The viability of social design as an agent for positive change in a South African context: Mural painting in Enkanini, Western Cape

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Abstract

The aim of this article is to highlight some of the issues that handicap the success and viability of community-based design projects that aim to negotiate positive social change in South Africa through social and inclusive design processes. Using a case study methodology, we focus on a community mural project recently executed in Enkanini, a township outside Stellenbosch in the Western Cape. The project, implemented by Andrew Breitenberg, an American artist currently living in South Africa, together with a group of Dutch volunteers, was called *These three remain*. By investigating how the project negotiates, or fails to negotiate, sustainable social change in practice, we construe possible reasons for the project's outcomes with the aim of improving the viability of social design practice as a change agent in social design projects throughout South Africa. In this case study, aspects of South African social design practice are discussed, without skirting around issues that may be hard for designers to deal with when confronted with the reality of social politics in South Africa. We argue that there is a need for a critical consideration of the unquestioned optimism and often romanticised prospects that are linked to such projects.

Key words: Social design, mural painting, community (development/interaction) projects, social transformation, South Africa.

Introduction

'Community development' and 'community participation' are terms that are familiar to most people on either side of the socio-economic divide in post-apartheid South Africa. They have become a key component of planning programmes at a local level in South Africa, to the extent that Williams (2006:197) sees them as 'synonymous with legitimate governance' today. In South Africa, with its troublesome history, bridging the gap between people is a challenge, not so much in terms of writing a constitution, policies, or curricula, but in terms of what is happening in everyday interactions among people. In addition to government-based development programmes, privately funded, Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) and Not for Profit Organisations, which realise the importance of individual citizenship in transforming our country, have flourished. This increase in the number of organisations could be indicative of a loss of faith in the government's ability to take the necessary lead in social reconciliation, in addition to the recognition of individuals' responsibility to do so. The barriers to a more equal and socially just South Africa are not only complicated, as histories of social discourse continue to interplay and develop, but seem to be on the increase. Moreover, it would be naive to think that there

is a simple or instant way of solving such deeply layered social politics.

The aim of this article is to highlight some of the issues that handicap the success and viability of community-based design projects in South Africa that set out to negotiate positive social change through social and inclusive design processes. Using a case study methodology, we focus on a community-based mural project executed in Enkanini,[1] a section of the Khayamandi township outside Stellenbosch in the Western Cape in 2011.

Mural paintings are a familiar sight across South Africa's urban and rural landscapes. The often amateurish renderings have become intrinsically linked to our understanding of South Africanness and the country's journey of development and democracy since the abolishment of the apartheid regime in the 1990s. Mural painting is often claimed as a tool for the 'empowerment' of underdeveloped communities, and plays a significant role in the South African discourse of progress and development (Marschall 1999:60). Marschall (2000:96), one of the few critics who has written extensively on the topic of South African mural art, argues that '[w]hile there were a few murals in South African cities during the 1970's and 80's, urban mural art has only recently emerged as a highly visible phenomenon and tremendously flourished ever since.' Mural projects are not phenomena exclusive to South Africa, but with regard to our country's complex racial and cultural histories, South Africa presents a unique context for them.

Community murals can be differentiated from commercial murals or graffiti in the sense that they always '[involve] the local community to some degree and that the process of painting the mural is as important as its imagery' (Marschall 2002:41). This notion of participation by members of the community makes community murals an interesting subject for investigation within the discourse of social design. During such projects, interactions between racially and culturally diverse groups of volunteers and community members, as well as interactions between participants and the space they work in, are among the interests that social design is concerned with. These interactions may assist in breaking down the stereotypes of these spaces, which are often associated with the previously disadvantaged groups of South Africa as being dangerous and foreign (i.e., informal settlements or townships). The project discussed in this article was implemented by an American artist together with a group of Dutch volunteers,[2] and was called *These three remain*. By investigating how the project negotiates, or fails to negotiate, sustainable social change in practice, we hope to suggest possible reasons for the project's outcomes. We also hope to point out the need for a critical consideration regarding unquestioned optimism and often-romanticised prospects that are frequently linked to such projects.

South African context

With the above argument in mind, we would like to briefly to highlight a few prevalent issues that arise within the general sphere of community development projects, before continuing to discuss the case study by investigating the manner in which these issues could affect the success of social design projects in practice.

