AntheA Delmotte: performing temporality and returning to chaos at AfrikaBurn 2016

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Visual artist AntheA Delmotte is widely known for realistically rendered landscapes and the influential *Portals of Creation* series of paintings, which feature portraits of southern African artists such as Willie Bester, Bongi Bengu and William Kentridge. She is also experimenting extensively with performance of trance-state flow painting in public settings. Live music, dance, copious amounts of paint and huge canvases are some of the ingredients she harnesses when executing paintings arising from her freely flowing subconscious during such sessions. A history of her trance-state flow paintings includes events from 2012 onwards in and around Cape Town, as well as with alternative band Croak at AfrikaBurn 2014 and 2015. These served as foundations for the erection, then daily performance and eventual ritual burning of *Return to Chaos* at AfrikaBurn 2016. This article aims to contextualise and describe this performance artwork, as well as seek to establish whether there might be links between Big Bang and Chaos theory and Delmotte's reference to chaos in the title of this work.
Key words: AntheA Delmotte, ephemeral art, trance-state flow paintings

AntheA Delmotte: uitvoering van temporaliteit en terugkeer na chaos tydens AfricaBurn 2016
Die visuele kunstenares, AntheA Delmotte is wyd bekend vir realistiese landskappe en die invloedryke reeks skilderye, *Portals of Creation*, waarin portrette van Suid-Afrikaanse kunstenaars, onder meer Willie Bester, Bongi Bengu en William Kentridge, afgebeeld is. Haar eksperimente omvat voorstellings van onbewuste vloei-skildering in openbare plekke. Lewende musiek, dans, buitengewoon veel verf en groot skilderdoeke is van die bestanddele wat sy betrek wanneer sy skilderye in sodanige sessies uit haar vry-vloeiende onderbewuste tot stand bring. 'n Oorsig van haar onderbewuste vloei-skilderinge sluit gebeure in Kaapstad en omgewing sedert ongeveer 2012 in, asook deelname aan AfricaBurn 2014 en 1015, tesame met die die alternatiewe orkes Croak. Sodanige voorafgaande optredes het as die grondslag gedien vir vir die oprigting van, daaglikse optrede en uiteindelike rituele verbranding van *Return to Chaos* tydens AfricaBurn 2016. Hierdie artikel het ten doel die kontekstualisering en beskrywing van hierdie voorstellende kunswerk, asook om te probeer vasstel of daar moontlik 'n verband tussen die Oerknal en Chaosteorie en Demotte se verwysing na chaos in die titel van hierdie werk kan wees.
Sleutelwoorde: AntheA Delmotte, efemere kuns, onbewuste vloeiskildering

AntheA Delmotte (figure 1) is intensely driven by her visual and performance art … she both lives it and lives to create it; any day of the week, anywhere in the world. She epitomises the idea expressed by Estelle Maré (2014: 156) in the title of her article: "I paint, therefore I am". It is as if, for Delmotte, the philosophical position succinctly put by René Descartes in 1637 (translated by Cress 1986: 65) that "I think, therefore I am" can also be aptly changed to "I … [live for art, family and music], therefore I am"[1.] Furthermore, in her installation artwork *Return to Chaos*, performed at AfrikaBurn 2016, Delmotte also expressly celebrates mind and body intertwining, and welcomes the uncertain certainty of uncertainty.

To explore *Return to Chaos* closely, it is useful to first look at the event of AfrikaBurn 2016 as one which overtly expresses and celebrates "temporality of the landscape" (Ingold 1993: 152) and is conducive to creation of experimental artworks.
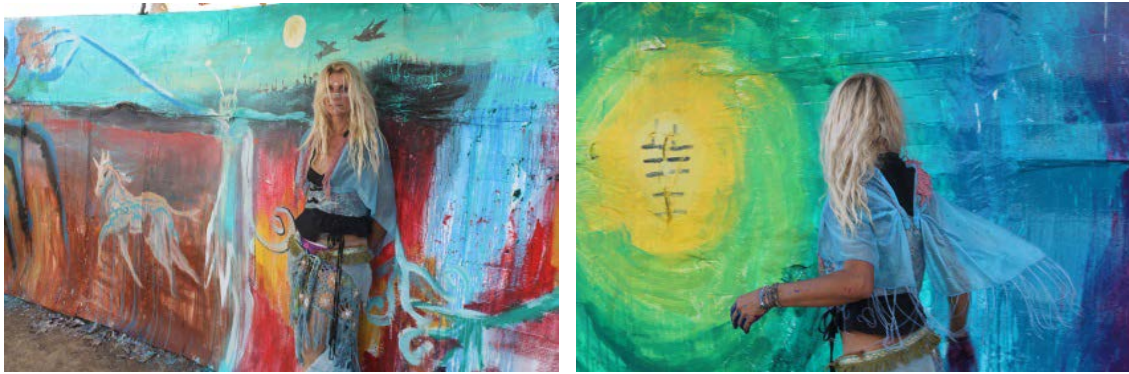
Figure 1
AntheA Delmotte with sections of *Return to Chaos* at AfrikaBurn 2016 (photos: John Steele).

AfrikaBurn 2016, and temporality of the landscape

AfrikaBurn, a home-grown outgrowth of Burning Man (Kristen 2003: 343), has been held annually at a carefully laid out site (figure 2a) at Stonehenge Farm in the semi-desert region of Tankwa Karoo since inception in 2007 (Steele 2015: 187-190). This year, close to 12 000 people came together as an intentional temporary creative community for a week, at the end of April, in celebration of visual and performance art, music and costuming in just about every conceivable mode or form. Everything is brought in for this land art (Steele 2015: 198) event, then removed thereafter, or ritually burned (figure 2b). The site is restored to as pristine a condition as possible.
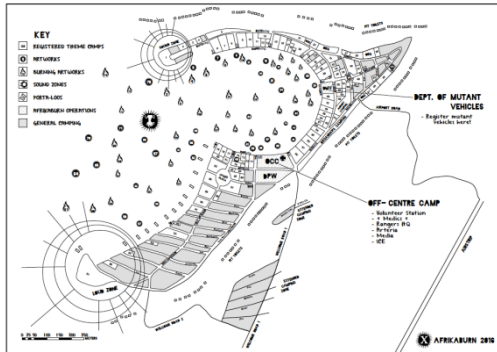

Figure 2a
Tankwa Town map, 2016, created by Davina Hall[2].

