

**CONFRONTING THE MUSEUM'S COLONIAL PAST: TOWARDS NEW STRATEGIES OF
INSTITUTIONAL CRITIQUE**

Greer Valley

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Declaration

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Abstract

This study considers how colonial narratives imbedded in the museum institution, may be unsettled and reframed by artist interventions. My interest in this subject is to question whether these interventions could facilitate dialogue, unlearning and change in the museum. I also discuss the exhibition *The Chair*, where I experiment with these ideas by means of a curatorial intervention in the Stellenbosch University Museum. Centred around the concept of the *chair* (as head, seat, object), this exhibition explores the relationship between the museum as institution and the institution of the university and their roles in the production and accumulation of meaning, knowledge and capital.

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Table of Contents

1	Introduction	1
1.1	Background Context and Motivation for this Study.....	1
1.2	Outline of the Problem to be Investigated	5
1.3	Research Question and Objectives	6
1.4	Research Methodology.....	6
1.5	Chapter Outline	8
2	Key Concepts	10
2.1	Colonialism, Coloniality, Decolonialty	10
2.2	Institutional Critique	13
2.3	The Museological Turn.....	15
2.4	The Curatorial Turn	15
3	Museums and Meaning Production	17
3.1	What is a Museum?	23
3.2	The Museum as Archive	29
3.3	The Museum as Frame	30
3.4	The Museum as Text	31
3.5	The Transformative Museum and the Museum as Transformer	35
4	Towards a Decoloniality of Knowledge and Culture	42
4.1	Situating Institutional Critique	43
4.2	The Language of Institutional Critique	45
4.3	Praxis: Towards New Strategies.....	48
5	Unsettling Monuments: The Chair as a Curatorial Intervention into the Stellenbosch University Museum Archive	59
6	Conclusion.....	82
	Illustrations.....	84
	Electronic data	103
	Bibliography	104

Table of Figures

Figure 1: Greer Valley. 2015. Image taken in the entrance foyer of the Stellenbosch Museum underneath a poster with the title: “The History of Stellenbosch and Its People”.	84
Figure 2: Greer Valley. 2015. Bronze plaque dedicated to H.F Verwoerd. This photograph was taken in the Accounting and Statistics building at Stellenbosch University in March, 2015.	84
Figure 3: Mail and Guardian. 2015.	85
Figure 4: Ashraf Hendricks. 2015. Stellenbosch University students and staff gather at the Accounting & Statistics building for the removal of the H. F. Verwoerd commemorative plaque. Open Stellenbosch staged a silent protest at the ceremony.	85
Figure 5: Jason Boud. 2015. District Six Museum interior showing central map.	86
Figure 6: District Six Museum. 2016. Suitcase Exhibition.	86
Figure 7: Hans Haacke. 1974. Manet Projekt 74. Installation view.	87
Figure 8: Hans Haacke. 1974. Manet Projekt 74. Panel detail.	87
Figure 9: Fred Wilson. 1992. Metalwork. Installation.	88
Figure 10: Fred Wilson. 1992. Cabinet Making. Installation.	88
Figure 11: Renée Green. 1992-93 Commemorative Toile (Vienna). Installation.	89
Figure 12: Renee Green. 1997. Partially Buried in three parts. Video Installation.	89
Figure 13: Pedro Lasch. 2014. Black Mirror. Installation.	90
Figure 14: Pedro Lasch. 2014. Black Mirror. Installation.	90
Figure 15: Chimurenga. 2015. Installation detail.	91
Figure 16: Chimurenga. 2015. Installation.	91
Figure 17: Greer Valley. 2015. Eye chart.	92
Figure 18: Greer Valley. 2015. Hair colour chart.	92
Figure 19: Greer Valley. 2014. Africana.	93
Figure 20: Greer Valley. 2014. Africana.	93
Figure 21: Greer Valley. 2015. Anthropology room, Stellenbosch University Museum.	94
Figure 22: Greer Valley. 2015. Anthropology display.	94
Figure 23: Greer Valley. 2015. Stellenbosch University museum archival storeroom.	95
Figure 24: Greer Valley. 2015. Stellenbosch University museum archival storeroom.	95
Figure 25: Greer Valley. 2015. Anthropology and cultural history index cards.	96
Figure 26: Greer Valley. 2015. Archival storeroom, Stellenbosch university museum.	96
Figure 27: Irene Grobbelaar-Lenoble. 2015. The Chair. Inzync poetry interview.	97
Figure 28: Irene Grobbelaar-Lenoble. 2015. The Chair. Inzync poetry presentation.	97
Figure 29: Greer Valley. 2015. The Chair. Map and index.	98
Figure 30: Greer Valley. 2015. The Chair. Installation view.	98
Figure 31: Nicola Kaden. 2015. The Chair. Exhibition flyer.	99
Figure 32: Greer Valley. 2015. The Chair. Installation view.	99
Figure 33: Greer Valley. 2015. The Chair. Installation view.	100
Figure 34: Greer Valley. 2015. The Chair. Installation view.	100
Figure 35: Greer Valley. 2015. The Chair. Installation view.	101
Figure 36: Greer Valley. 2015. The Chair. Installation view.	101

Figure 37: Greer Valley. 2015. The Chair. Performance: Diff vs D.F.	102
Figure 38: Greer Valley. 2015. The Chair. Performance.....	102

1 Introduction

1.1 Background Context and Motivation for this Study

South Africa can be characterised by its cultural, racial and political complexity and diversity. More than two decades into its democracy, the country is still plagued by high levels of inequality that have developed alongside increasing urbanisation and inherited patterns of affluence and poverty. Melissa Steyn (2001) argues that relations between cultural groups carry the “imprints of the colonial history out of which the country is still emerging” (Steyn, 2001: xxiii). South Africa’s colonial period lasted three hundred and fifty years that had a direct influence on its period of apartheid rule that began in 1948, when the Afrikaner-dominated National Party came into power, and lasted to 1994. However, it would be too simplistic to view this period or its ongoing “psychological and social effects” as simply beginning suddenly in 1948 and ending abruptly in 1994 (Peffer, 2009: xvi). John Peffer (2009) corroborates, “[formal]¹ apartheid was a development of earlier tendencies of the state, and it took thirty years to put in place, only to disintegrate from then on. Much of the separatist legislation enacted after 1948 merely hardened a model for white minority rule in Africa that was derived from nineteenth-century British colonial policies” (2009: xvi). This colonial legacy is visible through patterns of spatial inequality and social polarisation reflected in South Africa’s built environment but also through colonial statues and buildings which act as a constant reminder of this past in the present. Arguably, nowhere in South Africa is this colonial history more visible than the Western Cape, South Africa’s most southern province.

