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# Views and (Re)Views

## *Dystopia: A review*

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If he were king of the island, Gonzalo says in Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, he would ensure that there would be no riches or poverty, no use of metal, corn, wine or oil. Basing this passage on Montaigne's *Des Cannibales*,<sup>1</sup> Shakespeare has the old courtier continue, proposing that all men and women would be idle, there would be no treason or felony or weapons; nature would bring forth by itself abundance for his people. However, he subverts his vision of a paradise by saying halfway through that there would be 'no sovereignty'. This is latched onto by two of the 'men of sin'<sup>2</sup> (III iii 53. Shakespeare 1997:3089), Sebastian and Antonio, who comment that the 'latter end of his commonwealth forgets the beginning' (II i 158. Shakespeare 1997:3073). Thus, Gonzalo's utopia is seen to be a chimera, something impossible to achieve, something which will be in no place, the meaning of utopia. The opposite of this is, of course, 'dystopia', with its connotation of disorder, discord, disruption, disillusion. Its meaning is the opposite of both connotations of utopia (perfect place and no place): unpleasant place – or every place. All of this, of course, with shades of More (*Utopia*), Butler (*Erewhon*), Zamyatin (*We*), Huxley (*Brave New World* and *Island*) and Orwell (*Nineteen Eighty-Four*).<sup>3</sup>

Therefore, the imaginative portrayal of dystopia shows us what is around us, what besets our psyches and our societies. To overcome this, priests and prophets, politicians and philosophers, artists and writers, on occasion try to show us how to attain utopia. Because of the human condition, this, however, is always doomed to failure. For every messiah, there are followers who bring hell to the infidel. It is the cancer that the religious are wont to turn a blind eye to. We always seek those brave new worlds because, maybe, this time we may find them. But, like Gonzalo, we might just fail to see the contradictions in what we aim our arrows at. But, like Gonzalo, too, we must aim – for if we don't then we are forever stuck in the morass of misery, in the mudflats of the mediocre.

With this in mind, we realise that cynicism and dreams are strange bedfellows, but bedfellows nonetheless. An early depiction of this can be found in Hieronymus Bosch's 'The

Garden of Earthly Delights', paradise and hell both being shown in the wings.<sup>4</sup>

In the garments of utopia, dystopia wracks the world: capitalism entrenches poverty, Marxism begets oppression; evangelism leads to cultural corruption; every crusade leaves thousands of innocents suffering and dead on the crucifixes of the ideals of others; holy cows (religious, social or technological) lead both their adherents and antagonists into the maws of abattoirs; and as we make our multitudinous gods in our own image, those who disagree with us are not just outsiders but heretics, what the rabbis called 'apikoros', the abandoned whom we excommunicate to their own dystopias while revelling in our own (*Encyclopaedia Judaica* 1971: III 178).

The great 20<sup>th</sup>-century Irish poet, W.B. Yeats, knew about this as evident in his remarkable poem 'The Second Coming', with its image out of *Spiritus Mundi*<sup>5</sup> of a creature in the sands of the desert slouching its way along the dunes to be born, with the implications of yet another utopian nightmare about to beset the world. Mongane Wally Serote, the contemporary South African poet, knows it, too, in his poem, 'What's in this black "Shit"?' (Serote 1982:42), where it takes strength of mind to tell others that their way of life leads to shit for others.

And so we realise that we cannot have a utopia with a messiah without a dystopia and the shit of a messiah.

We find this in literature, music and art. C. Louis Leipoldt depicts this tellingly in his Anglo-Boer War novel *Stormwrack*,<sup>6</sup> where the paradisiacal Village becomes 'a battered wreck that had drifted into a backwater where the eddies continually washed in stray bits of flotsam, from the excitements of preceding years, and took stock of its losses and scars' (Leipoldt 1980:233). This vision lies at the basis of other, more contemporary, novels (both realistic and prophetic), such as J.M. Coetzee's desperate *Disgrace*<sup>7</sup> and Elleke Boehmer's distraught *Bloodlines*,<sup>8</sup> depicting a South Africa of now and the future. We have this in novels with gay protagonists, such as Eben Venter's Afrikaans book *Ek stamel ek sterwe (My beautiful death)*,<sup>9</sup> with its surrealistic attempts to find a utopian vision in a heavily dystopic world, and André Carl van der Merwe's sentimental but riveting *Moffie*,<sup>10</sup> where a perfect world always seems a step away no matter how close one comes. There has been a