Figure 2b
***Return to Chaos* was burnt by AntheA Delmotte at AfrikaBurn on Sat 30th April 2016 (photo: Trace Rosekilly).**

The AfrikaBurn 2016 WTF? Guide (1-54) lists an astonishing number of registered "site and time specific" (Kristen 2003: 343) spectacles, including 83 installation artworks, of which 38 were due to be ceremonially burned; 94 theme camps; 81 mutant vehicles; and 13 scheduled performances. These are supplemented by hundreds of other unlisted, usually interactive, creatively inspired events daily. AfrikaBurn participants are both performers and audience, together, and for each other, in a pluralistic, "self-expressive heterotopia" (Steele 2015: 189, citing Fortunati 2005: 152; and Foucault & Miskowiec 1986). As has also previously been outlined in greater detail (Steele 2015: 189; Gilmore 2010: 38), eleven guiding principles provide a conceptual framework that encourages individual and collective creative expression

in a nurturing and largely appreciative social milieu. This setting is "an enabling and very free platform for experimentation" (Delmotte interview of 27th April 2016: 7).

Unlike intentions and expectations of durability and site-specific long-term presence originally invested in, for example, the Marion Walgate statue of Cecil John Rhodes at the time of its unveiling at the foot of the Jameson steps of the University of Cape Town in 1934 (Makoni 2016: 1), most artworks and other creative interventions at AfrikaBurn, such as *Return to Chaos*, have an explicitly intended short physical presence of about a week or less. Thus, ephemerality is celebrated at AfrikaBurn (Steele 2015: 187), whereas the statue of Rhodes was intended to occupy that space at the University of Cape Town for centuries. Despite the differences between these artworks, it is interesting to note that they are both artist, time and site specific, thereby indicating an intertwining of social factors with time and environment, temporality and landscape, no matter where and what the artwork might be.

Tim Ingold (1993: 152) notes that "human life is a process that involves the passage of time" and that "this life process is also the process of formation of the landscape in which people have lived". He elaborates by suggesting that this landscape is not a "neutral, external backdrop to human activities", nor is it that "every landscape is a particular cognitive or symbolic ordering of space". Landscape as such, be it in Cape Town or at AfrikaBurn (figures 3a and 3b), "is the world as it is known to those who dwell therein, who inhabit its places and journey along the paths connecting them" (Ingold 1993: 156). Dwelling expresses "patterns of habitation" (Goodrich & Strydom 2014: 69). Ingold (1993: 159, citing Merleau-Ponty 1962: 416) adds that it is in this process of dwelling that temporality is experienced by participants as a "present that is not marked off from a past that it has replaced, or a future that will, in turn, replace it: it rather gathers the past and future into itself".

Dwelling enables movement from "one present to another without having to break through any chronological barrier that might be supposed to separate each present from the next in line". Ingold (1993: 159-160) concludes that temporality is also "social … because people, in the performance of their tasks, also attend to one another". It is thus within the twin contexts of temporarily being part of a relatively creative and encouraging social community, situated within a well-defined yet explicitly short-lived AfrikaBurn 2016 landscape, that Delmotte chose to dwell and experimentally perform *Return to Chaos*. Furthermore, Delmotte (email of 17 July 2016) has suggested that in her own career, temporality is situated both within space and as part of what sometimes seems to be fairly orderly cycles of inner consciousness, time, experience and events. For her, temporality also hints at "a world … of unstable chaos … a world I know … in that world of chaos is a place where … [one can] see with no eyes … a place of solutions and new ideas, a place of creativity".

Delmotte is a self-taught professional artist, now living and practicing on a farm in the Piket-Bo-Berg area, towards the west coast. Her body of work to date, which she describes as "my voice" (email of 19 January 2016), largely encompasses highly disciplined, carefully planned and realistically executed landscapes, townscapes, (figure 4) and portrait works (figure 5) such as in, for example, the *Portals of Creation* series (*SA Art Times* 2013: 37-38) of Willie Bester, Bongi Bengu and William Kentridge, amongst others.

Figure 3a
Nelco Coetzee starting work on *Return to Chaos* (photo: AntheA Delmotte).

**AfrikaBurn 2016 from the air (photo: Simon O' Callaghan).**

The Moment, **created by a Russian team led by Sasha Mironov and Sema Payain (photo: John Steele).**

Figure 3b
Conrad Hicks in collaboration with others, on *Stoomtrekker*, doing the rounds at AfrikaBurn 2016, at slow walking speed. Left: On front bench are pilots Richard Bowsher, left, and Sebastian Prinz. Conrad Hicks is centre back, with his back to the camera … best position to mind the various working parts.
Right: *Stoomtrekker* parked at DMV. The fire needed to create the steam to drive this mutant vehicle can be seen burning at the bottom of the boiler (photos: John Steele 2016).
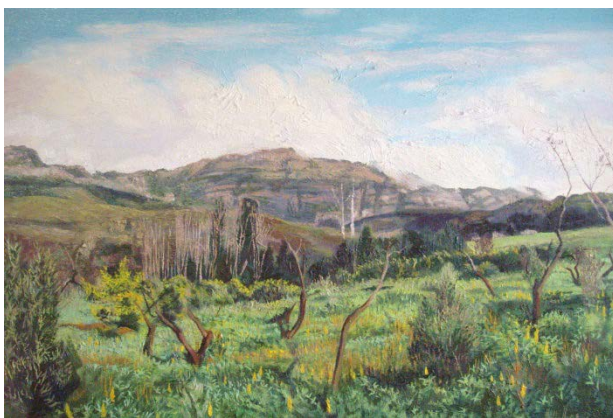
Figure 4
AntheA Delmotte, *Adullan orchard just before spring*, 2008, oil on canvas 45 x 30 cm, Piket-Bo-Berg, collection the artist (photo: AntheA Delmotte).

AntheA Delmotte, *Bo-Kaap tot laat toe*, 2016, oil on canvas 50 x 35cm, Piket-Bo-Berg, collection the artist (photo: AntheA Delmotte).

Figure 5
From *Portals of Creation* series by AntheA Delmotte

***Willie Bester*, 2012, oil on canvas overlaid on board, 900 x 600 cm, Johannesburg, MTN Corporate Collection (photo: AntheA Delmotte).**

***Bongi Bengu*, 2012, oil on canvas overlaid on board, 900 x 600 cm, collection of the artist (photo: AntheA Delmotte).**

***William Kentridge*, 2012, oil on canvas overlaid on board, 900 x 600 cm, Cape Town, private collection Susan Procter-Hume (photo: AntheA Delmotte).**

Experiments in enhancing trance-state flow painting experiences

Out of this situation has emerged another strand of interest, at least partly because of Delmotte's incessant drive to explore and find new ways of being and creating art. In the interview, of 27th April 2016 at AfrikaBurn, she explains that for several years she has been progressively exploring ways of working more freely and expressively, in a less controlled and preconceived way than usual. Another catalyst for this parallel yet intertwined direction in exploring ways to work ever more freely happened when she was in the midst of the Cape Town City Orchestra, moving between the musicians and taking their photographs while they were playing. This event took place in preparation for the 2008 exhibition *A Story of a Time, a Place and People*. Photographing the musicians, with the orchestral music in full force, gave Delmotte the idea of performance painting with live music because she could feel the energy of the musicians, in combination with the sounds they created, as a very powerfully stimulating force.