The complex and layered nature of social politics

Mashele (2011:57, 61) argues that '[i]f there is a single burning issue that South Africans handle untruthfully

it is the question of race ... the more South Africans pretend and grin to each other about racial matters; the longer they postpone their collective success ... The truth is that racial integration in South Africa remains a myth ... Pretence and opportunism are among many of the blinkers that lead observers to think that post-apartheid South Africa has made significant progress in race relations.' Mashele (2011:72) further argues that, if there is to be any hope of racial reconciliation at a grassroots social level, it is necessary for white South Africans first and foremost to confess that they generally view blacks as inferior, contrary to what they usually admit. He forms his argument on the basis that most black South Africans are poor and are therefore seen as 'needing help' – which leads to them being viewed by most whites as being intellectually inferior. It is therefore necessary for whites to understand what it means to be a person of colour, to reflect critically on whiteness and on the invisible privileges of being white, and on the consequences of institutional whiteness and what is considered as the norm.

According to Seekings (2008:1), it seems that the racial categories established by South Africa's apartheid past often still serve to structure the way in which citizens address processes of racial redress. When community development projects are executed by white parties for black communities in South African townships, Biko's (2004:23) notion of 'white as knowledgeable and black as needy' can easily be rein-forced. In this light, it becomes evident that issues of race are implicated in this study. According to Leonardo (2004:132), people need to work together to reflect on historical and current contexts and to dismantle supremacy discourses of whiteness. Whiteness should not be denied, but people of all races should work together actively to unpack multiculturalism.

One of the most important keys to working with people towards social transformation is not to underestimate or disregard the deep influence that culture, race, gender, social class and history have on human social behaviour and on a person's reaction to visual messages (Seekings 2008:5). Nelson Mandela's (1994:554) statement that '[a]fter climbing a great hill, one only finds that there are many more great hills to climb,' illustrates the important notion that all problems are nested within a bigger context that creates ever more 'hills to climb'. This perspective has a profound impact on the way we tackle social obstacles in practice. Consciously changing deep-rooted perceptions and attitudes, most of which lie in the subconscious, does not happen in a few days or weeks; it will take months or, more realistically, years.

Politics of helping behaviour

The topic of helping behaviour in South Africa proposes an intricate set of emotions that often go hand in hand with an integral feeling of doing the 'right thing' in reaction to the injustices of the past. The notion of 'white guilt', collective as well as individual, plays an undeniable, although not exclusive role in our attitudes toward helping those who are viewed, in most cases, as the less fortunate blacks.

Even though a new generation of white South Africans cannot be held responsible for the country's past mistakes, the fact that they continue to enjoy many invisible advantages as a result thereof, is evident. Giving money to an online charity, or dropping off old clothing at a second-hand charity store could lighten the 'burden' of whiteness. Yet, these 'hand out' acts of charity do nothing to restore racial equality at a social level. It is comfortable and easy to help at a distance, avoiding the emotions and

personalities of those we help, and keeping their problems from coming too 'close' to our comfortable lives. 'Helping' in this sense becomes an act that merely gives what Biko (2004:23) refers to as the 'vague satisfaction for the guilt-stricken whites,' enabling them to sleep peacefully at night and face themselves in the morning. Biko (2004:23) warns against artificial integration through which the hierarchy of white as knowledgeable and black as needy is perpetuated.

Mashele (2011:106) notes that the notion of white guilt handicaps white people's ability to achieve social and racial equality by 'helping' blacks. He argues that the solution to this problem is for blacks to stop blaming whites for their poverty and to take charge of their situation by helping themselves. Though such a statement is not unproblematic, it is evident that the act of giving continues to place the 'giver' in a position of power, with the 'receiver' in a position of pity and dependence. This merely deepens, instead of closes, the gap between them. This kind of helping behaviour can sustain the dependency of the receiving group on the giving group (Bhattacharyya 2004:13).

The irony of this situation proposes an extremely difficult territory to navigate with regard to community development projects. The negotiation of power involved is volatile and intricate. If these feelings of guilt pollute our helping attitudes, should white South Africans stop feeling guilty altogether? If they should not help others because they feel guilty, what should compel them to help? Is it at all possible to help another person without affirming the receiver's position of needing help?

Design and social transformation

Winkler (2002:60) suggests that design that is dependent on the social sciences can enable designers to access the intuitive, emotional and uninformed operations of making and interpreting meaning. As such, it should be tolerant of all human cultures and subcultures. Consequently, the social design paradigm should have the capacity to uncover the gaps between practice and theory in South Africa's developmental discourse, and be able to deliver real and viable social change within our society.

