an academic and ultimately ethnic background. In contrast, the Ndaleni Training College as one of the major educational institutions in the 1950s was a venue where Black students were confronted with European ideas on the function and production of art that did not refer to religious connotations only. The paradox still remained that in the context of mission schools and most notably in later art educational

venues Black artists were “detrribalized” (Koloane 1998: 70) and accepted as part of a South African bourgeoisie while educators were simultaneously searching for the ‘authentic’ idiom of an innate creativity.

Deviating Conceptualisations. John Grossert’s Art Historical Texts

“Ndaleni was the ‘dream child’ of Jack Grossert, who had just been appointed *Organizer of Arts and Crafts and Industrial Work* for the Native Schools in Natal”, notes Leeb-du Toit (1999: 6). Grossert was aware of the damaging impact of colonialism and the erosion of cultural practices. “He was convinced”, she further writes, “that the embellishment of surroundings, homes or schools with art, would improve a community’s aesthetic sensibilities and quality of life.” (Leeb-du Toit 1999: 7).

At this point it is revealing how Grossert as a dominating figure in the development of an art educational scheme at Ndaleni specified the function and meaning of art in peoples’ daily lives and how he defined art as such. For him, art had the purpose to shape the intellect and to guarantee partaking in what he called the ‘civilized’ life. In his view, art was a kind of medicine for social and cultural tensions. Through art, he seemed to believe, it was possible to establish an inclusive society in which each and everyone had reached the same civilizing level. Grossert’s attempt to construct an inclusive approach of art theoretical thinking reflected the trend of his time to reevaluate crafts and to recognize foreign cultural goods.

In his monograph *Art and crafts for Africans. A manual for art and craft teachers* from 1953 Grossert outlined a seemingly unprejudiced framework of the connection between art education, art and society. “During the centuries”, he writes, “through which our culture has been progressing certain standards of judgement of art have become generally accepted by cultured people” (Grossert 1953: 19). Instead of distinguishing between South Africans from European origin and Black South Africans Grossert elaborated the discrimination between educated and uneducated people, and between people with culture and those without. On the other hand, he did *not* understand culture as a property that belonged to certain groups of human beings exclusively but rather as an archive that everybody should learn about and that was allowed to be foraged creatively. He notes:

All cultured people should be familiar with the best works from this treasure house, since it not only enriches their own experience but also forms a basis of good taste.
(Grossert 1953: 20)

Grossert then lists rock paintings of the Bushmen, Egyptian sculptures, art works from China, Persia and Europe as corresponding examples. He seemed to unfold art and culture as a commonly available archive with non-linear, eclectic dimen-

sions. Cultural heritage had to be seen in a global perspective. It had to be used productively to teach the ignoramus.

In his later dissertation from 1968 on *Art education and Zulu crafts* Grossert further devised the question of how to define aesthetic production. In his fairly incoherent text he sketched the turbulent history of art education in Kwa-Zulu Natal and tried to come to grips with an inclusive concept of art. “We may say”, Grossert (1968: 23) explicates, “that before any expression may be called a work of art there must be evidence of creativity and originality in the significant form it assumes. Art is nature seen through the artist’s temperament.” The question of judgment and ascription, of how to analyse creative evidence and of who was actually proficient to analyse, though, is excluded at first. After all, Grossert used the emphasis on the concept of originality as inclusionary instrument. As long as artists produced original artworks they could be included into the art world no matter what aesthetic quality their objects might have had. Originality is in fact valued more by Grossert than aesthetic properties or technique.²⁰ With this approach he embraced into the canon of art all man-made objects but at the same time resorted to the exclusive structures of originality.

Man reveals his higher intellectual ability by constructing, making and planning. [...] In doing this he places himself in the position of an innovator and creator, an original thinker and inventor. [...] It would be unreasonable, therefore, to exclude any work of man from our category of art unless it is merely a copy or repetition of a skill. (Grossert 1968: 27)