This concept of performance painting to live music percolated for a few years until one day in 2010, at the Tulbach Spring Arts Festival, Delmotte heard Martinique Matinino du Toit singing, and realised that she could be a potential performance partner. Early discussions and then painting experiments in 2011, with Matinino du Toit and alternative band Croak, on a wall of her studio resulted in the mural *I am* (figure 6a). This experiment turned out to be sufficiently exciting and energising to warrant further effort. Together, they then staged some public outdoor performance painting to live music events, including at Steenbokfontein Art Gallery, on the Cape west coast, in August 2013, where *I am the Creature* (figure 6b) was performance painted. A 3.5 metre x 2.12 metre 'canvas' made of joined together boards was painted according to how Delmotte felt moved by the music, resulting in almost dervish-style dances and an artwork featuring unique colour fields and fantasy imagery within a vaguely articulated landscape. Towards the end of 2013, the artists collectively deemed experiments thus far sufficiently energising to warrant presentation of ideas to the organisers of AfrikaBurn for an installation that would be performance painted to the accompaniment of Croak in 2014.

Figure 6a
AntheA Delmotte, *I am*, 2011, wall-size mural (photo: AntheA Delmotte).

Figure 6b
AntheA Delmotte performance painting *I am the Creature*, 2013, acrylic on board, 3.5 x 2.12 m, Steenbokfontein (photo: Byron Ramsey).

Then came the devastating event of Delmotte's third-born son Jarrad's fatal motorcycle accident[3], with attendant grief and complications. Nevertheless, Delmotte and Croak honoured their commitment to performance paint at AfrikaBurn at the end of April 2014. This was a relatively small event (figure 7a), with performance painting being done on an approximately 4.5 metre x 2.5 metre canvas erected for the occasion. It is interesting to note that Delmotte used a lot more black paint at AfrikaBurn 2014 for *My Bruttar* than at Steenbokfontein in 2013, and that there is no hint of any reassuringly recognisable landscape-type setting for these more recent, discombobulated, only vaguely human-like images in this work. These forms came from her unconscious and, apart from sheer determination and other elements, probably expressed huge amounts of sorrow and pain, with a fair amount of bewilderment too. This was a brave rendition. *My Bruttar* was burned at the end of this performance cycle. Delmotte then set up two further performance painting events for August of that year. She created the 3.1 metre x 2.44 metre *Wounded Freedom* with musicians HA!Man and Joke at her Adullan farm, Piket-Bo-Berg (figure 7b) on 28th August 2014.

Figure 7a
AntheA Delmotte, *My Bruttar*, 2014, performed with Croak at AfrikaBurn (photo: Hennie Niemand).

Figure 7b
AntheA Delmotte, *Wounded Freedom*, 2014, performed with HA!Man and Joke at Adullan (photo: AntheA Delmotte).

Thereafter, only two days after *Wounded Freedom*, she performance painted with Croak at Steenbokfontein Art Gallery for a second time. This event, billed as *Cross-pollinate* featuring *Croak and the Pythian painter*, represents a significant conceptual and maturing visual arts step for Delmotte in her search for parallel, yet interwoven, ways of experiencing and expressing creative impulses and processes. The poster (figure 8a) features Delmotte crouched in a near-

foetal position in front of part of her first 2013 performance painting with Croak, alongside an in-process portrait of her cousin, Petro, on the left. In an unpublished concept statement for this event, Delmotte wrote that this collaboration was aimed at "cross-pollinating with other forms of art … music, dance and [for example] science, psychology … and mysticism". She aimed to publically "break through my own boundaries and comfort zones of being the disciplined painter that I have become, and give recognition to the outsider artist that I am. I want to explore my impulses, urges, instincts and raw emotions, and where it goes when I feed it". Significantly, she also said in this concept statement that "in form, it strives to be raw, simple … painting is by impulse and not preconceived … on the spot and spontaneous". She seeks to interweave "concepts, painting, performance … with newly introduced trance/flow-state painting".

Here, Delmotte is specifically identifying that, while performance painting, she aims to encourage trance states of awareness not normally experienced in everyday living, which allows and emboldens artists such as herself "to tap into latent and unconscious artistry" (Galetta 2014: 544). Thus, she is not referring to "flow … painting" in the sense of "space of flows" as used by Bert Olivier (2015: 1), who talks of "global technological transformation that … is encroaching on the spaces where situated experience is, and has been possible, for millennia". Delmotte is, rather, in the context of her dwelling and situated experience, referring to the types of concepts articulated by Ariana van Heerden (2010: 141) pertaining to "optimal human functioning … [at times of] creativity … peak experience and self-actualisation". Van Heerden refers extensively to researches by Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, who is accredited by Karen Beard (2014: 353, citing Csikszentmihalyi 1975, 1990 and 1997) with having originated "flow theory … first defined as a holistic sensation that people have when they act with total involvement". This idea has been quite extensively debated (Banfield and Burgess 2013, Fullagar *et al* 2013, and O'Neill 1999) and general consensus seems to be that certain factors, in varying degrees and proportions, usually come into play. These factors include those of "challenge-skill balance, action-awareness merging, clear goals, unambiguous feedback, concentration on the task at hand, sense of control, loss of self-consciousness, transformation of time and autotelic experience" (Beard 2015: 353). In her *Cross-pollinate* concept statement, Delmotte also equates being in a "state of flow" with entering a "trance state … [with being in an] auto pilot-state", hence terminology of trance-state flow paintings used earlier.

Cross-pollinate was successfully performed by Delmotte and Croak at about sunset on 30th of August 2014, resulting in the work called *Good and Bad and Society* (figure 8b). This emotionally charged work is quite drippy and displays brighter colours than at AfrikaBurn 2014, and there are vaguely recognisable human faces, as well as tree-like elements on the left, which perhaps hint at a sense of rootedness within a landscape familiar to both the artist and viewers, despite imponderables posed by unknown figures and forms. This performance started out with Delmotte in a grim reaper/dark angel costume, which she took off in due course to reveal that she was actually dressed all in white. Once darkness had fallen, the artwork was ceremonially burned in a final ritual of sacrifice, signifying completion of that cycle.

Organism 2015 and *Return to Chaos* 2016 at AfrikaBurn

The sense of growth and expanding creative horizons arising from *Cross-pollinate* encouraged Delmotte, towards the end of 2014, to submit a proposal for a much more ambitious project, called *Organism* (figure 8c), to be created at AfrikaBurn in 2015. In this work, once again in collaboration with Matinino du Toit and Croak, she sought to "depict the order that forms out of universal chaos and randomness and the cycle of creation, living and experience up to death

… the burning" (AfrikaBurn WTF? Guide 2015: 24). This installation and performance ended in a poignant burn, which has been quite extensively documented (Steele 2015: 191-193; and by Matinino du Toit[4]). Interestingly, the focus on order in *Organism* acted as a foundation and launchpad for *Return to Chaos* at AfrikaBurn 2016.