This master’s study is conducted in Stellenbosch, a university town in the Western Cape where I first enrolled for postgraduate studies at Stellenbosch University in 2013. The official museum for the town of Stellenbosch, the Stellenbosch Village Museum, makes use of a digital timeline to represent the history of the town of Stellenbosch – a history that supposedly ‘begins’ with the arrival of the first governor of the Cape Colony, Simon van der Stel in 1679 (Figure 1). This constructed chronology creates the impression that Stellenbosch was an empty land with little or no history worth mentioning, supposedly ready to be inhabited by European settlers. The concept of time is viewed throughout this museum as something that can be divided into separate segments and moments

¹ I use ‘formal’ here to problematise the notion that the end of the apartheid state translates to the ending of apartheid’s effects, including racialised distribution of wealth, systemic oppression and socio-spatial segregation.

Introduction

that are isolated from each other and from the present. However, as the Haitian scholar, Michel-Rolph Trouillot² (1995: 147) contends, the divide between past and present is constructed. What happened in the past affects what happens in the present and as Trouillot argues, “time is not mere chronological continuity. It is the range of disjointed moments, practices, and symbols that thread the historical relations between events and the narrative” (1995: 146). In this regard, Trouillot writes about the presence of the past, arguing that the past is present and that present struggles rooted in the past must be addressed.

The presence of the past is felt in Stellenbosch. The town is spatially polarised and bears the social scars of the ideologies and policies of the apartheid state more than twenty years into democracy. Stellenbosch is spatially fragmented with clear divisions between white residential areas and black residential areas. It is also evident that the ‘dop’ system, a system where farm labourers are paid in alcohol still has pervasive effects.³ London (1999) argues that even after formal apartheid ended, the alcohol dependency that this system created, kept farm workers trapped in cycles of poverty.

Stellenbosch University played a significant role in the design and maintenance of apartheid. In 2014, when I began to research the material culture of the institution, I came across a bronze plaque in the foyer of the Accounting and Statistics building which was dedicated to honour the memory of Hendrik Frensch (H.F) Verwoerd, former head of the ‘Volkekunde’ (Ethnography) Department at Stellenbosch University and former prime minister of South Africa. This plaque read, “In grateful memory of the honourable H.F Verwoerd, prime minister of the Republic of South Africa, after whom this building was named on 3 April 1963 and on 6 September 1966 died in the service of his people” (Figure 2). H.F Verwoerd is known for rigidly implementing apartheid policies and was a firm believer in racial hierarchy and the superiority of the white race. In May of the following year, corresponding with the emergence of the 2015 student activist movements (which took on various articulations across university campuses nationwide and persists into 2016), this bronze plaque was ceremoniously taken down by the (then) newly-appointed Stellenbosch University rector Wim de

2 A crucial part of Michel Rolph Trouillot’s thesis is that much of the past, even the past that is preserved in records, gets silenced or passed over and pushed to the background. Trouillot’s model of the relationship between the past and the present proposes that the meaning of the past is continuously renewed, based on changing contexts in the present.

3 A 1998 study published in the South African Medical Journal documents the number of farms operating a ‘dop’ system to establish the number of farm workers effected. It concluded there was a 9.5% prevalence of farms implementing this system with 780 workers affected (Naude, London and Mahamed, 1998: 1102-1105).

Introduction

Villiers. In attendance were members of the rector's management team, members of the student and staff body, members of the pressure group Open Stellenbosch and H.F Verwoerd's grandson, Wilhelm Verwoerd (this event is discussed in further detail in the following chapter). Another apartheid era figure who until recently had a building named after him, was Daniel Francois (D.F) Malan, former university chancellor and first prime minister of the apartheid state. The D.F Malan Memorial Center where the university's graduation ceremonies are held, was renamed Coetzenburg Sports Center in 2014. A bronze bust of Malan was unceremoniously removed from the forecourt of this building in 2015 and is currently housed in the Stellenbosch University Museum archives. D.F Malan and H.F Verwoerd are both considered to be the architects of apartheid – Malan first used the term 'apartheid' in the 1930s as a means to distance his party from British traditions of liberalism and the earlier policy of segregation, which he saw as too lenient towards the black population. Meanwhile Verwoerd, educated in the Netherlands, the United States, and Germany, was the main ideologue of apartheid. He became Native Affairs Minister in the early 1950s and Prime Minister in 1958. Until 2015, Stellenbosch University had thus seemingly celebrated these former apartheid heads of state through its material culture— the traces of apartheid that had been left uncontested. These issues form the basis of my critical reading of and curatorial intervention into exhibition displays in the Stellenbosch area, and it will be revisited in the following chapters.

Another troubling reminder of the university's apartheid legacy is the anthropology display in the Stellenbosch University Museum, which is reflective of colonial thinking about African cultural groups as separated into types. Ethnographic displays are critiqued in contemporary museology discourse—specifically their use as a colonial tool that institutionalised notions of cultural authenticity where 'tribal specific' styles were used as objective indicators to establish administrative units and plan labour policies (Svasek, 2007). In South Africa, advocates of apartheid often claimed that apartheid was founded on the just principles of 'unity in diversity' and that the country's politics were based on a system of positive recognition of human difference (Dubouw, 2005). The specialised field of 'volkekunde' emerged in the 1920s to validate these claims and to legitimise the establishment of the Bantustan states via the Bantu Authorities Act passed by D.F Malan's administration in 1951. As the art historian, Annie Coombes (1994: 160) argues, "because of the concentration on the relation of 'physical evidence' to mental and inherited characteristics, the association of the African body with displays of material culture did much to encourage the conflation of living Africans with inert specimens". From personal experience as a student at Stellenbosch University over the past three years, my perception is that despite its legacy, the

Introduction

university hasn't made sufficient strides towards redress. As the recent (2015 – 2016) responses to student activism by the rector's management team attest (which sees the excessive militarization of the campus and preemptive disciplinary measures that are taken against student activists), and as the subsequent social fragmentation this has caused in its community highlights, matters of transformation and redress need to be dealt with urgently.