At this text passage at the latest it becomes clear that the dedicated art mentor conceded a potential for original art making and thus the activation of a civilising and modernising process to every individual. Yet, his approach derived from an entirely European vantage point. Here, repetition and copy were no cultural values but a nuisance, the trait of illiterate man. Consequently, the foremost aim concerning his educational approach was a syllabus that would “not only preserve existing Native crafts, but later on make definite additions to Native Craftwork without slavish imitation of European models” (Grossert 1968: 210). At the same time, the modern concept of originality was transferred to individuals who were perceived to be potentially equal, yet were also expected to keep ready genuine ‘African’ characteristics. Grossert thus developed an understanding of originality that would translate as spontaneity and as a vague connection to some kind of immutable ‘tradition’, very different, indeed, from the alternating forces radiating from Europe. As much as his version of originality resembled the idea of the “self as origin” (Krauss 1981: 53) – that Rosalind Krauss much later diagnosed for the European avant-garde following the historiographical development of this concept as ultimate permutation of artistic individuality – Grossert, however, thought of a thoroughly other ‘self’. Here, at Ndaleni, it was not the actual *modus operandi* of the production of so-called art that was questioned by Grossert and his colleagues.

What was at stake was rather the preservation and emergence of an ‘African’ identity as such.

The cachet of emotionality of ‘authentic’ artistic production by Black artists was a leitmotif not only within Grossert’s considerations but also in view of several critical voices of Africans in art. It was selectively employed for feelings of insecurity when coping with the advent of modernity²¹ or those that were believed to be connected to inborn dispositions. The anti-modernist stance on an art curriculum that was developed by Edward Paterson at *Grace Dieu* was also implemented by Grossert:

The art of the rising artists among the Bantu of South Africa differs from both the old traditional styles and also from the contemporary art of whites in this country, Europe and America, since in its upsurge it shows a profound interest in humanity and the portrayal of the full range of man’s emotions. This humanistic trend at a time when the art of the white races has shown a tendency towards becoming more abstract and dehumanised, evinces a commendable independence in the Bantu and also their ability to strike new roots to provide supports in the place of the traditional ones which have been cut away. (Grossert 1968: 42-43)

It is not without irony that it was actually Grossert’s and other educators’ ways of searching for alternatives aside ‘dehumanising’ European trends in art which can be designated as emotional. Art had to provide the possibility to reconcile one’s own emotions with an unsettled society. Parameters of art as civilizing factor, of art as an instrument of empowerment and art as therapeutic tool were intermingled with the belief in fundamental cultural differences.

Inclusionary Conceptualisations. Grossert’s Account of African Voices

An important element in Grossert’s considerations was his effort to implement into them voices and thoughts of African origin. He enclosed into his elaborations on the original production and ‘authentic’ configuration of new art by Black artists concepts that he borrowed, for example, from aesthetic appreciation of the Zulu.²² “[...] the Zulus”, he wrote, “also distinguished from the general group of craftsmen the man whom they called *uchwephesha*, a man who mystifies by the inborn talent which he possesses and which he cannot transmit to others. [...] From this title is derived the word for a work of art. It is called an *ubuchwephesha*,²³ but this is limited to the visual arts such as woodcarving and metalwork.” (Grossert 1968: 41) Grossert – far from being a trained anthropologist and executing respective methods – might have very well translated the term according to his own particular theorisation as it highlights striking parallels to the European conceptualisation of the artist as genius. Again, pivotal differences between Black and European artists were obviously not perceived to become manifest in conceptual structures. Also, Grossert referred to old, ‘traditional’ works of art made by the Zulu but did not investigate how the concept of *ubuchwephesha* was

used amongst then contemporary artists and craftsmen. Yet, whereas he commented on the loss of traditional structures and African patrons in a relatively neutral and unemotional way, the bequeathed Zulu notion seemed to offer him an adequate support to create a theoretical matrix for both the significance and orientation of art education in South Africa that should be informed neither by traditional forms of artistic production nor by European models but rather evoke a new intuitive version of native ‘African’ creativity that was seen as beneficial in changing social tides.