Frascara (2002:46) describes design as the activity that organises information within society, emphasising its ability to communicate effectively alongside the social impact of its effects. In line with the thinking of pioneers such as Victor Papenek (1971), Buckminster Fuller (1969) and Nigel Whitely (1993), designers have become increasingly aware of their responsibility to the greater society and the environment. Globally, various design movements and initiatives prove the existence of a community of new design thinkers who realise that through design 'designers have directly influenced the actions of individuals and communities, changed attitudes and values, and shaped society in surprisingly fundamental ways' (Buchanan & Margolin 1995:49). The values and aims of design with a conscience by no means suggest that all designers have to stop making products that feed the global economy; but they should rather, as Buchanan and Margolin (1995:49) suggest, realise how fundamentally the designs which they create and present to the world influence society and the environment. The movement towards responsible design calls on designers on all levels of practice to use their ability to influence and change the world responsibly.

A post-modern perspective sees design as a nested process inside many complex systems that are all connected and which influence one another in a cyclic interplay of meaning and representation (Imbesi 2011:273-274). In South Africa, this view of the design process as a complex system is especially relevant when considering the vast amount of historical, environmental, economic, cultural, and social variables that are dealt with locally. Casey (2009) argues that designers have to tap into the cultural context within which these problematic variables exist if they are to produce positive and sustainable change. She advocates acquiring a wider awareness of the effects our actions might have. She states that, while we are comfortable in our 'zone of control', our 'zone of influence' often stretches far beyond what we might initially imagine.
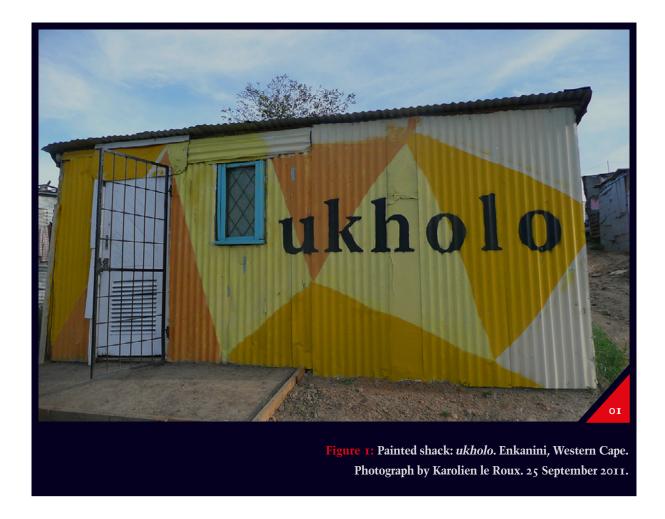
Recent years have not only seen an increasing focus on the research and development stages of the design process, but also on the importance of a continuous process of grassroots feedback and sustained development. A reflection of designers' potential to negotiate social transformation displaces their role as source of superior knowledge, and reinterprets them as being dependent on those who experience the design problem first hand, in order to create an accurate solution that negotiates successful change. Designers can therefore be seen as mediators between economic, social, political, and ecological role players in the process of researching, defining, and implementing solutions to all problems concerning society. According to Sanders (in Frascara 2002:7), the call on designers to design with, rather than for people, is paramount in social design discourse. Postdesign, in his opinion, affirms the recognition of power in collaboration and participatory design: 'Postdesign is an attitude about people. It is about the recognition that all people have something to offer and that they, when given the means to express themselves, can be both articulate and creative' (Sanders in Frascara 2002:7).

Results and discussion

These three remain was a shack-painting project executed by an American artist, Andrew Breitenberg, now a resident of Cape Town, and a group of Dutch volunteers during the summer of 2011 in Enkanini near Stellenbosch. The project consisted of painting approximately 20 shacks with brightly coloured geometric shapes. In addition, six shacks were painted with the words 'faith', 'hope' or 'love', as well as the Xhosa translation of these, namely *'ithemba', 'uthando'* or *'ukholo'*. The name is a clear reference to the Biblical verse in 1 Corinthians 13:13: 'And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love.'