Carolyn Hamilton and Elizabeth Rankin (1999: 3) argue that the "great museums of England and Europe in the nineteenth century were intimately connected with the promotion of imperialism and industrialization, while museums in the colonies played an important role in underpinning settler ideologies and, later, in the South African case, apartheid". As a result, museums in South Africa face substantial challenges to address these legacies. Post-1994 national responses to South Africa's inherited material culture, reflect the first democratically elected ANC government's reconciliatory approach. It appears that in order to foster a sense of national unity, the 1994 dispensation's objective was to appease the country's white minority by leaving many of Apartheid's monuments unscathed, while building their own national legacy projects (e.g Robben Island Museum and Freedom Park). This hands-off approach to adjusting South Africa's memory landscape is apparent in the way that the icons of colonialism continue to exist in their visibly unaltered state throughout South Africa's major cities. As the University of KwaZulu Natal scholar, Sabine Marschall (2009: 148) writes,

Heritage officials in particular are well aware of the great importance communities in South Africa across the racial and ideological spectrum attach to their political icons and the heritage sector would hardly dare engaging in ventures that might undermine its widely perceived role as contributing to morally elevated societal goals, such as community empowerment, reconciliation, education and nation-building.

Marshall (2009: 40) argues that no concrete guidelines or criteria have yet been developed in order to facilitate the removal of selected colonial and Apartheid era monuments, and "the process of removal is acknowledged as being contentious and divisive, whereas the installation of new monuments is presented as an inclusive, unifying act, conducive to nation building and

Introduction

reconciliation”, which formed the basis of the national rhetoric of South Africa since Desmond Tutu coined the term ‘Rainbow Nation’⁴ in 1994.

What is the relation between what is being broken down and what is emerging? Coombes writes that “in many ways, South Africa is anachronistic in the extreme” (2004: 5) referring to the paradox where in one way, South Africa bears resemblance to highly developed capitalist states and in another “shares many of the problems of developing nations states with histories of extremes of unevenly distributed wealth” (Coombes, 2004: 5). Zayd Minty (2006) argues that while South Africa still finds itself in a space of transition, the end of formal apartheid in South Africa provides a valuable space for cultural “reimaginings” that potentially provide opportunities for redress. Referring to ephemeral, public, interventionist work he writes, “many artworks have specific resonance passing only in time: with South Africa in flux, passing interventions speak to the time in which they are made. Even when erased, especially when documented or written about, the debate they spark continues” (2006: 438).

1.2 Outline of the Problem to be Investigated

For many black South Africans, monuments, plaques and statues are symbolic reminders of the lingering presence and effects of South Africa’s colonial past. Marschall argues that the meanings of symbolic markers such as monuments are not simply made up of unalterable historical facts or values but that they are “containers for a host of meanings which can be activated by individuals and societal groupings in different socio-political contexts” (2009: 167).

What is clear in the above quote, as well as the context sketched out this far, is that there are sites tasked with displaying material culture in Stellenbosch that need urgent intervention. Perhaps institutions such as the Stellenbosch University Museum are well positioned to take the lead in such endeavours of redress by making its collections and exhibition spaces available for intervention by artists. This could be achieved via a transparent invitation and selection process to disrupt the

⁴ The term ‘rainbow nation’ has become a national (and global) metaphor for post-apartheid South Africa. It refers to the country’s diversity and its definition references the allegory Noah and the Flood, where the rainbow served as a sign of God’s promise to never wreak vengeance on humanity again. Its creator, Desmond Tutu, gave the term global appeal. (Evans, 2010: 1).

Introduction

language and visual coding of the exhibitions it houses (in terms of materiality, scale and accompanying text) to permanently alter its meaning and the ways in which it is read by present and future generations (Valley, 2015). In the context of my own master's research, this practice-based study investigates whether interventionist art practices could be employed in the Stellenbosch University Museum to offer opportunities to contribute towards change within the museum itself, as well as the larger institutional context of Stellenbosch University.

1.3 Research Question and Objectives

Institutional critique has been applied with some success by artists of the global north, particularly during the period between the 1960s and 1980s to highlight and question the museum's role as an ideological institution that "produces and sustains past and present political and social formations" (González, 2008: 68). In this study, I question whether the artistic strategies of institutional critique can be adopted to my own artistic and curatorial practice in Stellenbosch and whether this is sufficient to address the colonial traces evident in the material culture of the Stellenbosch University museum. The main research question this study will address is, whether temporary, interventionist exhibitions in the museums institution (which are intended to unsettle problematic and difficult pasts), facilitate a process of self-reflexivity amongst its audience? Hinged on this is the question of whether new knowledge can be produced within a context that is still marked by deep-seated racist attitudes and a patriarchal institutional culture?

These questions frame the objective of this study, which is to explore whether interventionist strategies of institutional critique and decolonial aesthetics can be applied in the Stellenbosch University Museum to unsettle existing institutional representations of knowledge.

1.4 Research Methodology

Against the backdrop of the cultural and social context of the research objective and questions, a qualitative research methodology is utilised in this study. Qualitative research is distinguished from quantitative research in that it values processes and entities with their meanings, which cannot be experimentally examined or measured (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008: 14). Furthermore, qualitative research methods explore the "socially constructed nature of reality, the intimate relationship of researcher and what is studied and the situational constraints that shape inquiry" (Denzin & Lincoln,

Introduction

2008: 14). Qualitative based field research is conducted in Stellenbosch using processes of practice-based research and reflective curatorial practice.