spate of schoolboy novels in South Africa, some of which glorify those days when innocence was really corruption of several kinds, where adolescence in a school environment was fun for the most part (such as John van de Ruit's *Spud*,<sup>11</sup> full of bounce like a contemporary Frank Richards' Greyfriars School, but where dystopia reigns if one is the Billy Bunter or any other bullied boy), or where adolescence in a school environment was utter hell, as with Errol Stevens the tyrannised and traumatised boy in my own *Soliloquy*.<sup>12</sup>

These are all variations on a theme where discord often reigns and the dissonance of life cannot be obviated no matter what the ostensible harmonies are. We observe this in contemporary classical music, for instance, in Frederic Rzewski's 'The people united will never be defeated!',<sup>13</sup> a set of thirty-six variations based on the Chilean song by Sergio Ortega '¡El Pueblo Unido Jamás Será Vencido!' that has utopian aspects but also portrays clashing elements throughout. Similarly, the Argentinian-born Osvaldo Golijov has scored his 2004 work 'Ayre'<sup>14</sup> for a richly coloured chamber ensemble, the music deriving from both original melodies and also from, as he puts it, 'found objects' (such as a Sephardic lullaby or a Christian Arab Easter hymn) – a term we more commonly associate with art; the music is melodic but does jar at times, showing a dystopic element also reflected in the lyrics, such as those by the contemporary exiled Palestinian poet Mahmoud Darwish<sup>15</sup> who makes the timeless plea:

'... conquerors come, conquerors go ... /  
It's getting hard to remember my face in  
the mirrors. / Be memory for me / so I can  
see what I've lost.'<sup>16</sup>

There is a surprising resonance here with The Beatles' 'Hey Jude'<sup>17</sup>, which starts with Paul McCartney singing briefly a capella, then accompanied harmoniously by piano and the band, which develops into a glorious hysteria, the irony being that the more clashing the music might appear on the surface, the more uplifting and vibrant it really is – hence, utopia in dystopia, a wonderful subversion of the surface meaning by the deeper connotations. In contrast, we have Jeanne Zaidel-Rudolph's 2009 'Youth Oratorio', the musical narrative tracing 'the journey of a young life from the joyous welcoming of a new soul'.<sup>18</sup> However, and I presume inadvertently, there is much that undermines this intention as there is a certain

monotony of orchestration and triteness of lyric together with words that show dystopia in Zaidel-Rudolph's ostensibly idealistic vision: 'Passion of Youth, love that is pure / Pain is the price, there is no cure / ... When will he call? What will I say? / Fear is the price I have to pay.'<sup>19</sup> From all this it appears that the youth are boxed in to a life of fraughtness, no matter what the aim of the composer might be.

This being boxed in is portrayed graphically in the art of the Gau Brothers of Beijing, with their dystopic conceptions that permeate much of their work as in 'The Utopia of Construction' – a photographic montage with 504 boxes, some blank but others containing people, generally alone and several with a *trompe l'œil* effect, underlying their satire on utopia. This can also be seen in their 'Outer Space Project', with a montage of people in a wasp's nest, and also 'The Forever Unfinished Building' and the variations on 'A Sense of Space', all indicating a loss of individuality in the dystopia of life that surrounds us at all times.<sup>20</sup>

Related to this are the contemporary Israeli artists Pinchas Cohen Gan's 'From Herzl to Rabin to Infinity' with xeroxes of Herzl and Rabin boxed in on cardboard, acrylic and wood, Moshe Kupferman's oil 'Mourning for Rabin', with its dark rectangular forms, and the Limbus Group's digital print of 'Embroideries of Generals', their being framed underlying the impression of being boxed in by the dystopia they themselves have helped to create. The other side of the army is seen in art depicting gay life in the forces as in the photographs by Adi Nes and also by Nir Hod of the insiders being the outsiders, trying to be true to themselves in Gehenna.<sup>21</sup>