Figure 8a
AntheA Delmotte, *Cross-Pollinate* poster, 2014 (photo: AntheA Delmotte).

Figure 8b
AntheA Delmotte, *Good and Bad and Society*, 2014, performed with Croak at Steenbokfontein (photo: Byron Ramsey).

Figure 8c
AntheA Delmotte, *Organism*, 2015, performed with Croak at AfrikaBurn (photo: John Steele).

Work on conceptualising *Return to Chaos* began in 2015, and by January 2016 Delmotte had turned her sights specifically towards practicalities of realising this idea. Early activities included exploring possibilities of musicians to work with, as well as to begin actual preparations for realising the project. One of her first substantial activities was to cut "21 big trees and skin them so they can dry in time" (figure 9a) (email of 6 February 2016) in early February. Wattle trees were chosen because they are an alien species to South Africa, and their branch structures give really interesting shapes. Then, during February and March - in between exhibiting works at Stellenbosch University "Woordfees" and at "THAT ART FAIR" in Cape Town, curated by Art Africa Magazine; as well as contributing both to the "Mirrored Dialogue" exhibition hosted by Eclectica Design and Art in Cape Town, and to "Fear & Loss, Industrial Karoo" at Oliewenhuis Art Museum in Bloemfontein - she also arranged technicalities and agreements of participation with Matinino du Toit, rock band OhGod, ghoema poet Loit Sôls and several other musicians. Materials and equipment for *Return to Chaos* were sourced or created, and then at the beginning of April, a 30-ton truck was packed to overflowing (figure 9b) with most of the materials and gear, and Delmotte set off for Tankwa Karoo with her daughters Keana and Lieve, as well as Nelco Coetzee. Other core build team members included son Ryan, as well as Trace Rosekilly, Byron Ramsey, Attie Jantie Basson, Stacey Leigh, Jurgen van Schalkwyk, Beth Fleming and Chris Wait. They were occasionally assisted by specialised riggers, including Marchelo Pacella, Patrick Cornish, Kei St Blaize, Jay St Blaize and carpenter Oliver Polter, "who also works at height" (Monique Schiess email of 18 July 2016).

At Delmotte's time of arrival, a full two weeks before commencement of the event on 25th April, the AfrikaBurn site was still relatively empty desert. Camp was established, and work began on the build. A huge storm hit Tankwa Karoo a few days later and flattened everything that had been accomplished thus far, so work began afresh. Once again, *Return to Chaos* slowly emerged from the desert. I arrived at AfrikaBurn on Saturday 23rd April. Darkness had fallen by the time I had managed to set up camp but, with the help of the AfrikaBurn 2016 map, I managed to find my way to this artwork. In the moonlight, I was astonished to see that this installation seemed to be slowly marching across the desert (figure 9c). Initially, in the dark, it was all quite difficult to take in. I soon realised that the trees, cut down by Delmotte approximately two months earlier, had been replanted upside-down in the desert, and it was the branches, pointing

earthwards, that gave the impression of centipede legs in motion. The stems of this upside-down forest had been secured to each other with cross members above head-height. I also discovered that there was a semi-circular end wall of well-secured cardboard, with its back to prevailing winds, that I immediately realised would become the 'canvas' upon which Delmotte would be performance painting in a few days. I hunkered down against this end wall, taking shelter from the prevailing breeze, and thoroughly enjoyed being in the midst of this other-worldly space, with only the near-full moon for lighting. As I made my way back to my tent that first evening I could see other artworks rising in the dark, and looked forward to exploring and contextualising them in relation to *Return to Chaos* in daylight.

| **Figure 9a** | **Figure 9b** | **Figure 9c** |
| AntheA Delmotte cutting invasive trees for *Return to Chaos* (photo: Tracey Rosekilly). | Packing the truck, and then building *Return to Chaos* (photos: AntheA Delmotte). | Part of *Return to Chaos* as seen at night, with moon, centre left (photo: John Steele). |

The following morning, I was delighted to see installations and other artworks spread out all over a centrally located, approximately 1.5 square kilometre (Travis Lyle email of 20 July 2016) open space allocated to artworks, known as the *playa*. The work that immediately caught my full attention was *Temple //Xam*, which was being finished off by Kim Goodwin and the Dandylions (AfrikaBurn WTF? Guide 2016: 33). This team, from the Midlands in KwaZulu-Natal, created a welcoming and quite interactive installation featuring woven wattle arches in various configurations. A semi-enclosed raised observation platform was accessible by means of four separate stairways that widened as one climbed upwards. These stairways were oriented to the four cardinal directions, and embraced a small womb-like crawl-into space under the platform, that could be accessed from ground level. *Temple //Xam*, composed of carefully controlled yet freely flowing curvaceous contours, became an installation favoured by some as a space for reflection and meditation, as well as impromptu musical and other performances.

Figure 10
Kim Goodwin, left, and *Temple //Xam* (photos: John Steele).

Clan X (figure 11), designed by Brendan Smithers (AfrikaBurn WTF Guide 2016: 24), located a little further up the slight ridge, dominated the middle distance skyline on this particular morning. This huge 15-metre tall artwork, which had been completed just prior to my arrival, depicted compactly arranged dancers reaching high up into the sky. Severely symmetrical in design, *Clan X* featured abstracted human-like components rising and being brought together as one towards the top. This unusually upright work was clad in regularly sized and placed wooden strips that flowed upwards over the undulating ins and outs of the form, enhancing the impression of carefully expressed swirling and twirling verticality.

Figure 11
Clan X, under construction on left – riggers from left to right are Jay St Blaize and Kei St Blaize, with Oliver Polter (photo, courtesy of Monique Schiess, by: Andrew Parker); centre (photo: John Steele); right (photo: Tracey Rosekilly).

The *Clan X* sculpture also provided a nice bench-like place upon which to sit at ground level and look out over the desert towards the distant mountains, or at passers-by and other artworks such as *The Moment* (in figure 3a), which were taking shape in the dip. This installation depicted a huge raised egg cracking open. I could see that finishing touches were being put to a spiral staircase, which enabled visitors to ascend into the egg and enjoy a sheltered interior space, and even look up at the sky, especially at night, through the opening in the shell. *The Moment* was being created by a Russian team led by Sasha Mironov and Sema Payain (AfrikaBurn WTF? Guide: 33).