This study makes use of practice-based research to question how interventionist curatorial practice might assist the museum audience to unlearn knowledge and how it might produce new knowledge. I use Linda Candy's (2006: 1) definition of practice-based research – a form of research that she argues:

Is an investigation undertaken in order to gain new knowledge partly by means of practice and the outcomes of that practice. Claims of originality and contribution to knowledge may be demonstrated through creative outcomes which may include artefacts such as images, music, designs, models, digital media or other outcomes such as performances and exhibitions.

Highlighting the distinction between creative practice and practice-based research, Stephen Scrivener (2002) argues that the critical difference is that practice-based research aims to generate culturally significant work that is not only significant to the creator or individual observers of an artifact, and it is this that distinguishes the researcher from the practitioner (Scrivener, 2002).

To address the question of how interventionist, curatorial practice might assist the museum to produce new knowledge, I turn to Donald Schön's (1986) *The Reflective Practitioner: How Professionals Think in Action* to understand how creative practitioners produce knowledge through action. Schön (1986: 40) argues:

In real-world practice, problems do not present themselves to the practitioner as given. They must be constructed from the materials of problem situations which are puzzling, troubling, and uncertain. Problem setting is a process in which, interactively, we name the things to which we will attend and frame the context in which we will attend to them.

Schön advocates a shift from problem-solving to problem-setting, insofar as he argues, "let us search, instead, for an epistemology of practice implicit in the artistic, intuitive processes which some practitioners do bring to situations of uncertainty [and] instability" (1986: 49).

Introduction

Schön's proposal is that much of the activity reflective practice is personal knowledge that is "usually articulated, sometimes indescribable, and that it relies on improvisation learned in practice". It is "knowing-in-action, the characteristic mode of ordinary practical knowledge. This kind of 'knowing' is dynamic knowing how rather than knowing what" (Gray and Mulins, 2004: 22). Raul Gschrey (2016) also argues that "rather than agents in the production of factual knowledge, curators could be described as moderators in the emergence of insights and perspectives and facilitators in the establishing of individual positions and attitudes" (Gschrey, 2016: para 3). To meet the objective of this study, I concur with the argument Gschrey presents "that curatorial practice can be employed as an effective means of "posing questions, raising awareness, and initiating discussions" (2016: para 3). In my personal experience, the practice of curatorship offers a middle ground between academic research and artistic practice. Through its methodology, it can allow for "more open ways of addressing material culture and "challenges the linearity and decisiveness of academic reasoning and allows for a less hierarchical and a more open-ended and associative occupation with topics, ideas, and artifacts" (Gschrey, 2016: para 4). Hence, it can offer opportunities for developing reflexive, practice-based form of academic research. Drawing on these ideas on practice-based research, this study uses recorded and performed dialogues and conversations, unstructured interviews, as well as visual, audio and audio-visual documentation to supplement textual research.

1.5 Chapter Outline

Following on this introductory chapter (Chapter 1), Chapter 2 presents the key theories that was drawn upon for this study. This chapter also provides the theoretical framework for the practical component of this study. Theories and textual sources surrounding colonialism, coloniality, decolonialism, and decolonialty are of central importance in this chapter. In addition, sources surrounding the field of institutional critique are drawn upon, where the museological and curatorial turn is also brought into discussion.

Chapter 3 is aimed at developing an understanding of how museums frame the meanings of the cultural artifacts in their collections. As such, this chapter presents an overview of developments in museological practice and briefly discusses the museum's trajectory, from its inception as a public institution rooted in modernity to contemporary understandings of the museum as a reflective space of dialogue. As a case study, this chapter presents the District Six Museum as an example of a contemporary post-apartheid museum that engages in critical citizenship in the quest for

Introduction

producing new knowledge. This case study is specifically references for its potential to bring erased and subaltern memories to the surface of public knowledge – an idea that resonates with my own curatorial practice.

Chapter 4 focuses on the manner in which systems of knowledge and representations of culture can potentially be decolonized. To address questions of whether curatorial interventions in museums can lead to institutional change, key discussions on and examples of institutional critique are presented in this chapter to investigate how these concepts have been applied. In order to imagine a decolonial curatorial or artistic practice, it is important to define the parameters from which decoloniality emerges. These are discussed in Chapter 4 to achieve a working definition of decoloniality and decolonial aesthetics.

From this basis, Chapter 5 looks at my own curatorial intervention into the Stellenbosch University Museum archive, which took the form of my practical exhibition work, entitled *The Chair*. This chapter elaborates on the site of the exhibition *The Chair* by means of a contextual discussion of the Stellenbosch University Museum, where this work was conceptualised and executed. In addition, this chapter draws on the previous examples and theories as they were laid out in the preceding chapter, and shows how such ideas and practices resonate with my own research.

Lastly, I conclude my study in Chapter 6, where I assimilate key insights, offer a (potential) conclusion to my research practices and suggest future areas that might be expanded on in subsequent research projects.

Key Concepts

2 Key Concepts

This chapter provides a summary of key theories and concepts that are referred to throughout this study and which informed the exhibition *The Chair*. Key concepts include colonialism, coloniality, and decoloniality, institutional critique, as well as the museological and curatorial turn.