One can ask if thematically this is very different from resistance art in South Africa, appearing in the 1980s, about ten years before the Israeli art mentioned.<sup>22</sup> One can consider the metaphorical painting 'Ons vir Jou, Suid-Afrika' by Paul Grendon, with its subversion of the national anthem and its take on colonising forces, with skeletons portraying the bringers and receivers of death through this, as violent as the black-on-black conflict portrayed by Chabani Manganye in 'The Battle'. Jane Alexander's horrifying skeletons made of wax, paint, plaster of paris, wood, steel and, of course, bone also depict this discharge of society and its suppurating horror, also seen in her acclaimed *Butcher Boys* and *Domestic Angel*, as well as Gary van Wyk's

'State of Emergency' series. Robert Hodgins' 'A Beast Slouches' is reminiscent of Yeats' 'The Second Coming' (mentioned earlier), and David Hlongwane's linocuts 'Mama let me go' call to mind Serote's 'What's in this Black "Shit"?', as well as poems by Siphso Sepamla, Oswald Mtshali, Arthur Nortje and Keorapetse Kgotsitsile – especially his 'A Luta Continua' (Finn and Gray 1992:75–76) with the lines:

If the warped bloodhounds of tyranny say  
They will torture and kill us  
Let them. Let them.  
Skulls they will crack, yes  
Young bones they will trample underfoot,  
yes  
School and church will also try  
To twist and break our young yearning  
minds, yes  
But the unbridled brutality of these beasts  
Shall not break us.

All this is graphically summarised by the remarkable wood, metal and paint work 'The Last Remains of Another Man' by Norman Catherine, which the artist describes as 'an entrance to hell' with its policemen on guard at the entrance to an underworld chamber with coffin and trap as well as depictions of the baggage of the past. It is, as Joseph Conrad tells us in *Heart of Darkness*, 'The horror! The horror!'<sup>23</sup>

Horror, hell, gehenna or dystopia. Whatever we call it, it surrounds us, be it in the past or the present or even the future as we see in the outstanding exhibition 'Dystopia', curated by Elfriede Dreyer, assisted by Jacob Lebeko.<sup>24</sup>

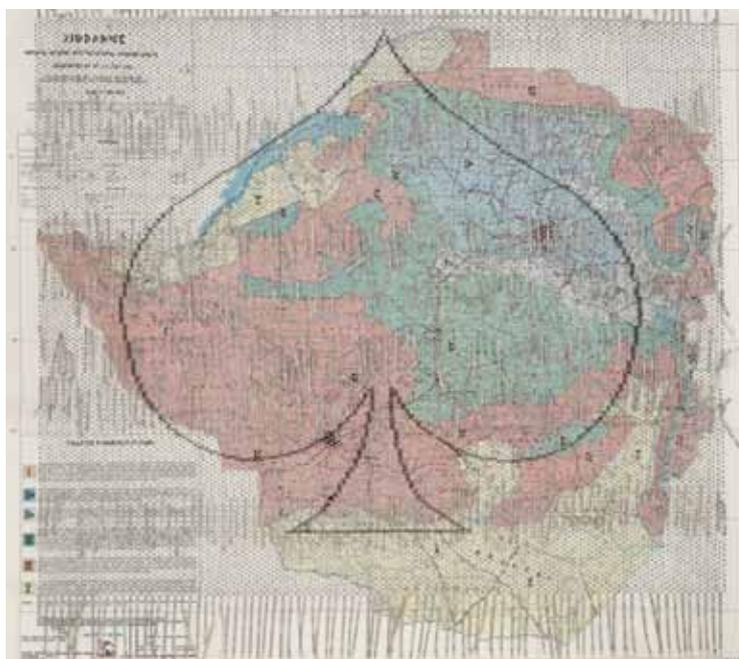
The nature of an exhibition implies selection and choice: total inclusiveness of various artists is an impossibility. Rather, it reveals the approach of the curators, their views, their preferences, what makes sense to them. Similarly, a review concentrates on works that form a whole, works that resonate in the reviewer and, as importantly, with one another. For this reason, I shall discuss just a dozen or so of the works (about 40 per cent) and divide them into what appears to be the major and overlapping categories of 'Dystopia': politics, culture, sex/gender, and the outsider in society.