A little higher up the low ridge, another enormous installation, called *Project O* (figure 12), was taking shape. Created by Nathan Victor Honey and the Sutherland Kuns Ontwikkelings Projek (AfrikaBurn WTF? Guide: 31), this work was simultaneously being clad in spikey thornbush and being centrally reinforced by means of an approximately 18 metre high wooden spiral staircase that would eventually give access to the "highest viewing platform ever erected at AfrikaBurn" (Monique Schiess email of 21 July 2016).

Project O was initially created and pre-erected in Sutherland in the Northern Cape early in 2016, partly as a test run, and partly to fulfil community development objectives that include upskilling for those local Sutherlandians who became involved. All components for this installation were then dismantled and trucked in and positioned at AfrikaBurn on the same site as *Subterrafuge* in 2014 and 2015. *Project O* rose out of the desert in the shape of a giant O, daringly constructed by means of giant radial ribs swooping from the ground into the sky, then around back towards the centre, then linking up to a centrally placed spine, which cleverly also served as anchorage for the staircase leading up to the viewing platform on top.

Project O also provided a spacious space of shade and rest within. Clad in thornbush, this work looked soft and fluffy from afar, then strangely unkempt and hedgehog-spikey as well as furry succulent-organic when viewed from close-up. Only once inside could one appreciate the intricacy of precision design and vision that had gone into its conception and execution. Honey described this installation as one that "flirts with the boundaries of off-the-cuff engineering and contractucyion methods" (AfrikaBurn WTF? Guide 2016: 31). *Project O* became the first AfrikaBurn installation to be burned just before sunrise. AfrikaBurn Art Wrangler Isa Marques (email of 16 July 2016) has commented that it was burned "at a perfect time … the people around O were there especially for and fully out of commitment to this piece … so, yes, in my opinion, it did turn out wonderfully".

Figure 12
Left: *Hauptbahnhof*, created by Patrick Baumhöfer and a multicultural crew from seven countries in the foreground, with *Project O* behind it (photo: Jonx Pillemer). Centre: Nathan Victor Honey at *Project O* (photo: Simon O' Callaghan). Right: (photo: Jonx Pillemer).

In contrast to the relatively precisely calculated, upwardly oriented and carefully controlled contours afforded by the likes of the foregoing three installations, for example, it is interesting to note that *Return to Chaos* was really low-slung (figure 13), hugging the desert at not much more than approximately 2.5-metres to 4-metres high, on average. It was also, intentionally, quite higgledy-piggledy in layout and construction method.

Delmotte had conceived the basic form, but variable practicalities, including that upside-down trees are in essence irregular in shape, determined how that would be executed. Apart from the approximately 30-metre long by 2.7-metre high semi-circular western wall that became a 'canvas', the rest of the approximately 120 square metre desert floor-space encompassed by this installation was mostly open to the elements and delightfully asymmetrical and unexpected in many ways.

Figure 13
Top, *Return to Chaos* (photo: Tracey Rosekilly). Bottom left, AntheA Delmotte
preparing for the first performance of *Return to Chaos* painting … daughters, from
left, Lieve and Keana, are in the front row (photo: John Steele). Bottom right,
musical performances in full swing at *Return to Chaos. Stoomtrekker* and *VuvuStasie*
are on the right (photo: AntheA Delmotte).

The skeletal design of *Return to Chaos* harks back in some ways to *Organism* (figure 14), presented at AfrikaBurn 2015. Similarities include, for example, that they were both, in essence, "free-form" (AfrikaBurn WTF? Guide 2015: 24) works that were created on site and were transformed every day during various performances. Other similarities include presence of a solid western wall that also served as a huge canvas for performance painting, which overlooked a largely open-to-the-air space with rudimentary roofing, which then in turn opened to the desert for further accommodation of audience/participants. Both spaces were geared for performance of live large-scale painting and music, with attendant generators and wires discreetly housed. *Organism* was by far the more orderly and conventionally symmetrical of the two structures, and probably covered an area about half of that of *Return to Chaos*.

Figure 14
Performing *Organism*, 2015 (photos, from left: Shablin Konstantin, Silver W, Jonx Pillemer).

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Apart from some basic architectural similarities, there is also a clear continuity in conceptualisation that links the two installations. In *Organism*, Delmotte was explicitly celebrating transitions from primal chaos to order, observing that the work and performance events aimed to depict "the order that forms out of universal chaos and randomness and the cycle of creation, living experience and up to death" (AfrikaBurn WTF? Guide 2015: 24). Then, in 2016, with *Return to Chaos*, Delmotte deliberately went searching for primal chaos once more, so as to complete the cycle, as it were. She nevertheless also made it quite clear in various discussions that she was not trying to separate out chaos from order, or *vice versa*, because she recognised that seeds of each state were to be found in the other. Intentions behind creation of both these AfrikaBurn works are thus very much theoretically intertwined, with Delmotte actively committed, in both works, to performance painting while "putting knowledge aside and embracing impulse, instinct, spontaneity and expression" at sunset each evening (Delmotte concept document for AfrikaBurn 2016[5].

Delmotte's focus this year on chaos was made quite clear by the way the installation structure had been assembled. On top of the upside-down trees were irregularly placed cross members that held up occasional seemingly randomly placed roof coverings. For Delmotte, the whole structure aimed at embracing chaos, out of which a form of constructed order emerged. For example, the various roofing cross members, holding everything up and together, created an overarching bower of beautifully chaotic patterns, one section of which eventually sported a sort of crown that only on closer inspection could be seen to perhaps be representational of a DNA strand (figure 15).

Figure 15
Nearing completion of the *Return to Chaos* build. Centre: raising the DNA strand on to the roof. Right: first moments of torching *Return to Chaos* (photos: John Steele, and right: Tracey Rosekilly).

This perhaps-DNA strand was part of a very important element of Delmotte's intention, and referred specifically to DNA components known as "GABRB3 + (MAOA + BDNF +5HTTPR)" (AfrikaBurn WTF Guide: 27). Delmotte has suggested (interview of 27 April 2016 at AfrikaBurn) that these DNA sequences, as do all others, hint at instances of order gradually emerging out of Big Bang (Singh 2005: 560) origin of the universe chaos. Some of these specific genes also, for example, give clues about genetic variations that may be influenced positively or negatively towards antisocial or socially empathetic behaviour, depending on the kind of environment in which the carrier lives. Sheilagh Hodgkins[6] of the University of Montreal has explained this idea clearly, saying that in certain instances, "it is not the gene that leads the behaviour, but the gene that reacts with the environment. Genes react with each other and other environmental factors". Thus, like a Russian *babushka* doll containing several others, Delmotte is playing with ideas that elements of original genetic makeup can in turn be open to being influenced – perhaps chaotically – by social and other contexts. Delmotte (interview of 27 April 2016: 12) has commented that she embraces both chaos and order and that, therefore, by means

of the DNA strand and genetic research referred to above, she was hinting at her impression "that this also boils down to an idea that chaos and order are the same thing, just manifest differently".