In addition, Grossert was obviously engaged and familiar – to some extent at least – with debates on art and art history among Black intellectuals. In his dissertation, for example, he quotes the artist Selby Mvusi²⁴ and thus acknowledges the condescending attitude towards art from Africa on the part of Western protagonists. Selby ironically commented on the paternalistic view on art from Africans: “African art [...] enjoys special dispensation from the mental rigour we are accustomed to encountering in Western art appreciation and criticism. [...] The basis of analysis becomes not Art, but the African.” (Grossert 1968: 43-44) What – within Grossert’s text – was a clear critique on the modalities of art production in Africa nonetheless met his own inclusionary approach in theory and practice. He was in search for a new artistic language. The role of the schools was seen in supporting the “phase of transition” (Grossert 1968: 44) in which African people should become part of a modern society. “[...] we want to help negotiate the meeting point of African and outside cultures”, he explicates, “and we want to contain the shock which the confrontation with these other cultures entail.” (Grossert 1968: 44) Art and its educational institutions became spaces of negotiation to address cultural and societal tensions. Grossert formulated the idea of a collaborative effort to meet the changes that colonisation and most notably the era of apartheid brought about. In this collaborative space art should serve as a mediator between individual and society. From such a perspective, Grossert promoted the development of authentic behaviour in Rousseau’s sense. While he set the concept of originality in the process of art making in analogy with the individual’s inner ‘African’ condition, Grossert subsequently aimed at helping to establish an ‘authentic’ and autonomous African bourgeoisie. His motivation was informed by new theories in art education, the obviously honest belief in the power of art and culture as well as by positions that at the same time demarcate an ‘African’ cultural idiom.

Black South Africans displayed a much more prosaic attitude to the issue of art education within the regular curriculum at times. The *Transkeian General Council*, a group of “chiefs, government nominees and [...] elected representatives” (Mbeki 1957: 16) that was also included in Grossert’s text, formulated their viewpoint as such:

[...] if the handicrafts ever existed on any large scale among the Natives [...] we are convinced that their day has long gone by [...] And so far as the training of hand and eye is concerned, the slight benefit the Native pupil might derive is in no way com-

mensurate with the waste of valuable time which could more usefully be given to other subjects. (Grossert 1968: 77)

Grossert's account of Bantu Education exhibits a variety of voices concerning the development of an appropriate and effective syllabus in art. He altogether objected to political trends at a time when education for Black South Africans was drastically curtailed, turned explicitly against political policies (1968: 56 and 60) that were aiming at separate laws and customs from the mid 19th century onwards and instead advocated the educating efforts of the missions. The Black intellectual had to achieve equal status and to take responsibility. This status, though, could only develop *next* to European culture, not within it. "Culture in a new form will emerge" (Grossert 1968: 234), he eventually concluded. And he was explicitly thinking of Black culture.

Grossert's hypothetical thoughts between crossing frontiers of and demarcating (Mersmann 2004) cultures and art mirror the complexities and changing meanings of cultural concepts especially when being transferred to and permeated by new cultural contexts. The voices of Black cultural workers and politicians accompanied, questioned and transformed such concepts.²⁵ Both positions countered political restrictions in South Africa in an ambivalent endeavour to search for new identities and art forms.

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Notes

- ¹ The demarcation of Black and White protagonists in South Africa is due to the segregation policy of the apartheid era that determines discourses on presentations of artworks produced by the respective other down to the present day. The capitalisation of the adjectives designates their sociocultural dimension and thus implicates common experiences of discrimination or privilege.
- ² Exchange and clashes between educators and students from diverse cultural and social backgrounds took place on various different levels, namely within a single venue, in encountering other art educational venues with differing agendas or in coming to terms with educational policies of the apartheid administration.