Breitenberg studied Critical Visual Studies and Graphic Design at Swarthmore College, Pennsylvania, and graduated in 2001. He has since then worked as an advertising copywriter in The Netherlands (Design at Old Dominion 2009). He is 'deeply inspired by the central themes of faith, hope and love found in the teachings of Jesus' (Breitenberg 2012). About four to five years ago this conviction urged him to move to South Africa. He wanted to pursue public art and design in South African townships and in the rest of Africa. His goal is to involve communities 'in dialogue about hope, dignity and finding your own voice' (Breitenberg 2012).
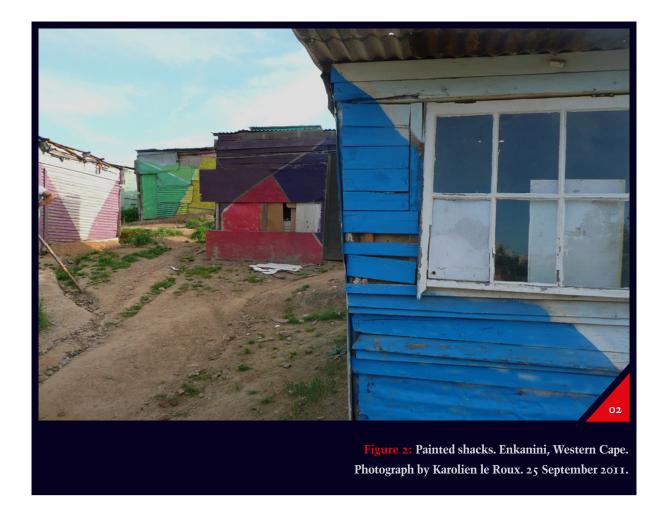
Qualitative data for this study were gathered through interviews with a range of people involved in the project. Breitenberg was interviewed at his studio on 24 July 2011, a few months after the completion of the project. Our initial request for an interview with him was met with a friendly, eager reply. He requested that the results of our research be made known to him, even though it might reflect negatively on his work in some respects. He would use these aspects, he said, to improve his personal work processes.

Figure 1: **Painted shack:** *ukholo***. Enkanini, Western Cape.
Photograph by Karolien le Roux. 25 September 2011.

In addition to this interview, we collected information through informal conversations with Ayanda Dlamini,[3] a resident of Enkanini who accompanied us on our walks through the area. We also had conversations with eight residents who occupied the painted shacks and five residents who were neighbours. The fact that we are white South Africans and non-residents of Enkanini immediately made us outsiders. Ayanda, who always accompanied us on our walks, conveyed the aims of our research to the residents, who replied to him in Xhosa, effectively excluding us from the conversation. This conversation continued after we had left, and Ayanda later expressed surprise at how differently the residents reacted in our absence. Two residents expressed a dislike of the patterns that were painted on the shacks, saying that 'they looked like preschool paintings' and that they would have preferred it if their whole house had been painted,

not parts of it only. One resident remarked that 'they wanted to paint my house and I agreed. They only painted half of the house and told me that they are coming back, but they never returned', but he immediately stated that 'I do not have a problem with that, because they were only trying to help me. Those white people from overseas, when they see the roof of the leaking [leaking roof], they do not leave without fixing it.'

Some residents were hesitant about giving us their real names because they had a fear of being recognised or of legal action against them. One woman remarked: 'I don't want my name to be known. Those people did come to my house and they wanted to paint my house and I agreed. Are you going to take photos of the front of my house? No, rather take photos of the back of my house.'

Figure 2: Painted shacks. Enkanini, Western Cape. Photograph by Karolien le Roux. 25 September 2011.

We asked questions about the project such as 'Do you like the colours that your house has been painted?' or 'Do you mind the fact that your house has been painted?' They reacted positively in most cases. Some tenants added that, if we wanted to, we could paint their houses. In relation to this, Breitenberg (2011) observes: 'I think often you'll find that these people don't feel like they can really say no. They don't really feel that they have been given permission to say no.' Another resident commented that '[r]umours started going around that people who got their houses painted by those people, it's people that are going to get electricity.'

Breitenberg's (2011) specific interest in Enkanini comes from his personal vision as artist, which is to work with people who are 'on the margin of the margin ... people who feel like they do not have their own

voice'. This assumption, that the underprivileged black does not have a voice, is often normalised by privileged white people speaking for them. Biko (2004:27) argues very strongly against this attitude of many white liberals in his writings on Black Consciousness: 'The liberal must understand that the days of the Noble Savage are gone; that the blacks do not need a go-between in this fight for their own emancipation'.