Furthermore, these DNA components and Delmotte's references to chaos deliberately evoke notions associated with Chaos theory. Arkady Plotnitsky (2006: 40, citing Deleuze and Guattari 1994), for example, suggests that "chaos is defined not so much by its disorder as by the infinite speed with which every form taking shape in it vanishes". This author also maintains that chaos "is a void that is not nothingness but … virtual, containing all possible particles and drawing out all possible forms, which spring up only to disappear immediately, without consistency or reference, without consequence". Delmotte has latched on to this idea that anything can happen, and seeks to be open to any eventualities as they arise, thus recognising chaos as being characterised as "aperiodic … behaviour in a deterministic system that exhibits sensitive dependence on initial conditions" (Devane 2010: 5). In her capacities as visual and performing artist Delmotte is thereby seemingly probing the big "question of how our perceived reality is constructed and subsequently how … mind has evolved such that we are able to both perceive and subsequently alter our own causality or even our own evolution within this reality" (Forshaw 2016: 49).

Performance painting Return to Chaos

Seeing Delmotte and her team of helpers working continuously on realising *Return to Chaos* as a venue and installation artwork, right through until the very final moment before the first performance on the evening of Monday 25th April at sunset, reminded me of an observation made by her previously (email of 7 July 2015) that the entire process of creating and performing at AfrikaBurn is an "amazing journey … building and performance and burn experience … were all equally valuable". I also got the impression that creativity was as intensely focused and expressed during the procedure of erecting *Return to Chaos* as thereafter, during performance painting sessions. Focus and flow are part of the process throughout, not just at peak moments of painting or burning.

The act of establishing a visual arts installation open to all, in combination with provision of music and performance painting, was one of Delmotte's gifts to all those who joined in and enjoyed the space and thereby contributed to proceedings. It is also her platform for exploration of self and technique, as an artist, in different circumstances than normally prevail. Integral to Delmotte's performance painting technique in this AfrikaBurn setting is her use of loud music to enable tapping into possibilities emerging through unplanned sequences of trance-state flow painting. Music has, through time, been used as means to activate a "switch that opens the channel, allowing unconscious creativity of an … artist to emerge and manifest itself" (Galetta 2014: 544).

Another important role of music, in this context, is to bring together performer/s and audience/participants into a collective consciousness, thereby enhancing experience for all. Selim Bulut[7], for example, has explained this principle as being based on suggestions that "if everybody in a … [space] is focused on one audio source, then brainwaves are synchronising, putting everybody in a similar state of mind". Delmotte (email of 15 May 2016) has also commented that "creative energy is very powerful … it radiates". She commented further, about being brought together with others by music, saying that she experiences "connection on an intimate level … and this live energy of people becomes like cotton wool around me … especially when the music takes me into this vortex … of creative performance".

On the first three evenings, Attie Jantjie Basson was the DJ on Byron Ramsey's equipment (figure 16a). They played heavy metal and sludgy grunge tunes by the likes of Radiohead, Tool, Lacuna Coil, Ramstein, System of a Down and Tame Impala, as well as, for example, the anthem Black Hole Sun by Soundgarden. Basson explained later (interview of 27 April 2016) that "the deep darkness of some of this music also carries essences of incomprehensible beauty and life, thereby resonating with many of the emotions being explored while she is painting".

Then, on Thursday evening, Delmotte painted to live classical rock music played by violinist Luca Hart (figure 16b), and also to alternative dark pop/art rock sounds of Martinique Matinino du Toit (figure 16c). These were rounded off with instrumental ghost rock energetically played by live band OhGod. On Friday evening, *VuvuStasie* (figure 17), the "weird and wonderful caravan of strangeness", and the mutant vehicle *Stoomtrekker* (AfrikaBurn WTF? Guide 2016: 47-48), pulled in and provided "wonky" tunes. Then, on Saturday evening, Delmotte performed once more to music provided by her live performers, including OhGod.

Figure 16a
Heavy metal DJ for the occasions, Attie Jantjie Basson – front – and Byron Ramsey (photo: John Steele).

Figure 16b
Musician, Luca Hart (photo: Attie Jantjie Basson).

Figure 16c
Musician Martinique Matinino du Toit (photo: Attie Jantjie Basson).
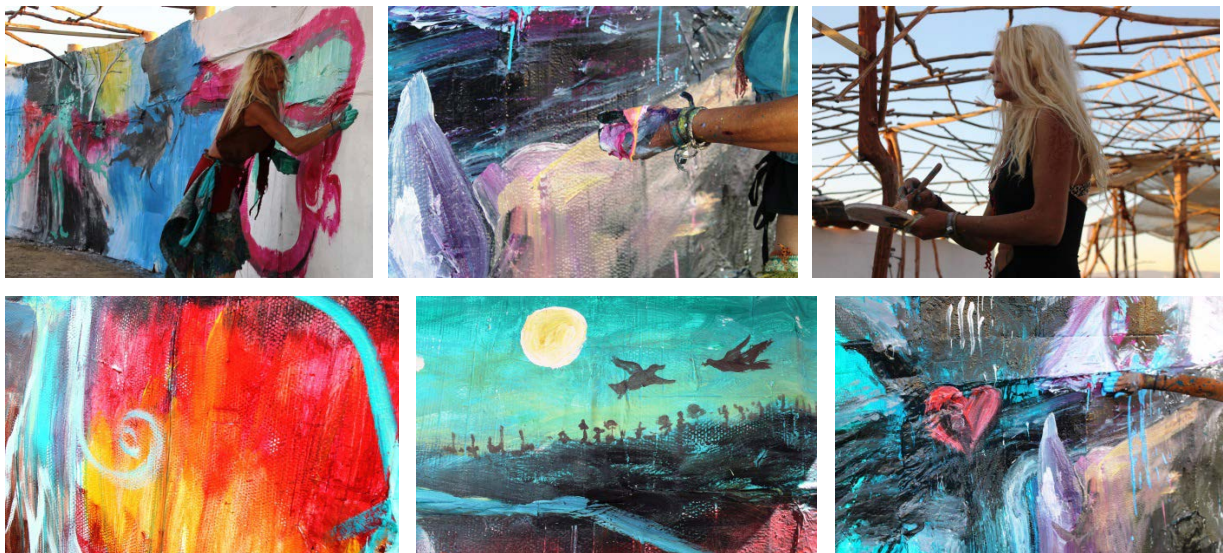

Figure 17
Left: *Vuvustasie at Return to Chaos* **(photo: Jonx Pillemer). Centre: Helpers, Jurgen van Schalkwyk and Beth Fleming (photo: AntheA Delmotte). Right: OhGod, left to right: Danny Harris, Stefan Steyn Bothma, Mark Fluffy Woodfrey and David Houston (photo: Martinique Matinino Du Toit).**

Delmotte's sunset painting sessions usually lasted between 40 and 80 minutes, termination thereof requiring that a helper catch her attention, perhaps repeatedly, and indicate that the drawing to a close of a session was imminent. She dressed in different costumes, usually created by Nella Mif, for each performance, and set things up very carefully prior to commencement each time. Brushes, sponges and any other tools were placed close to each other, within easy reach, alongside cans of acrylic paint and containers of water. Her basic technique (figure 18) seems to be to energetically block out gesturalist colour zones that interpenetrate and in due

course serve as holding spaces – that sometimes hint at 'real' world landscapes – for forms that become suggested by shapes emerging therefrom, or subconscious ideas. Times of frenzied paint application by means of throwing, brush, or directly by fingers and hands, are occasionally interspersed by contemplative and seemingly serene interludes when particular compositions are being resolved or, for example, when just the merging of juicy colour for the sheer joy and tactile intensity of that moment is being dwelt in and savoured.