An artist whose oeuvre embraces all of these categories is Chris Diedericks, although his one work this time eschews the blatant – and generally successfully portrayed – (homo)sexual.<sup>25</sup> Rather, it concentrates on the political, underlined by the Zapiroesque

shower<sup>26</sup> on the main character's head in 'Exhausted Earth'. However, this shower is not directed at one person but, seemingly, at all politicians, despoiling the world, its inhabitants and the environment. Suited men, unsuited to their surroundings, stand on the trunks of chopped-down trees, one of the men on a skull, while the landscape is littered with skulls, reminiscent of Cambodia's killing fields; but this could well be Rwanda, Darfur or, only metaphorically we hope, South Africa. The men are trying desperately to flutter away into a polluted atmosphere, not able to breathe, their wings frayed and useless. They cannot escape from what they have caused. They have denuded the world entrusted to them, killed their people – but a link of blood remains, something they cannot flee from. And at the bottom there is an abundance of crows (reminiscent of the work of sculptor Rossouw van der Walt, not included in the exhibition), carrion peckers as much as the men, while border collies, that should be herding, are roaming around, the implication being that man's best friend has helped in the destruction. There is no hope. All is dark. All is dystopic.

How different this is to Elfriede Dreyer's gentle, peaceful 'Utopia Map', ultrachrome ink on PVC, depicting the geography of success: a view of Pretoria with the University of Pretoria, the top schools, Loftus Versfeld and the road linking them all: a swathe of green, showing the pre-liberation (apartheid) influences on this country's political ethos, from where so many of the movers and shakers came. From far, it is a thing of beauty, but not Keats' joy forever,<sup>27</sup> as the closer one gets the more pixelated it becomes, making us realise that those who lived there lived in boxes. Dreyer's vision is akin, therefore, to that of the Gao Brothers: in this utopia lies a stronger dystopia. The green is not, in this context, lush life blooming into success, but a symbol of stagnation, a swamp of algae threatening to suck the life from the country. To use another metaphor, as we muse on this work and change our contextual *mise en scène* Dreyer takes us from Capability Brown's lush landscapes into Jeremy Bentham's Panopticon.<sup>28</sup> This is all the more disturbing because of the tranquillity that attracts one initially and superficially.

The irony at the basis of Elfriede Dreyer's work is seen, too, in that of Daniel Halter, who is more playful but none the less bitter and damning. In his spooneristic<sup>29</sup> 'Space of AIDS'



1 Daniel Halter, *Space of AIDS* (2007). Farming region map of Zimbabwe woven with a shredded 2006 Harare telephone directory, black thread, 820 x 890 mm. Unisa Art Collection, Pretoria.

(1), a shredded Harare telephone directory, woven into a farming region map of Zimbabwe, with a massive interposed Ace of Spades, he conveys a striking view of the devastating effect of this disease. But it is as much a political comment as anything. In popular myth and folklore the Ace of Spades (the highest card in a pack) is known as the 'death card'. Thus the apparent beauty we look at from afar, as with Elfriede Dreyer's, hits hard and hits home the closer we get: lives are shredded by this disease, a disease that can be slowed by the interventions of government policy. This links with Halter's 'Safe as Fuck' of an AIDS ribbon, hypodermic needles and black foam-core that he exhibited at the Joburg Art Fair in 2008 but, unfortunately, not available for 'Dystopia'. Just as Dreyer's implication that 'as safe as houses' is a misnomer (houses are boxes and are, essentially, decaying in her portrayal), 'safe as fuck' isn't safe at all. Love/lust/generation leads to disease/decay/death. The utopian world is fucked.

Few South African artists convey this notion as persistently as Churchill Madikida, as seen in his installations depicting HIV/AIDS, particularly the 2005 'Status' (at the Michael Stevenson Gallery in Cape Town) and the 2006

'Status II' (at the Adler Museum of Medicine, University of the Witwatersrand). His 2004 exhibition 'Interminable Limbo' and 2005 works 'Virus' and 'Nemesis' also portrayed the disease graphically. The work at 'Dystopia' is his 2004 digitally mirrored image on DVD 'Skeletons in my Closet', reminiscent of AIDS, with its bloodied hands wringing each other like a nightmarish Rorschach test, looking at different times like a flower or lips – both facial and vaginal. Hence, the disease is brought to mind as is the inability to question cultural traditions – all is bloodied, hand washes hand, it is both destructive and interminable. This concept is accentuated by Madikida's other work at the exhibition, also video art, 'Struggles of the Heart', an attack on Xhosa circumcision ceremonies, where we are confronted by a head perpetually chewing pap and spewing it out again, something like a perpetuum mobile. All is meaningless, however, as the chewer really gains nothing and as his mouth is full all the time he cannot talk to anyone, especially not about the rituals. He appears, as a result, something like a goose force fed to produce the best *pâté de foie gras* – something that might benefit the perpetrators of the practice, but not the actor in this case who doesn't rebel but