These three remain was implemented through collaboration with an old friend of Breitenberg's, Lourens Maritz, who had been involved in Enkanini through a non-profit organisation (Serve the City[4]). Through this organisation, Breitenberg developed a good relationship with the residents of the township. The fact that Maritz was a link to the community and already knew and understood its context formed a cornerstone around which the rest of the project was planned.

Breitenberg (2011) reflects: '... I don't want to just go in and put something on a wall, the reason it appealed to me – and this is really important – is because Lourens [Maritz] had already established a relationship … he knew the elders of the township … he has been through a lot with these people.' Maritz introduced Breitenberg to the community and was able to vouch for him during the initial presentation of the project. In a sense, this could additionally create a mutual sense of trust between the designer and the community. 'I was so grateful for this. That I was going in with his [Maritz's] blessing, with the blessing of the people who had been elected by the township to be their leaders' (Breitenberg 2011).

Yet, the decision to paint the words 'faith', 'hope' and 'love' on the shacks of Enkanini was made by Breitenberg prior to developing a relationship or working with the actual residents and volunteers in Enkanini. *These three remain* had to be executed in only three days to accommodate the volunteers' tight schedule. Consequently, planning and design work was completed beforehand. This decision not to include the community members in the design process, established a clear discrepancy in power between the artists and the community. Breitenberg and his team thereby seemed to strip the community of their own authoritative power. It is thus no surprise that, as mentioned previously, the community members did not feel comfortable to oppose the designs volunteered by the artists. Even in translated Xhosa format, the words painted on the community members' houses cannot be seen as 'their' voices, but rather the voice of the artist imposed on the 'voiceless'. Designers wanting to work as true agents of change need to consider critically the difference between giving a 'voice' and speaking for others.
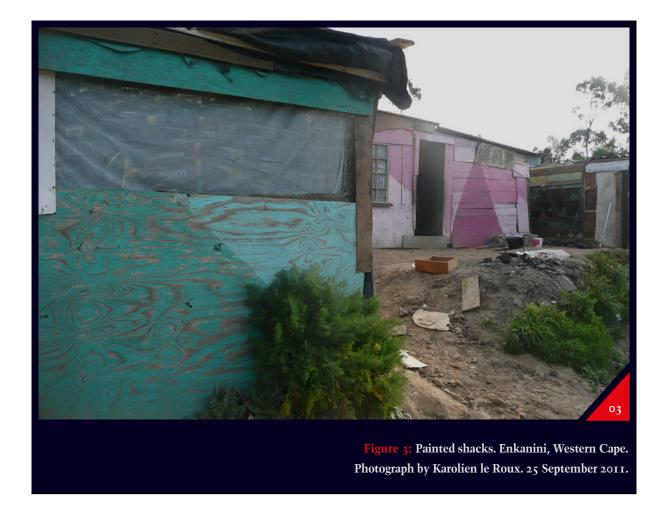
Maritz had been involved with a community board that, despite being elected by the community, cannot be viewed as fully representative of the needs of an entire community, as is the case in any flawed democratic system. This can prove to be problematic, as is clearly seen in this case study. The board members, who initially approved Breitenberg's project, consisted predominantly of active Christians, who could therefore identify with the words 'faith', 'hope' and 'love'. This message cannot, however, automatically be considered as valuable to the rest of the community. The effects of South Africa's colonial past still play a pivotal role in the social make-up of black South Africans and their associations with Christianity, often comprising conflicts between ancestral worship and 'western' Christianity. From the perspective of colonialism in Africa, Christian beliefs were regarded as superior and were often used to 'civilis[e]', and, in turn, oppress the other (Snyman 2008:421).

Breitenberg (2011) argues that he is able to convey a Christian message that brings hope and joy, without intentions of converting people. He simply wants to focus on the general ideals 'of bringing hope and building up ...' in the community he works in. These ideals could possibly be achieved if the people whose houses are decorated with these messages personally identify with the words or if the message had been personally chosen by them. Furthermore, if they could benefit by means of the act of painting in terms of earning income, learning a skill, or feeling empowered to make a claim to the statements written on the walls of their own houses, benefit might be more obvious. Enkanini residents' reactions to the project demonstrated that these opportunities were not, however, created by this project. Consequently, we cannot assume that 'hope' and 'joy' can be given to a person merely by painting these kinds of messages on their houses.