Figure 18
AntheA Delmotte performance painting *Return to Chaos* (photos: John Steele).

Figure 19
Aspects of *Return to Chaos* painting performance (photos: John Steele).

Sometimes rapidly performed short and intense brush or hand-strokes quickly fill and define spaces with colour, and on other occasions, long swooping motions express new ideas, occasionally also linking images to each other, which in turn suggests new possibilities (figure 19). She uses paint tin lids as palettes upon which to mix desired colours, but quite often this method was deemed too cumbersome and she mixed colours directly in her cupped hand. On

other occasions, she would stand back, or just quietly assess components of the composition prior to the next sublime moments of further paint application. It is amazing to see pure colour zones suddenly transform into, or become contrasted by, recognisable images such as, for example, a forest, or a two-headed dragonsnake facing a long and narrow wraith-like figure with extended arms and fingers. Such images sometimes appear with just a few strokes upon what initially seem like only abstract colour zones. Delmotte brings all her considerable experience and capability to each performance moment. Next, this paper will briefly look at aspects of her 'normal' painting modes, then review some of her experiences and imagery created while trance-state painting.

Painting modes – process, imagery and the burn

In an unpublished concept note for her *See* exhibition, in 2009 at The Cape Gallery, Delmotte has explained her normal way of painting in her studio at home as being

> like opening a tunnel (channel) space where I paint what I see, and I look and I see more and I paint that. Through the different layers of seeing, I see different parts of life and express the different parts like material and emotion consciously and subconsciously on canvas. As a result, my work is done in many layers, a very time-consuming process … everything tells a story … besides the different layers of paint there are also different layers of the creative process at work … [including] conception, subject scenario, putting together the different elements of composition, texture and technique.

In her early days as an artist (email of 5 July 2016), she focused extensively on "conceptualisation of what is to be portrayed … medium, composition, mixing colours, tones, lines and so on". In this same email, she also clarified that, nevertheless such planning is not always necessary because, "for many years now [when creating artworks], I easily enter into light inner-world dreamlike trance states and can move in and out of it whenever necessary … and anyway, the mind is unstable, so these states come and go" (email of 5 July 2016).

Delmotte's deliberate trance-state flow painting occasions, such as at AfrikaBurn, seek to upend her conventional visual arts norms of conceptualisation, planning, concentration and focus on goal-oriented outcomes. She actively seeks out "being instinctive, spontaneous and … [the immersion in] rhythms of colour, body and sound". This is when she "becomes the performance … [and] sees with inner eyes … the painting creates itself" (email of 17 July 2016). Furthermore, she explains (interview of 27 April 2016) that when she is in a deep mode of trance-state flow painting in combination with full energy of live music being played with an empathetic audience of 'co-performers', she gets sensations of being "exhilarated, overexcited. I get a feeling like there is something explosive inside me, almost out of control, something vibrating inside me, over fast. It feels like water that starts to boil inside me … like bubbles that go ever faster inside me". She has also related (emails of 7, 19 and 22 July 2016) that these events of deep trance-state flow painting are

> about simplifying things … I know there are infinite variations, but it is also true that they are all a whole … [I feel] constantness, with my mind not breaking everything up into pieces of different things because this is not an analytical space … [everything happening] is one thing … and it is about becoming the artwork by being a conduit between colour, sound, moment and experience … throwing away learned things and structure. There is a fluency in technique and style, like the trance state itself. Everything slows down … in deep stages. I don't think that I am performance painting … I just go on autopilot".

Out of these circumstances emerged the *Return to Chaos* composite painting. It is a work in many-part series (figure 20a-20f) of "paintings melted into one" (email of 22 July 2016), composed on six evenings at sunset, to different musical accompaniments. Audience participation increased to such an extent towards the end that some even joined in and wrote words and also painted their own images. Such events influenced how the work looked in the end, and Delmotte has said in this same email that she appreciates these "happenings. It suits the situation … there are no rules." That being said, the mural in its entirety, as created by Delmotte, reveals separate entities flowing into each other and "is a big visual image of this very abstract thing, the process … of [this instance of] trance-state flow painting". Delmotte has also noted in this email that "there is always a creature that is me … I might look dark to some … [but to me] they are friendly and beautiful in a way". These selfies reflect presence and states of mind, and interlink with all other elements in the composition.

The various interwoven phantasmagoric images and spaces of pure colour on this panel were not painted sequentially, from right to left, for example. Nevertheless, for the sake of a quick round trip, it is very interesting to take note of Delmotte's own observations about the content. She has kindly offered insight as follows (email of 22 July 2016):

> The only word that I painted is CHAOS, just before the burn. The tree (figure 20a), a being, is intertwined with vines, which are difficult to untangle … the moon is mystery … the image could refer to the mysterious and complicated nature of the inner world … although I see it in the opposite way. I did not paint the cat. The two headed dragonsnake (figure 20b) also reflects complications … it might have something to do with difficulties that happen when trying to undo conditioning so as to discover truth … I did not paint the teddy bear nor the heart. The blue greens behind the dragonsnake and the blue purple shades behind the eye are fading towards light … the eye is probably about insight. There are also some almost sweet and humorous references to the dark world to the left of the dragonsnake (figure 20c) … which could partly be about … [ongoing consuming grief arising from the] death of my son Jarrad in 2013 … [and heartache from that and associated circumstances]. My long creature form appears again … on the left of this darker zone (figure 20d). On the one side, I am reaching through fire towards another selfie in light … and darkness … and beloved nature. The moon and mystery are also there, within a space showing beauty of darkness … light within times of what others consider to be negatives, perhaps. I did not paint the rat. The other arm reaches towards a high-up creature … within a continuity of fire and night backgrounds … this intermediary creature in turn links to a potentially threatening spider (figure 20e) associated with dark powers … modified to remove explicit danger. This modified spider then links to another social world of nature … featuring a menstruating bird bear, two pink figures … one and the same person … copulating … and a mouse-bird flying (figure 20f). Overall … images are about differences between people and perceptions … some do normal things, others do not …

Figure 20a
Far right segment (photo: AntheA Delmotte).