2.1 Colonialism, Coloniality, Decoloniality

While colonialism, coloniality and decoloniality are somewhat related to each other, they are distinguished by specific theoretical applications and will be elaborated on in this section. When looking at the first term, colonialism, it is important to take into account the expansion of western empires in the 19th century, which resulted in nine-tenths of the entire land-surface of the globe to be in European control (Young, 2003 :2). Colonial and imperial rule was legitimised by anthropological theories which Robert Young (2003) argues, “increasingly portrayed the peoples of the colonised world as inferior, childlike or feminine and incapable of looking after themselves, and requiring the paternal rule of the west for their own best interests. The basis of these anthropological theories was the concept of race” (Young, 2003: 2). In this system, European (white) knowledge and culture was constructed as superior, legitimate and civilised whereas African (black) culture was constructed as inferior, primitive and uncivilised. In Mahmoud Mamdani’s (1996) seminal text, *Citizen and Subject*, his focus is on the legacy of colonialism which he argues has remained more or less intact (1996: 5). In a similar vein, Frantz Fanon, the Martiniquan scholar, stressed the structural continuities of colonialism. In *On national culture*, an essay in *The Wretched of The Earth*, Fanon (1967) argues “colonialism is not simply content to impose its rule upon the present and the future of a dominated country. Colonialism is not satisfied merely with holding a people in its grip and emptying the native’s brain of all form and content. By a kind of perverse logic, it turns to the past of the oppressed people and distorts it, disfigures and destroys it” (1967: 37). For Edward Said, colonialism is also “the implanting of settlements on distant territory” (1994: 9). Commenting on the nature of colonial rule as imperialist in nature, Said argues that it is “the practice, the theory, and the attitudes of a dominating metropolitan centre ruling a distant territory (1994: 9). Walter Rodney (1973) also argues that colonial Africa formed part of a system of an interconnected, global capitalist economy. As he contends, “colonialism was not merely a system of exploitation but one whose central purpose was to repatriate the profits of the colonies to the so-called mother country” (Rodney, 1973: 162-3). Colonial powers amassed great wealth that they

Key Concepts

acquired in part through the exploitation of African workers. Racist theory about the inferiority of Africans was used to justify exploitative labour practices, which was sustained through the power monopoly the colonial regimes achieved by crushing all opposition with armed force. Frantz Fanon defines colonialism as the complete subjugation of a racial, ethnic, religious or other group defined according to shared characteristics (1976: 32). Fanon argues that “colonialism is not a thinking machine, nor a body endowed with reasoning faculties” (Fanon, 1967: 48). For Fanon, structural violence as the cornerstone of colonial rule and colonialism as violence in its natural state and will only yield when confronted with greater violence (Fanon, 1967: 48).

While colonialism needs a geopolitical core and a geopolitical periphery, coloniality is a system of power relations that can exist even after the end of formal colonialism. Therefore the existence of coloniality is not dependent on formal colonialism. In *Decolonial Aesthetics: Colonial Wounds/Decolonial Healings*, Walter D. Mignolo argues, “coloniality is the continuing hidden process of expropriation, exploitation, pollution and corruption that underlies the narrative of modernity, as promoted by institutions and actors belonging to corporations, industrialised nation-states, museums, and research institutions” (2013: para 1).

Anibal Quijano, regarded as one of the founding thinkers of the decolonial movement, uses the phrase “coloniality of power” to name the structures of power, control and hegemony that have emerged during the modernist era, which he argues, stretches from the colonial period to the present. Quijano developed the concept of coloniality which Walter D. Mignolo (2007) refers to as the “invisible and constitutive side of modernity” in the article titled *colonialidad y modernidad-racionalidad* where he links coloniality of power in the political and economic spheres with the coloniality of knowledge (Mignolo, 2007: 451). In this text, Quijano (1992) argues that a new world order emerged from the conquests of lands in the global south during colonialism which culminates in global capitalism 500 years later. Walter D. Mignolo (2007) argues that modernity as a global universal process continuously reproduces coloniality. Critiquing the notion of a Totality which excludes all other totalities, Mignolo (2007) argues that Quijano’s concept of decoloniality of power moves in two simultaneous directions: analytic and programmatic. As an analytic concept, “coloniality has opened up the re-construction and the restitution of silenced histories, repressed subjectivities, subalternised knowledges and languages performed by the Totality depicted under the names of modernity and rationality” (Mignolo, 2007: 451). The programmatic direction Mignolo argues is manifested in Quijano’s text as a delinking on which Mignolo elaborates:

Key Concepts

A delinking that leads to de-colonial epistemic shift and brings to the foreground other epistemologies, other principles of knowledge and understanding and, consequently, other economy, other politics, other ethics. 'New inter-cultural communication' should be interpreted as new inter-epistemic communication. Furthermore, de-linking presupposes to move toward a geo- and body politics of knowledge that on the one hand denounces the pretended universality of a particular ethnicity (body politics), located in a specific part of the planet (geo-politics), that is, Europe where capitalism accumulated as a consequence of colonialism. De-linking then shall be understood as a de-colonial epistemic shift leading to other-universality, that is, to pluri-versality as a universal project. (Mignolo, 2007: 453).

Decoloniality has its origins in the global South and its historical grounding in the Bandung Conference of 1955 in which 29 countries from Europe and Asia gathered. The main goal of the conference was to find a common ground and vision for the future that was neither centered on capitalism nor communism (Mignolo, 2011: para 1). Mignolo argues that decoloniality is an option, "the decolonial opens up a way of thinking that delinks from the chronologies of new epistemes or new paradigms (modern, postmodern, alter modern, Newtonian science, quantum theory, the theory of relativity etc)" (Mignolo, 2011: para 1). In *Thinking through the Decolonial Turn: Post-Continental Interventions in Theory and Critique*, Nelson Maldonado-Torres (2011) argues that decoloniality has always existed alongside modernity and is an unfinished project which is still unfolding. Maldonado-Torres argues that a decolonial turn has emerged in the domain of knowledge from the global south in the fields of theory, philosophy and critical thought and the main aim of this movement is to decolonise knowledge, power and being, including institutions such as the university (Maldonado-Torres, 2011).

Decolonial thinkers call for "radical exercises of un-thinking, de-disciplining, and re-educating (Maldonado-Torres, 2014). In the field of art theory, the main contribution has been the concept of decolonial aesthetics where "Mignolo suggests that Kant's theorisation of aesthetics was the cognitive operation that marked the colonization of aesthetics, a process that led to the devaluing of any sensory experience conceptualised outside of European aesthetic categories" (Muñiz Reed, 2015: 15). Mignolo proposes decolonial aesthetics as a counter concept, which becomes a "confrontation with modern aesthetics and its aftermath (postmodern and altermodern aesthetics) to decolonise the regulation of sensing all the sensations to which our bodies respond, from culture

Key Concepts

as well as from nature” (Muñiz Reed, 2015: 15). Muñiz Reed elaborates on the decolonial critique on postmodern and postcolonial discourse:

A decolonial critique of postmodern and postcolonial discourses is that although they focus on understanding the aftermath of colonialism, this exists within the frame of European Philosophy with little attention given to the problems arising outside of Europe. Although postcolonial theory is considered valuable for analyzing and critiquing imperial structures, decolonialists argue that ultimately, by operating within the academy and through European-generated categories, they construct a Eurocentric critique of Eurocentricism. (Muñiz Reed, 2015: 16).