The group of Dutch volunteers, who were also mutual friends of Maritz and Breitenberg, funded the project. The organisers budgeted for a project that included helping a specific community whilst visiting South Africa. Maritz conferred with the Enkanini community board to find a way for the volunteers to not only give financial or material handouts, but also to be physically involved in the project. Small construction projects, such as laying cement foundations and steps between shacks, were identified. Volunteers were divided in groups, some working on construction items, while other continued on the painting project under the direction of Breitenberg. Despite volunteers having made a notable difference to the infrastructure and physical quality of life in Enkanini, it is important to consider whether this type of helping behaviour contributes to restoring racial equality at a social level. This does fall within the reach of the aims of Serve the City and Breitenberg (2011) – namely, to bridge sociocultural divides and empower those who have been silenced owing to past political circumstances. Personally, we argue that *These three remain* contributed little to positive social change in Enkanini. Although the relationships built between the volunteers, Breitenberg and the community can be described as good and friendly, such attitudes are typical in the hierarchical relationship between the helping and the helped. The helped do not want to offend or discourage the helper, and thus agree to whatever help is offered. As a result, the helper remains under the misperception that what is done is in the best interests of the person being helped.

During a planning meeting, Breitenberg had specifically requested that the township board members inform the rest of the tenants about the project, to make sure that everyone was aware of procedures and had adequate time to consider it. This was also intended to allow for tenants to decline having their house painted, so that the team could exclude these shacks from the project when it commenced. The community board, however, did not follow through on this plan. Breitenberg and his team were disappointed to find that many locals were not aware of the project or did not know why they were there. Furthermore, managing all the volunteers and dealing with the often 'demanding' locals proved to be a difficult task (Breitenberg 2011). At this stage, volunteers might have taken up the task of talking to locals about the project and getting their opinions, without pressuring them to make a decision about the project. Despite possible disappointment regarding the delay, this could have provided an opportunity to get to know the community and to give the tenants enough information and time to process the idea in order to make their own, informed decisions.

Shacks that were visible from the opposite hillside, in addition to those that had clean surfaces that were large enough to work on, were selected to have the selected words painted on them. Some residents were not at home when the painting project started, and permission to paint on their shacks was obtained from friends or neighbours. A woman said that, 'When we came back the house was painted. My sister was very angry, because she did not ask those people to paint the house, and she did not like the colours they used to paint the house. They used purple and other colours that my sister does not like'. By asking her why her sister did not take action against the artist she said that 'I have no power, I have no money'. Another resident remarked that 'When I came back my house was painted, but I do not have a problem with that'. The decision to consider another person's permission sufficient to paint on somebody else's house, robs the owner or owners of their right to have a say about their own property. It is actually against the law and also constitutes a severe infringement of basic human

Figure 3: Painted shacks. Enkanini, Western Cape. Photograph by Karolien le Roux. 25 September 2011.

rights (UN 2013). If all South Africans are to be regarded as equals, such situations should not occur. To expand on our argument, it proved useful to imagine a community project, such as *These three remain*, being implemented in, for example, the predominantly middle to higher class residential areas of Stellenbosch. Surely very few, if any, home owners there would allow an artist to paint on their walls without permission and some form of compensation. We also doubt whether any artist would even consider asking to do so. We thus pose the question why it is considered acceptable to paint on shacks in Enkanini without permission from the owner and any form of compensation, and then view the tenants as 'demanding' if they do not agree with the style, colours or other aspects of the artwork and project.

The fact that not all the tenants were informed of the project's implementation created difficulties as the project continued. For example, one woman who was not informed of the project beforehand kept making requests that interfered with the artist's design. The intention of the project, understandably, was not to satisfy every individual tenant's taste and wishes, but rather to 'address social change and bring a message of love and hope' to the community at large through completing the set project within the allocated time. This meant that those who gave their consent to have their houses painted also had to accept the conformity to the greater design. The tenants were given an opportunity to choose from the colours available in which the artwork on their house would be painted, but had no further say in the outcome.

Breitenberg (2001) found it frustrating to deal with the woman's changing demands and the volunteers' inability to know how to 'take charge' of the situation. He explains that '... it becomes really important that before the project starts, the locals are debriefed a little better, because then they feel that they can actually say yes or no.' He also notes that, on reflection, having on board a few residents from the township – some who understood the project and had been part of the planning process – to help deal with the tenants' questions and demands, as well as managing and helping the teams, would have already been a great help in bridging the gap between the community and the volunteers.