Figure 20b
Inbetween right segment (photo: AntheA Delmotte).

Figure 20c
Centre right segment (photo: AntheA Delmotte).

Figure 20d
Centre left segment (photo: AntheA Delmotte).

Figure 20e
In between left segment (photo: AntheA Delmotte).

Figure 20f
Left hand segment (photo: AntheA Delmotte).

Other observations can be added, but for the purposes of this paper, at this point, it is probably most relevant to say that in general, this mural is about her subconscious dwelling on perceptions and misperceptions, and finding ways to conjoin and make sense of both chaos and order within temporalities of self, family and society. Certainly, for Delmotte, the final statement regarding emerging from chaos (figure 21), being in chaos and *Return to Chaos*, happened at sunset on Saturday 30th April 2016 when she concluded the painting performances and then ritually torched the installation (figure 22).

Figure 21
AntheA Delmotte with son Ryan, on left, and then on the following day, final moments before she torched *Return to Chaos* **(photos: left, Trace Rosekilly; centre and right: Martinique Matinino du Toit).**

Figure 22
Returning to chaos. (photos: Left, AntheA Delmotte; right, Joffree Hayman).

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This sacrificial burn (Steele 2015: 196), which was also a transformative exorcism, "representing cleansing, purification and release" (Kristen 2007: 333), lasted throughout the night and into the following morning as the thickish tree trunks gradually burned away entirely, connecting people over *VuvuStasie* coffee and other consumables. Delmotte has related (email of 14 May 2016) that she was delighted that "random people were happy to find heat and spend time around the fires, discussing and debating. This was the final puzzle piece with my intention for *Return to Chaos*. My philosophical cage."

Furthermore, Delmotte has charted experiences in trance-state flow painting that bode well for future studies in this direction. She has, for example, hinted at a sense of slowing down while entering this state, in much the same way as is recorded by the likes of Selim Bulut[8] who, in a different context, has reported that "whilst the normal, alert brain's frequencies are usually between 14Hz and 22Hz, they're slightly slower whilst playing music – around 8Hz to 14Hz. Critically, the brain is in a similar state whilst meditating, or, indeed in a trance". Delmotte has also referred to factors mentioned by the likes of Guiseppe Galetta (2014: 540-541) in connection with channelling phenomena in art that includes "states of altered consciousness … [working] at amazing speed … paint application with both brushes and hands/fingers … [and] inspiration by otherworldly entities", all of which indicate various states of trance-state flow painting. Such occasions have been experienced by Delmotte, and may well hark towards those of artists associated with aspects of movements such as, for example, surrealism and expressionism, with elements of automatism (Conley 2011: 297; Forcen 2013: 7; Kuspit 1988: 229; and Powers 2014: 5). She does regard herself as being open to channelling experiences while performance painting, as indicated in the unpublished *Cross-pollinate* concept statement, on page three, in which she affirms that "I want to explore acting as a medium between natural, creative energies and metaphysical realms".

Conclusions

Delmotte dedicated a huge chunk of time and energy to bring this unique visual arts event to fruition. From the moments of conception, it appears that there was always going to be more to this project of *Return to Chaos* than met the eye. She certainly rose to the occasion of creating and then transforming a huge installation back to nothingness, and took away with her newfound strengths and consolidation of a deeply profound confidence in her own capacity for growth and ongoing learning without playing it safe. AfrikaBurn 2016 provided an ideal setting, in terms of space, people and collective consciousness, for this affirmation of visual arts expression to reach climactic fulfilment.

Points of departure for Delmotte (email of 17 July 2016) included an aim to question "what is life and what is permanence?" Conceptualisation, creation and performance of *Return to Chaos* reference both Big Bang and Chaos theory, all talking directly to the theme of temporality. She (email of 19 July 2016) has observed that "there are different levels of impermanence in both the *Return to Chaos* and trance-state flow painting … including the structure … [and the mural being created in phases over six days] and the imagery … from chaos to order and chaos again … with the burn". She also explained that, on another level, "I am speaking about illusions of what is real/permanent and what is not". Likewise, trance-state flow performance painting is itself a transgressive act which can be said to be rooted in temporality and chaos, wherein "spontaneity … instinct … expression and change" are favoured instead of control. This experience, according to Delmotte, is one of "becoming the artwork by being a conduit

between colour, sound … experience … throwing away learned things and structure" (email of 19 July 2016).

It is beyond the scope of this paper to comment further than to suggest that Delmotte's interest in this aspect of visual arts practice bears further study, and comparison with other artists and performers. Likewise, it will be very interesting to also expand such a study towards looking into Delmotte's visual arts oeuvre as a whole with a view towards establishing to what extent experiences in trance-state flow painting have influenced her thinking and execution of more conventional paintings and other artworks created during average home studio type circumstances.

It also seems that engaging in trance-state flow painting enables Delmotte to refresh herself and her interest in creating visual art, facilitating a sort of re-enchantment with processes and subject matter that helps facilitate periodic rejuvenation and revitalisation so essential to ongoing exciting and energising creative fulfilment. Finally, probably one of the most important factors to note of all is that she says (interview of 27 April 2016: 4) "I love painting … it makes me happy to paint", thereby giving good enough reason to continue on her visual arts quest, no matter the outcome.

Acknowledgements

Notes

1   It turns out that rewording of this famous quote is quite widespread. Of particular interest here is an example created by feminist American artist Barbara Kruger who printed the ironic slogan "I shop therefore I am" on various surfaces, including shopping bags and T shirts, as a "pithy critique of capitalism and its social vacuity" (retrieved from https:// www.acca online.org.au/event/icons-barbara-kruger-i-shop-therefore-i-am; and from https://www.accaonline.org.au/event/icons-barbara-kruger-i-shop-therefore-i-am on 28 October 2016).

2   Retrieved from http://www.afrika burn.com/wp-content/uploads/ 2016/04/ Screen-Shot-2016-04-12-at-4.48.24-PM.png on 27 July 2016.

3   Retrieved from http://arttimes.co.za/sudden-passing-jarrad-mcdougall-son-artist-anthea-delmotte/ on 30 July 2016.

4   Retrieved from http://matinino.co.za/projects/?name=Afrikaburn%202015 on 26 July 2016.

5   Retrieved from http://www.afrikaburn. com/latest-news/2016-creative-grants on 20 July 2016.

6   Retrieved from http://europe.newsweek. com/new-study-identifies-genes-interact-environment-increase-antisocial-behaviour-291937?rm=eu on 20 July 2016.

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