To make sense of the systemic nature of colonialism, Mignolo (2009: 160) writes: “who and when, why and where is knowledge generated ... why did euro-centered epistemology conceal its own geo-historical bio-graphical locations and succeed in creating the idea of universal knowledge as if the knowing subject were also universal?”

2.2 Institutional Critique

In *Objects and Others: Essays on Material Culture*, George Stocking (1988: 11) argues that, in the world of ethnography and anthropology, the emergence of a “new national consciousness in the aftermath of the colonial era, during a period of heightened domestic radicalism in the centres of European power called into question the traditional relationships of objects and others in the museum environment”. In a world ‘beyond’ or counter to modernist discourses, pluralism, heterogeneity and relative truth are of the utmost importance. In this context, the relevance of museum practices and practitioners as guardians of their collections of the museum becomes questionable (Keene, 2006: 187).

In the late 1960s, Western European and American artists and curators began to critique the logic and practice of museums, questioning how they come into being, their practice and how their collections are acquired (Alberro, 2009: 5). The development in the critique of the museum as an ideological institution that produces and sustains political and social formations came from growth in the fine arts, as well as in museum studies, which is known as institutional critique. The anti-authoritarian spirit of the time led to a critique of the way in which institutions were the “means in

Key Concepts

which authority exercised itself and were thus the embodiment of conservation and constriction, of untruth and unfreedom, of illegitimate authority” (Stimson, 2009: 22). This anti-authoritarianism is strongly aligned with postmodern ideas in which a questioning disposition is highly valued. Artists drew on this anti-authoritarian stance as a vehicle for playing a critical activist role and to draw “attention to museums as institutions that produce ideologies of cultural containment, cultural hierarchy and cultural legitimacy” (González, 2008: 66). Douglas Crimp claims in this regard that practices of postmodern art sought to undermine the modernist principles on which museums and their taxonomic structures have originally been based (cited in Gonzalez 2008: 67). This delegitimisation of absolute truths, history, originality and authenticity allowed for new discourses and museum practices to emerge. In the United States, artists working within the framework of institutional critique were inspired by the Civil Rights Movement and challenged museums to be more inclusive — arguing for, amongst other objectives, to solicit work from those historically excluded like women and people of colour.

Institutional critique comprises of two concepts. Andrea Fraser, a performance artist and leading author on institutional critique, explains that post-1969 western society saw the emergence of the institution of art. This included “not just the museum, nor even the sites of production, distribution and reception of art, but the entire field of art as a social universe” (Fraser, 2005: 2). Another important concept is that of the modernist metanarrative or grand-narrative of the nation-state which institutional critique aimed to expose and debunk. The fundamental postmodernist claim is that the notion of objective reconstruction according the evidence is myth (Butler, 2002: 32). According to Alun Munslow, all “meaning is generated by socially encoded and constructed discursive practices that mediate reality so much that they effectively close off direct access to it” (cited in Butler 2002: 32). The postmodernist position is that history is essentially a narrative, constructed in the same way and using similar language (tropes and metaphors) to fiction.

Postmodernist practices and theories draw our attention to the fact that, while history is a story, no historian can claim that it is “The Story” (Butler 2002: 33). What postmodernism calls for is an awareness and attentiveness towards the “theoretical assumptions that support the narratives produced by all historians” (Butler 2002: 35) regardless of their theoretical position. In the museum, our access to the past is always mediated through the language of the exhibition, and there are absences, gaps and biases to be dealt with (Butler 2002). Postmodernist theory would posit that, in terms of these challenges, the best we can do to transform the museum and potentially

Key Concepts

demythologise history, is to encourage robust, open debate about the meaning of the past. The danger of the single story approach to history is that it may come to represent some kind of ‘true’ and ‘final’ past that could be tied to dominant ideology within a given society. It becomes difficult to untangle these ideologies when they become tied to subject formation and cultural practice over time.

2.3 The Museological Turn

The museological turn, also referred to as new museology, is a critical reflection on the way museum practices of collecting and exhibiting place certain ideological conditions upon history, culture and what it means to be human. It followed the work by artists who worked within the field of institutional critique who had proclaimed that all representation is political and who articulated this through work that formulated a critique of the museum. In *The New Museology*, Peter Vergo expressed that the old museology was too much about museum methods and too little about the purposes of museums (Vergo, 1989: 3). New museology looks at what museums don’t say (what is both implicit and explicit), and theorists within this field have called for the transformation of the museum from a site of worship and awe to one of discourse and critical reflection that is committed to examining unsettling histories with sensitivity to all parties. This idea resonates strongly with my own work and it forms the basis of my curatorial research methodology.

2.4 The Curatorial Turn

In *The Curatorial Turn: From Practice to Discourse*, Paul O’Neill (2007) traces the trajectory of the curatorial turn, and he argues that “curatorial criticism differed from the tradition of art criticism (linked to modernity) in that its discourse and subject matter went beyond discussion about artists and the subject of art to include curating and the role played by the curator of exhibitions” (2007: 15). O’Neill draws attention to rise in popularity (and perhaps renewed interest) in exhibitions, art fairs and biennials in which the curator occupies a central position. O’Neill cites Alex Farquarson who points out that the “recent appearance of the verb ‘to curate’ indicates the growth and vitality of discussion around curating” (O’Neill, 2007: 15). There has been a shift towards thinking of the curator *as carer* to the curator *as creator*, or occupying a more prominent role in adding value and meaning to the artwork. O’Neill argues that,

Key Concepts

“the curatorial gesture is self-referential, curator-centred and, most evidently, in a constant state of flux: curatorial knowledge is now becoming a mode of discourse with unstable historical foundations ... Curating is ‘becoming discourse’ where curators are willing themselves to be the key subject and producer of this discourse”. (O’Neill, 2007: 26).