The project included almost no physical participation by members of the community. Breitenberg attributes this mainly to time constraints, but the logistic difficulty of allowing members of the community to take up brushes should also be considered. It is understandable that facilitating this could prove to be a challenge for artists who work within a limited timeframe, not to mention the difficulty of explaining the project to local volunteers and managing their creative input in relation to the planned project. Breitenberg (2011) however notes that, in retrospect, community involvement in such a project is simply non-negotiable.

Breitenberg (2011) admits that *These three remain* and his time in Enkanini represented a significant learning opportunity. Numerous changes have been made to the process and execution of his community-based projects ever since. These changes are specifically visible in his recent work in Gambia. He explains this as a change from 'imposing the art, to discovering the art'. By engaging in conversation and listening to the stories of a community's people, significant aspects about their lives and culture surface naturally, and can be visualised in a way that is both beautiful

and rooted in the context within which it is painted. Breitenberg (2011) asserts this by stating that 'I no longer go with a line in my head. I always go just to start a conversation.' As the artist's representation then depends on the community, and is therefore spontaneous, the involvement of local volunteers becomes more important. The involvement of locals in the actual rendering process also allows for the uncontrolled process to deliver spontaneous results that can be used as a means of 'showing what is already there' instead of imposing one's own, somewhat static and predesigned ideas, as might have been the case at Enkanini (Breitenberg 2011).

The project at Enkanini did not include the documentation of tenants' experience of the project, nor did the project team follow up regarding the influence that the painted shacks has had on the community after the project's completion. It is therefore very difficult to determine to what extent, if any, the project influenced the community of Enkanini in a positive, sustainable way. Breitenberg, however, often visits Enkanini and spends time talking to the local families that he had befriended. This ongoing relationship is unique to the Enkanini project, and possibly owing to the fact that the area is close to Breitenberg's home base in Cape Town. He completes many community-based projects every year, and when considering his work in Zimbabwe, for instance, realises that '[i]t is not realistic to maintain a deep and meaningful relationship with every person that I have worked with' (Breitenberg 2011). He is currently concerned with creating viable and realistic ways of keeping the process alive and documenting the work's influence on the community.

Keeping a project 'alive', however, should not necessarily be a matter of the artist keeping a personal connection with the residents of a community. Rather,

the emphasis should be on how the work sustains itself as part of an integrated solution to social transformation. The benefit that a community receives from such a project, the influence of the work on their daily lives, and the manner in which they continue to benefit from their interaction with the work long after the artist has left, should be integral to sustaining community projects. By tapping into Valerie Casey's (2009) 'zone of influence', a design solution can be fully integrated into the life and needs of the community. Such a design solution is not dependent upon the artist's continuous efforts to sustain the process, but rather develops and grows as part of the people themselves. This is not an easy task, and sustainable solutions to social problems do not always yield immediate, tangible results. Instant results, naturally, appear more attractive and gratifying. For such reasons, many designers/artists, organisations, and everyday do-gooders often opt for solutions to social problems that produce immediate effects, irrespective of their long-term sustainability or consequence.

Breitenberg suggests that the process that is started by painting community-based murals on township dwellings can be sustained through sponsorship. In this way, the community will be able to continue with the work even after the artist has left. For this suggestion to be realised, residents would need to be involved in the project design from the planning phase so that they can learn the basic skills required and gain an understanding of generating meaningful content. The unpredictable nature of such an experiment could be its most successful component, serving as a practical example of the designer handing over control rather than taking control. Furthermore, through his work at Enkanini, Breitenberg (2011) has learned to start a community project by emphasising 'I'm here to listen, I'm here to learn.' This is easily the single most important aspect of community projects,

and the fact that it was not fully implemented in *These three remain* serves as one of the project's key weaknesses.

In retrospect, Breitenberg emphasises the importance of learning and improving in practice. He has learned valuable lessons: '[If you] [t]urn into an art-director, [saying] here's what's going to happen, here's how I'm going to fix the problem, then you've abused something really precious' (Breitenberg 2011). It has become increasingly important for artists to reflect critically on their work and to be able to document and share their personal experiences and processes with others in their field. Again, the idea of the interdependence of the community and designers in order to reflect, share, and learn from each other in their collective efforts, is emphasised in the journey towards social transformation.