2 Lawrence Lemaona, *The discussion* (2006). Digital print on 100% cotton rag paper, 1120 x 1730 mm. Edition 1 of 10. Unisa Art Collection, Pretoria.

just keeps doing what he is told to do – to his obvious discomfort. This is akin to Feynman's Brownian ratchet, a perpetual motion machine dependent on the environment being warmer than the ratchet. Here, the unseen elders form the environment while the ratchet is the young man who doesn't appear to realise that he is generating the heat to keep a culture going that Madikida is questioning. Once again, we have dystopia stemming from an attempt to reach utopia.

Related directly to this, but in a more humorous way, is Collen Maswanganyi's bluegum and acrylic 'Gavaza', a Shangaan word given to girls when they have completed their initiation rites (*Dystopia* 2009:42). But this also shows another initiation – that into technology. One wonders why this work has been included in this particular exhibition, although it has links to Elfriede Dreyer's photograph 'To be', portraying another kind of initiation – that of an Afrikaner bride-to-be, blindfolded at her kitchen tea, preparing her for married life that will, obviously, be 'down-the-line' but also questioning the mores of this society as the girl doesn't know what she's letting herself into: she is not able to see. On the other hand, Maswanganyi's 'Tintiho leti'

(These fingers) takes a humorous look at the culture of women who use their fingers to talk about things. Here, a woman is talking about her children, including a doctor, a teacher and an artist, but the last one is just: 'Ag this one.' In other words, a failure – there is nothing to say about this child who obviously hasn't fitted into the demands of society. All is not a success. Not everything abides by what is demanded or expected by the straitjacket of society.

Celia de Villiers is concerned about this in her fetishistic resin work 'Post-human consumerism', a number of high-heeled shoes into which women have to put their feet, no doubt in agony but to fit their own expectations as well as those of others. There is no Cinderella here, no handsome prince seeking and in waiting, but a resonance of Chinese foot binding and the notion that there is no room for development. This is how women are or may be.

How men may be is delightfully shown by tongue-in-cheek, yet profoundly serious, artist Lawrence Lemaona. His digital print '*The Discussion*' (2) is purposely and obviously reminiscent of Leonardo de Vinci's 'Last Supper', but it also brings to mind the work of the Israeli photographer Adi Nes, referred to

earlier. Nes did a homoerotic series 'Soldiers', one of which is his most famous work, also called 'The Last Supper', which has fourteen (not thirteen) soldiers around a table before, one presumes, going off to (the last?) battle.<sup>30</sup> Lemaona seems to have depicted himself thirteen times at a table, his figure in the guises and positions of Jesus and his disciples. However, the men (or man x 13) are in pink at a table with a pink cloth, in a field of glorious flowers. Most startlingly, in a macho society, in the background we have rugby goalposts. So, are the men discussing or is Lemaona asking us, the viewers, to discuss what manhood really is? He calls into question our conceptions of masculinity, of gender, of sexuality. What makes a man? As this is a depiction of the Last Supper, is Lemaona implying that the 'sensitive' man, the man in touch with his (to be politically incorrect) 'feminine side', stands to be crucified on the cross of the stereotype? Or is he showing us what the goalposts are that we should try to score under or kick over (ambiguously). On the other hand, as Judas is also shown here, and might be seen as being as camp as Jesus, will the latter be betrayed? And, yet, as all the figures are the same man, is the connotation that, if we are true to ourselves (following Polonius's advice<sup>31</sup>) we can save the world. However, in doing so we might destroy ourselves (and we all know what happened to Polonius – as well as to Hamlet, not to mention Jesus). So, in this glorious image of utopia (and it is, indeed, truly beautiful), we have many elements of the dystopic. Again, one man's (in this case) paradise is another man's gehenna. Lemaona manages in this work to question the traditions and conventions of religion, culture and sexuality. He does this, too, in his 'Players of Colour', rugby players (and isn't rugby a religion in Pretoria?) sitting for the team photo, but their colour is pink and their legs are floral. Here, Lemaona is mocking the injunction of the powers-that-be that a certain number of 'players of colour' must be in various sports teams. His work is, therefore, not only post-apartheid, but post-affirmative action and post-redress. In his insistence on pink as his predominant colour, Lawrence Lemaona is showing his viewers that he is colour blind – as they should be, too, in order to achieve some semblance of utopia.