- ³ To be retrieved at <http://www.britishpathe.com/video/rhodesia-parliament-receives-a-new-mace>.
- ⁴ Kekana first completed his primary school education at the Diocesan Training College before he was trained to become a wood carver for three years. The Christian artefacts and furniture of the college's workshop were produced according to given designs mostly developed by Father Edward Paterson who led the Native Mission at Potchefstroom in the historical province of Transvaal and was himself a trained artist. Similar to Renaissance workshops in Europe students at *Grace Dieu* executed objects after Paterson's samples. They became requested as religious craftwork especially in Great Britain and the United States.
- ⁵ Six years after his invitation to the Federal Parliament Kekana moved to London with his wife to study art at the *Sir John Cass School of Art* and the *Camberwell College of Art* for three years. Here, his artistic approach towards an otherwise repetitive handling of the stylistic features of Christian iconography became more sophisticated. In the sculpture of a Madonna and child, for example, he entwined Christian European imagery with codes of African identity.
- ⁶ Mary Louise Pratt's (1991) contouring of the contact zone seems to describe exactly the situation in South African art schools. Here, protagonists engage with concepts of otherness and identity, "they involve in a selective collaboration with an appropriation of idioms of the metropolis" (Pratt 1991: 35). And taking into account asymmetries of power within these social spaces the question still arises, how emanating aesthetic concepts are adapted or denied as well as how they are customized through these very manoeuvres.
- ⁷ I borrow the term from Kwame Anthony Appiah's essay "Thick translation" (1993) in which he differs between producing meaning through the translation of a text and the more beneficial approach of facilitating its understanding that would include the necessity to amply contextualise the initial text.
- ⁸ Afrikaners are a South African ethnic group that originates from Dutch settlers as well as from other groups of mostly European origin.
- ⁹ The complexity of sociocultural structures in South Africa becomes apparent when looking at the politics of settlers from European origin - the Afrikaners - and the politics of British occupation. By the end of the 19th century Southern Africa was separated into four territories: two of them were under British rule, the other two under the rule of Afrikaners. The following decades marked a period of ongoing struggles for territory as well as for ideological assertion. The Emancipation Act of 1834, for example, abolished slavery in South Africa. The legal equalization of Black and White residents was perceived as betrayal by Afrikaners. Yet, "for the English", Melissa Steyn (2001: 26) writes, "backed as they were by empire, their sense of superiority to the native inhabitants was utterly above question. They did not regard the more rural and often illiterate Afrikaner folk as the same order of civilization." On the other hand, the Afrikaners' predominant differentiation from indigenous peoples at this point in time rested on a feeling of religious rather than racial superiority (Schmidt 1996). An educated African bourgeoisie that emanated from the missions schools - mostly under British custody - was perceived as an economic as well as ideological threat by an Afrikaner working class from often humble backgrounds. Henry Kenney (1991: 36), for example, writes: "The new government consisted exclusively of Afrikaners [...] Afrikaner workers would shrug off the chains of poverty and receive protection from the unfair competition of Blacks [...] Afrikaner business would acquire its rightful place in an economy too long dominated by Jews and English-speakers."
- ¹⁰ The commission under the chairmanship of Werner W. M. Eiselen that was responsible for the constitutive *Eiselen Report* especially addressed the problem of the so-called "intellectual

proletariat” (Kros 2002: 61), Black educated people that would never be able to fully participate in the South African society adequate to their schooling. Nevertheless, Eiselen himself disallowed theories based on racial classification and discrimination and instead aimed at reconciling mission-bred intellectuals with their communities. In this sense, “‘Bantu’ was held to allude to a cultural (or social) environment that predisposed its subjects to learn in particular ways and from which they should not be alienated. The ‘unhappy’ condition of many African intellectuals was explained by the fact that mission education had alienated them from their cultural roots” (Kros 2002: 66-67).