Conclusion

The above case study has served as a practical means to highlight the three issues touched on at the beginning of this article, namely, issues regarding the complex and layered nature of social politics, the politics of helping behaviour, and design and social transformation. Our suggestions for improved social design practices below are not aimed solely at delivering criticism of the Enkanini project, but they are offered rather in the hope that they may be applied in a broader scope to improve the viability of social design practice as a change agent in social design projects throughout South Africa.

Considering Mashele's (2011:57) statement that race is an issue that is handled 'untruthfully' by South Africans today, we would argue that the untruthfulness of designers as agents of change lies in their ignorance of the influence that their skin colour, as well as

their cultural background and social class, can have on the discourses they produce through their work in society. As established in this case study, the painting of the shacks in a black-only community by solely white volunteers, seemed to position the local residents of Khayamandi as inferior to the artists. Designers and artists working in a country with an undeniably complex history of racial and social politics need to remain sensitive to and aware of deep-set emotions and perceptions surrounding discourses of race. The need to connect through a mutual and equal humanity, as opposed to skin colour, is now more evident than ever.

In all fairness, no person decides to study design in the hope of becoming a social worker. Designers are primarily concerned with the physical elements of line, form, and space, and focus their energies on combining these to deliver a message effectively. However, as encapsulated in Frascara's (2002:46) definition of design, it is clear that a design message is always intended for a viewer or receiver. Design has no use if it is not seen, acted on, or experienced by people, implying that no designer can escape the hard, but necessary, task of learning to understand the complexities of social behaviour and identity that apply not only to the audience they design for, but most importantly to the people they design with. *These three remain* demonstrates the shortcomings of a project aimed at social transformation – at bridging the gap historically set up between people of varying races, cultures and social classes in South Africa – that is not designed or implemented with sensitivity towards, or an understanding of, local residents and their context of creating and projecting meaning. It is also indicative of the need for more time to be allocated to field research in social design. Designers should listen to the opinions or solutions of community members or work partners as fellow human beings before stepping into a designer's role to address the issue at hand. This could assist

in relieving pressure that community members might feel concerning the project, or their chances of receiving handout help – help that serves to ease the guilty conscience of the giver more than actually helping the receiver – when they express unwelcome opinions or make suggestions. Furthermore, it could encourage the development of more parallel relationships between designer and community, as opposed to the immediate giver-receiver relationships that are otherwise so easily established.

If we are to prove the viability of social design strategies in making a positive contribution towards social emancipation, designers need to eradicate a false sense of freedom, that is, the impression that an individual is 'free' and that they can 'help' others to their world of freedom through creative skills, gifts or even theoretical knowledge. This case study seems to show that a false sense of freedom can be created when the designers of a public art project do not involve the public as equal participants in the design process, and just proceed to satisfy their own goals and schedules. This false, oppressing illusion of freedom exists not only for those who give help, owing to feelings of guilt or moral duty, but also for those who have been helped, as an illusion of freedom through the hands of those more fortunate. Working towards social justice requires a constant investigation of our personal motives, in addition to asking questions regarding what and whose freedom is being worked for.

A preparedness to reflect honestly, and to build on negative critique regarding their work, are two fundamental characteristics of designers who aspire to work towards the greater good of society, rather than their own success at the cost of society. The ability to work in a world that comprises imperfect systems, complex structures and divided societies; admitting one's own shortcomings as designers; a

reliance on one another in an effort to co-design with a community; as well as critical reflection and integrated improvement of social design programmes – all these could comprise efforts to prove that design is able to implement sustainable change.

In this article, we have aimed to investigate critically the important aspects of South African social design in practice, without skirting issues that designers may find difficult to deal with when confronted with the reality of social politics in South Africa. Designers who are serious about creating positive social change through their practice will need to get their hands dirty if social design is to be seen as a viable tool for social transformation in South Africa.

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Notes

1   Enkanini has a predominantly black population and living conditions are crowded and basic infra-structure is lacking. Malnutrition, poverty, HIV/AIDS, and crime are rife (Prochorus Community Develop-ment [sa]).

2   The Dutch volunteers were from the Amsterdam International Community School (AICS). Their aim is to facilitate 'high quality, accessible, community-based international learning for students of all nationalities living in The Netherlands' (AICS 2013).

3   To protect their identities, the names of participants were changed.

4   '*Serve the City* is a movement of volunteers around the world connecting with local opportunities served in our cities' (http://servethecity.co.za/page_id=3).

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