Also using pink in his work but much more homoerotic is Nicholas Hlobo. His 'Umtya nethunga', made up of rubber inner tubes, pink

ribbon, chain, plastic, wood and steel, looks at first like a formless witch's hat, a leftover from a *Lord of the rings* meets Harry Potter movie. However, this very strong work throws up the question of masculinity once more. As the artist points out in his statement (*Dystopia* 2009:78), the rubber relates to masculine status (cars) – as much, I suppose, as the fins on Fords, Chevrolets, Plymouths and Pontiacs did in the 50s and 60s. However, rubber has sexual connotations and also of bondage. This bondage could refer to being bound by one's perceived masculinity. And as rubber can get punctured (tyres and condoms), harm and even death can result – we're back to STIs (sexually transmitted infections) again. With the work also having ramifications of intestines (Hlobo tells us that 'ithumbu' is 'tube' in Xhosa and also translated as 'intestine' in English), and as the ribbon sewn into it is pink, the whole connotation becomes one of man-to-man sex. This is accentuated by the splash of red and also by the strange pipe at the top, looking like a whip (bondage once more) or even an ejaculation. With all this in mind, 'Umtya nethunga' provocatively shows that in our freedom of expression lies our bondage; in our creation lies our destruction.

Another work that questions gender and sexuality is Zanele Muholi's '*Faces and Phases*' (3), so relevant with the debacle and institutionalised cruelty and bigotry regarding Caster Semenya<sup>32</sup> as well as lesbian bashing, rape and murder in certain societies in this country. Seven sexually ambiguous faces gaze at us in separate photographs, some alluring, some defiant in this portrayal of visual activism. We realise that these people live in a world made dystopic because of gender stereotyping, but Muholi's message only comes home when one is informed that two of the women are actually men. Then the game is: guess who's male. The task is a difficult one, which underlines Muholi's implicit questioning of how we perceive. Are we (male, female, gay, straight) attracted to some sexually (never mind the political or aesthetic import), only to be 'turned off' when we know who they are? Or do we look dispassionately but get aroused when who we thought was one gender now becomes the other? Where are the boundaries of gender and sexuality? And why is it important to define them? She deconstructs the parameters of typology that society has built up over generations. When does the outsider become



3 Zanele Muholi, from the series *Faces and phases, Siyafana: Mancane Selepe, Alexandra, Johannesburg* (2008). Fibre based photographic print, 865 x 605 mm. Edition of 8+2 AP. Courtesy of Michael Stevenson Gallery.

the insider – and when does the opposite occur?

Dale Yudelman is concerned only with the outsider as seen in his prints 'i am ...'. Like Muholi, the people he portrays define who they are but are also defined by society. Handwritten notes pinned up in supermarkets by job seekers are placed alongside photographs related to the requests, the pleas. The dignity of those desperate to work is not compromised, but they remain on the outside.

The prime artistic outsider in society is Steven Cohen (4). Daring, provocative, offensive, however he is seen, he bends our minds, making us realise that it is society itself that is bent. In a series of videos taken in New York, he walks on skulls (a reciprocal echo of Chris Diedericks's work), dressed as a businessman, but with a mask, and, also as a risqué fashion icon. But all is a grotesquerie, like the gargoyles in the walls of the cathedral that sometimes forms the background. People look and gawk. But many ignore him,

pretending he isn't there. He is the other, to be mocked or derided. If not, he must be disregarded as 'not one of us'. He is alone in a world of his own making, but also alone in a world of others' making. However, he elicits compassion from the viewer of the video as we see this in context. We observe an artist showing, as he always does, how dystopic and hypocritical society really is, a society without heart. Cohen reminds us that behind the painted-on smile of the circus clown, is a person whose heart is breaking, but who can cry only when alone, where the world cannot see, a world that fails to understand. This is accentuated by his being, at times, in Wall Street with all its concomitant bureaucracy. He reminds us tacitly of Psalm 146:3: 'Put not your trust in princes ...', here the princes of money and materialism – or as Jan van der Merwe might have it from the lyrics of the contemporary rock band Doves: 'My God it takes an ocean of trust / In the kingdom of rust.'<sup>133</sup>