By drawing on the theoretical framework set out in this chapter, I investigate the museums as a site for meaning production in the next chapter, where the terms and ideas that were introduced and examined in this chapter will be expanded upon.

3 Museums and Meaning Production

Fundamentally dialectical, the museum serves both as a burial chamber of the past - with all that entails in terms of decay, erosion, forgetting - and as a site of possible resurrections, however mediated and contaminated, in the eyes of the beholder. No matter how much the museum, consciously or unconsciously, produces and affirms the symbolic order, there is always a surplus of meaning that exceeds set ideological boundaries, opening spaces for reflection and counter hegemonic memory.

Andreas Huyssen, *Twilight Memories* (2012: 15).

In *Curating Difficult Knowledge*, Erica Lehrer and Cynthia E. Milton (2011: 1) ask, “what happens when the invisible is made visible, when knowledge relegated to society’s margins or swept under its carpet is suddenly inserted into the public domain? Who should look, at what, how, and to what end?” Sometimes, as could be said of monuments, this public footprint on memory-making and contesting takes the form of “commodification, graffiti and vandalism” (Lehrer and Milton, 2011: 3). Lehrer and Milton suggest that “new knowledge emerges when we consider memory ... not simply as latent in the social fabric, nor only in top-down efforts ... to encode preferred memory, but also as it is ... deployed by individuals and groups in attempts to provoke, enable and transform”(2011: 3).

In March 2015, students from the University of Cape Town’s Rhodes Must Fall movement⁵ and their supporters lobbied the university council to remove a bronze statue of the British imperialist, businessman and mining magnet, Cecil John Rhodes⁶ from its prominent position on the institution’s upper campus (Figure 3). The movement began when student-activist Chumani Maxwele threw the contents of a portable toilet canister over the statue of Cecil John Rhodes in what he called a public art protest against “white arrogance”. As Kim Gurney (2015: 29) writes, “this

⁵ The Rhodes Must Fall movement is described on its website as “a collective movement of students and staff members mobilising for direct action against the reality of institutional racism at the University of Cape Town. The movement formed as a direct result of the Open Air dialogue that took place on Thursday 12th of March at the University of Cape Town” (Rhodes Must Fall, 2015).

⁶ Cecil John Rhodes (1853-1902) was a mining magnate and a member of parliament in the Cape Colony. He has been described as an “arch imperialist” who believed, above all else, in the glory of the British Empire and the superiority of the Englishman and British Rule. Rhodes saw it as his God-given task to expand the Empire, not only for the good of that Empire, but as he believed for the good of all peoples over whom she would rule (SA History Online, 2016).

Museums and meaning production

set off a series of further interventions on the statue itself [which] in turn spurred action against other so-called dead monuments in the country". Both the South African Minister of Higher Education and Training, Blade Nzimande and the Vice Chancellor of the University of Cape Town, Max Price, agreed that the statue should be removed. According to them, the appropriate place for the statue to be have been moved to was the museum, where it could be recontextualised. The media statement released by the department of Higher Education (2015) reads:

[The] Minister also welcomes the statement by the Vice Chancellor, Dr Max Price, that the statue should be removed from its prominent position but not destroyed. It should be indoors, possibly in a museum. Cecil Rhodes played a significant – if brutal – role in our history and this must be remembered. History cannot be swept under the carpet, but this does not mean that we should celebrate its most dubious and anti-democratic characters who used their ill-gotten power to promote bigotry and the subjugation of Africa's indigenous people. (Nzimande, 2015).

The Rhodes Must Fall movement has argued that calls to remove the statue are symbolic of the need for, amongst other objectives, the decolonisation of the university curriculum, addressing the slow changes in staff and student composition in terms of race and gender, and to attend to the exclusionary culture of the university as institution. A month after the highly publicised lifting of the Rhodes statue from its perch, students at the University of Stellenbosch in the Western Cape responded to calls for transformation and redress at their own institution by forming the student activist group Open Stellenbosch.⁷ Although not placing the same emphasis on visual redress as their University of Cape Town peers,⁸ pressure from this group resulted in the ceremonial removal of a bronze plaque dedicated to the former Apartheid National Party minister and Vice Chancellor of the university H.F Verwoerd from the Accounting and Statistics building in May 2015. At the ceremony attended by the Rector, Vice Rectors, invited guests, faculty and students, Verwoerd's grandson, Wilhelm Verwoerd addressed the crowd saying, "I choose salve instead of salt as a

⁷ In April 2015, students and staff from Stellenbosch University formed Open Stellenbosch, "a collective of students and staff working to purge the oppressive remnants of apartheid in pursuit of a truly African university" (description on the social media site, Facebook). From May 2015 until early 2016, Open Stellenbosch protested against the lack of post-1994 institutional transformation at Stellenbosch University highlighting, inter alia, the discriminatory ways in which the (current) official university language policy (2014) is implemented at the university.

⁸ Stellenbosch University's approach to visual redress will be investigated later in this thesis through the discussion on the material culture of the Stellenbosch University Museum in Chapter 5.

Museums and meaning production

Verwoerd. I see the woundedness of black South Africans.” Open Stellenbosch held a silent protest during the ceremony, holding up posters with a red cross through the old South African flag, symbolic of the presence of the university's apartheid and colonial past, which they felt this plaque was emblematic of (Figure 4). In an article in the Daily Maverick, Neil du Toit, an Open Stellenbosch member writes, “that Stellenbosch University (SU), a public institution, took 21 years of democracy to realise that a plaque celebrating Hendrik Verwoerd should probably be taken down, is a strong outward indication of the strength of the institutional culture that continues to fester untreated within the Stellenbosch community” (Du Toit, 2015).

Again, it was suggested by the university's management⁹ that the plaque should be housed in the Stellenbosch University archives:

The removal of the plaque forms part of the assessment of all visual elements and symbols on campus, among which the names of buildings, to determine obstacles in the path of unity that should be removed or contextualised (Stellenbosch University, 2015).