- ¹¹ The aim in Europe was to comprehensively educate society through art, music and literature. The art education movement targeted the establishment of an integral human being as opposed to the individual’s alienation through the disrupting tendencies of industrialisation. Eiselen’s benevolent approach of propitiating African intellectuals with their ‘roots’ seems to align with exactly these concepts that sought for cultural veracity and anti-modernist stances.
- ¹² The English poet Edward Young, who mentioned the original in the context of art for the first time, writes: “Our spirits rouse at an Original; that is a perfect stranger, and all throng to learn what news from a foreign land: And tho’ it comes, like an Indian prince, adorned with feathers only, having little of weight; yet of our attention it will rob the more Solid, if not equally New.”
- ¹³ Ferrara (1985: 281-282) notes that “authenticity is the quality of the moral actor who courageously takes this step and faces the risk of acting immorally. An ethic of authenticity is then a post-conventional ethic which emphasizes this quality and encourages its cultivation [...]”.
- ¹⁴ See, for example, Valentin Yves Mudimbe whose investigation on Pierre Romain-Desfossés, founder of the *Academie d’Art Populaire* in Lubumbashi in 1946, and other early European art teachers in Africa reveals the resemblance of paradigms they used for establishing their educational institutions. He writes: “His task as he conceived it was to awaken in his students this ancient, unchanging aesthetic memory.” (Mudimbe 1999: 156)
- ¹⁵ Christopher Steiner, for example, investigates the circulation of objects and their transcultural entanglements in the history of West African art trade and states that: “Because the merchandise that the traders buy and sell is defined, classified, and evaluated largely in terms of Western concepts such as ‘art’ and ‘authenticity’, the traders are not only moving a set of objects through the world economic system, they are also exchanging information - mediating, modifying, and commenting on a broad spectrum of cultural knowledge.” (Steiner 1994: 2)
- ¹⁶ The foundation of the *Polly Street Art Centre* in 1952 with Cecil Skotnes, Cultural Recreation Officer at that time, offering informal art classes was such an attempt.
- ¹⁷ Kekana himself, for example, was self-employed for about five years after he moved to Johannesburg and sold his sculptures to private households. Only in 1944 he continued to collaborate with his former teacher, Sister Pauline, in the St. Faith’s Mission in Zimbabwe although she had already started to work there from 1938 onwards.
- ¹⁸ One of Sister Pauline’s most famous students, Ernest Mancoba, for example, left South Africa for Paris with a scholarship in 1938 where he received further education at the *École des Arts Décoratifs* after already having gained a degree from *Fort Hare University*.
- ¹⁹ “As a practicing Catholic Grossert was [...] well aware of the acceleration in art training ventures undertaken by the Church of Africa in fostering an indigenous sacred art, as well as the international interest and exposure that such work elicited in exhibitions worldwide.” (Leedu Toit 1999: 7)
- ²⁰ “In art and crafts originality is generally considered of equal importance to technique, but when teaching painting, modelling and carving we endeavour first to develop originality and allow technique to follow.” (Grossert 1953: 17)

- ²¹ Grossert (1968: 233) states: “It is strongly believed that it is the responsibility of education to equip the Bantu with the intellectual and psychological resources necessary to make the social and cultural adjustments which the changing situations demand. [...] Even when that unity [of a culture] is seriously disrupted by the impact of powerful outside influences, these basic forces strive to achieve a new pattern with its own unity.”
- ²² The Zulu are an ethnic group of Bantu-speaking peoples mainly living in the South African province of KwaZulu-Natal where the *Ndalení Art Centre* was located. Today, they are the largest ethnic group in South Africa with more than eleven million people.
- ²³ In the glossary of the African Studies Center in Boston *ubuchwephesha* is translated with “skill”. To be retrieved at <http://www.bu.edu/africa/files/2012/04/Xhosa-3-Glossary.pdf>.
- ²⁴ Mvusi enrolled for the course in art education at the *Ndalení Teacher's Training College* in the early 1950s and was there trained by the painter Alfred Ewan and his colleague Peter Atkins, a sculptor.
- ²⁵ While Grossert believed in art as civilising factor and was thus offering an unofficial alternative to apartheid policy and Bantu Education, Isaac Bangani Tabata, South African politician and president of the *Non European Unity Movement*, sketched a more drastic picture of the educational situation for Black people in general. “Today”, he (Tabata 1974: 64) writes, “unlike our forefathers, we know that it is their [the Afrikaners'] deliberate policy not to let the African become civilised and to deny him education; [...] In short it is their deliberate policy to debar him from civilisation and then shout: 'He is not yet ripe for civilisation!' All this while they were destroying his customs, traditions and way of life, ruthlessly destroying his economy, his family and his moral codes, shattering them by the impact of a capitalist economy and capitalist greed for profit and power.” In an earlier book from 1959 that Tabata wrote in direct reaction to the new, restricting laws of the *Bantu Education Act* he actually questions the Afrikaners' status of civilisation. Since the time they had left Europe in the 17th century they would not have progressed, he states. Instead, the merits of enlightenment would have passed the Afrikaners: “This was a Europe, then, unknown to the forebears of the present day Afrikaner. They did not inherit this new outlook on man and society. Humanism, that stream of the Renaissance which has been described as the parent of all modern development, whether intellectual, scientific or social, that great movement of thought which began to spread throughout Western Europe in the fifteenth century, and which was essentially an intellectual revolt against ecclesiastical tyranny, had still to come to fruition when these people left Europe.” (Tabata 1959: 27) In the following, Tabata continues with imagining the Afrikaners as uneducated peasants. The stereotype of the uncivilised African is thwarted by the stereotype of the uncivilised Afrikaner. Here, civilisation becomes the contested concept with different strategic alignments and ascriptions.

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