Imaginatively and technically, Van der Merwe calls into question such a trust with his works in rust. He reminds us time and again that we cannot trust in permanence. He often uses found objects in his installations, some of his most impressive works being seen in the past years in his 'Fusion through Art', 'The Human Condition' and 'The Archaeology of Time'. Here, we have typical Van der Merwe in 'Time Out', with its rusted metal, paper and charcoal. A chair, with a jacket slung over it and a suitcase alongside, faces the wall with scribbles on it. The person isn't there – or, more startlingly we realise, is there, but we cannot see him. Society disregards him as much as it does Steven Cohen's alter egos. What we see are the trappings of people, not their essence. They face the walls of their own existences, trapped and with little vision of how to escape. This is underlined by our understanding that Van der Merwe uses rust to give a sense of permanence to his installations, but rust also indicates decay (a similar ambiguity to that of Elfriede Dreyer's work). In our permanence lies our disintegration, both physical and moral.

This brings us to the versatile and always stimulating Diane Victor, who constantly goads us into reassessing our values and our attitudes. Here, she continues her overriding theme of showing up the world around us, provoking us to have a relook at society, politics and gender. This time she hasn't used

smoke (as with her works on AIDS), charcoal, embossing or etchings, but dust and ash on paper. With superb technique, she has three figures in various stages of undress: they are ageing, white males, stepping out of their accoutrements that defined them when in political or sexual power; now they are naked for the world to see, as bare as an emperor with new clothes, but they are defenceless, politically stripped and sexually impotent. One is reminded of Def Leppard's song: 'Won't you save me? / Don't you blame me? / I got the feel that I'm gone, turn to dust.'<sup>34</sup> And so they are: disintegrating. Once they might have stood on the skulls of others (Chris Diedericks) in their flourishing worlds (Elfriede Dreyer), but their own macho culture is on the wane and means nothing anymore (Churchill Madikida and Lawrence Lemaoana), and they are lost (Steven Cohen).

All these artists cause us to realise, just as Gonzalo does, that visions of paradise are a chimera; that, whether it's obvious or not, disorder, discord, disruption and disillusion are all around us. The insiders become the outsiders. They are metaphoric tramontanes, the barbarians from beyond the mountains of our making. And they will turn to dust, disappear, be no more. All attempts to reach utopia are blown away and ravaged by the tempests of idealism based on selfishness and exclusivity. All that remains is dystopia.

## Notes

- 1 Des *Cannibales* was published in 1580; the English translation by John Florio was published in 1603. *The Tempest* was written in 1610 or 1611.
- 2 The term used by Ariel when addressing Alonso (King of Naples), Sebastian (his brother) and Antonio (Prospero's usurping brother), who had a hand in overthrowing Prospero, Duke of Milan, before the start of the play.
- 3 Thomas More's *Utopia*, depicting an ideal island, was published in 1516; Samuel Butler's satire on the notion of utopia, *Erewhon* (roughly 'nowhere' backwards), appeared in 1872; the Russian Yevgeny Zamyatin's *We* was published in 1921, with its influence apparent in Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* (1932); Huxley's *Island* was published in 1962, and George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four* in 1949; all of these are novels of dystopia. The title of Huxley's *Brave New World* comes, of course, from *The Tempest* where Prospero's daughter, Miranda,



4 Steven Cohen, Video still from *Golgotha* series and performances: *Wall Street* (2009). DVD, 1-channel video (exhibition copy). Courtesy of Michael Stevenson Gallery.

who exclaims on seeing the three 'men of sin' for the first time: 'How beauteous mankind is! O brave new world / That has such people in't!' Prospero's cynical reply is: 'Tis new to thee.' (V i 186–188. Shakespeare 1997: 3102). These lines encapsulate both the naïve vision of utopia and the realistic observation that a superficial understanding of utopia belies its really being dystopic.

- 4 Painted in 1503/1504. It hangs in the Museo del Prado in Madrid.
- 5 *The Spirit of the World*.
- 6 Written in the 1930s, but only published in 1980.
- 7 Secker & Warburg, London, 1999.
- 8 David Philip, Cape Town, 2000.
- 9 Originally published in Afrikaans by Quellerie, Cape Town in 1996; the translation by Luke Stubbs was published by Tafelberg, Cape Town in 2006.
- 10 Penstock, Hermanus, 2006.
- 11 Penguin, Johannesburg, 2005.
- 12 David Philip, Cape Town, 2008.
- 13 Composed in 1975. Hyperion, 1998. Performed by Mar-André Hamelin.

- 14 Deutsche Grammophon. Performed by Dawn Upshaw and The Andalucian Dogs.
- 15 Darwish died in Houston, Texas, United States of America in 2008.
- 16 This translation of 'Kun li-guitari wataran ayyuha-al-maa' is by Clarissa Burt.
- 17 Released on the Apple label in 1968.
- 18 Jeanne Zaidel-Rudolph's programme notes on the 'Youth Oratorio'.
- 19 This comes from the finale, 'My Name is Youth', of the oratorio and is written by Zaidel-Rudolph.
- 20 These works were all seen at the Gao Brothers' studio at 798 Art Zone (Dashanzi) in Beijing, where a discussion with the brothers on both idealistic and dystopic elements in their works ensued. The brothers Gao Zhen and Gao Qiang have been collaborating on installation, performance, photography and writing since the mid-1980s. They have held solo exhibitions in China, Russia, Germany, France, Italy, Canada and the USA, as well as having been part of many group exhibitions.
- 21 These works were at the 'After Rabin: New Art from Israel' exhibition at The Jewish Museum, New York, in 1998 and 1999.
- 22 I am indebted to Sue Williamson's 2004 book *Resistance art in South Africa* (Cape Town: Double Storey) for examples given in this paragraph.
- 23 These are the last words of the rogue ivory trader Kurtz in Conrad's novella, first published in 1899.
- 24 Unisa Art Gallery, Pretoria, 23 May – 30 June 2009; Museum Africa, Johannesburg, 8 October – 15 November 2009; Oliewenhuis Art Museum, Mangaung [Bloemfontein], 10 June – 8 August 2010; Jan Colle Gallerij, Ghent, Belgium, 17 October – 21 November 2010.
- 25 As seen in his exhibition 'Small Poison' at the Fried Contemporary in September 2008.
- 26 The cartoonist Zapiro (Jonathan Shapiro) has portrayed President Jacob Zuma many times with a shower attached to his head, mocking him for saying that he took a shower after sex in order to prevent himself from contracting HIV.
- 27 The opening line of the Romantic poet John Keats's poem *Endymion*: 'A thing of beauty is a joy for ever.'
- 28 Both 18th-century Englishmen. Lancelot 'Capability' Brown was the foremost landscape architect of the time, an artist in his own right who had an enormous influence on the design of English gardens. The philosopher and social theorist, Jeremy Bentham, designed a Panopticon, a prison which would allow the observer to observe all prisoners who would not

know whether they were being watched or not. Similarly, we, the viewers, look at this particular art work, observing what was and seeing first its beauty but then realising how those living there were claustrophobically imprisoned in their cells, all being dependent on where we stand physically and ethically.

- 29 Spoonerisms are errors in speech in which corresponding consonants are switched. The word comes from William Archibald Spooner (1844–1930), warden of New College, Oxford, who was prone to this.
- 30 I must thank Dov Segev-Steinberg for introducing me to this work, a print of which evidently was auctioned for \$264 000 in 2007.
- 31 In Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, Polonius tells his son, Laertes, how to conduct his life, including: 'This above all – to thine own self be true' (I iii 78. Shakespeare 1997:1680). Polonius and Hamlet are both killed later in the play.
- 32 The South African world champion 800 metre athlete whose gender has been called into question both nationally and internationally.
- 33 From the band's song 'Kingdom of Rust', written by Jez Williams, Andy Williams and Jimi Goodwin.
- 34 From the band's song 'Turn to Dust', written by Phil Collen, and on their album *Slang*.

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