As Wamuwi Mbao (2016) reflects, “the oddly neutered language ('visual elements and symbols') that yields nothing (and thus a lot) of the university's ideological position, and the banality of 'the path of unity', a path seemingly littered with historical bric-a-brac to trip up the unwary. The gloss misleads, drawing our attention away from the fact that these objects continue to be given a safe harbor”. This moment presents interesting opportunities in terms of questioning the visual redress that has occurred thus far in the post-1994 South African built environment and sites concerned with the country's material culture. It has brought public attention to the successes and failures of

⁹ In a statement on the University website in April 2015, Stellenbosch University management confirmed their decision to remove the HF Verwoerd plaque. According to the statement, the plaque was to be removed from the wall of the Accounting and Statistics building “and placed in the University Museum and properly contextualised” (Stellenbosch University, 2015).

Museums and meaning production

the idea of the South African 'rainbow nation',¹⁰ and raised questions about the meaning of objects, particularly objects concerned with the representation of local histories. This moment also resonates with larger frames of thought surrounding the spaces that are locally available for stories that have been absent or silenced in the past, whilst presenting the opportunity for robust debates and discussions around transformation at South African tertiary institutions. Kim Gurney writes of the plinth left empty subsequent to the removal of the Rhodes statue, "[It] signals the politics and poetics of the void. It makes evident what is missing in the public sphere, and visually marks an open challenge: what do we do with the unfinished business of the past?" (Gurney, 2015: 30).

In a public lecture that formed part of the *Indexing The Human*¹¹ seminar series at Stellenbosch University in April 2015, prominent African scholar Achille Mbembe argued that the removal of the Rhodes statue from the University of Cape Town's campus is one of the many ways to demythologise South Africa's history and put it to rest (2015: 3). However, Mbembe points out that, while the statue of Cecil John Rhodes 'belongs' in a museum, the museum institution has itself not yet been subjected to the thorough critique demanded by the times that we find ourselves in. He writes that "a museum properly understood is not a dumping place. It is not a place where we recycle history's waste. It is first and foremost an epistemic space" (Mbembe 2015: 4). When interviewed about housing H.F Verwoerd's commemorative plaque at the university museum, its director, Bongani Mgiijima (2015) expressed similar concerns about the commonly-held assumptions that museums would intuitively know what to do with historically charged objects, such as bronze plaques or busts

10 The notion of the 'rainbow nation' remains contested. Although overused and regarded as cliché, "the phrase 'Rainbow Nation' captures the sense of optimism and anticipation of elemental social transformation" that has invigorated the public subsequent to the establishment of South Africa's democracy in April 1994 (Dubin, 2009: 1). The phrase is attributed to Archbishop Emeritus Desmond Tutu's address at the final public hearing of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) when he said: "as we put our past behind us to stride into the glorious future God holds before us as the rainbow People of God" (Meiring, 1998: 379). Duane Jethro (2015:17) notes that it was one of the first state-sponsored post-apartheid models of nationalism. Jethro argues that "this Christocentric, spectral model of the nation was meant to emphasise South Africa's equality in cultural diversity and racial difference and was intuitively appealing in part because it segued with new symbols of the state like the colourful new national flag and the new amended national anthem" (Jethro, 2015: 17).

11 *Indexing the Human: From Classification to a Critical Politics of Transformation* was a year-long Mellon-funded programme of seminars and workshops initiated by the Department of Sociology and Social Anthropology at Stellenbosch University. The project was inspired by a confrontation with the institution's material past – in February 2013, while researching the history of the department, at the Stellenbosch University museum, a PhD student was handed a hair colour chart and an eye comparison chart by Lydia de Wal, director of the museum at the time. These objects were stored among the remnants of the defunct Department of 'Volkekunde' (Ethnography) in a cupboard at the museum. See more at indexingthehuman.org.

Museums and meaning production

honouring colonialists or apartheid prime ministers that represent a difficult past. Simply taking these objects to a museum does not seem like a much better solution when, as Mbembe argues, the collecting, classifying, categorising and display practices of the museum should themselves be subject to investigation, decolonisation and transformation. We cannot separate objects in the museum from the ideology of the institution. Hence, if local universities are still undergoing radical transformation, the same can largely be said for the museums and archives that support such institutions, and have actively supported them, especially during apartheid.

By focusing solely on visual redress (which sometimes translates into the purging of monuments and statues of former heads of state and individuals who held power) a given place/society can appear 'transformed' without actually having gone through a process of self-reflexive, self-critical transformation at all. This thesis is concerned with applications of visual redress that go beyond this narrow understanding of transforming/decolonisation as just the altering of the material culture of an institution.

In *History After Apartheid* (2004) Annie Coombes discusses the documentary *Disgraced Monuments* (1994) by directors Laura Mulvey and Mark Lewis, which explores "the fate of public monuments under the successive regimes in the former Soviet Union, following the cycles of building monuments and their removal in accordance to who held power at the time" (Coombes 2004: 19-20). Newly elected governments in countries like Russia and Hungary seemed to deal with busts and statues of defunct Soviet Union and Communist leaders by placing them in public parks that essentially serves as cemeteries (Coombes 2004: 20). Coombes recalls an interview from the documentary where an observer remarks that the only real changes visible in Russia since the fall of the Soviet Union are "a spate of new subjects for yet another wave of monuments". At the end of the interview he says, pessimistically, "Concrete is easier to change than reality" (Coombes 2004: 20). The same argument could be made, I would argue, for using the museum as a dumping site for material culture that is deemed problematic.

South Africa is habitually described in the media and elsewhere as a 'country in transition'. Currently, South Africa is emerging from the early post-apartheid era, which promoted a doctrine of reconciliation regarding the (colonial and apartheid) past (Dubin, 2009). This doctrine has clashed with loud calls for decolonisation among university students and political parties such as the Economic Freedom Fighters in recent months, subsequent to the falling of the Rhodes statue at the

Museums and meaning production

UCT campus and the Fees Must Fall student protests which swept across university campuses in 2015 and 2016. Student activists of 2015 and 2016 have called for a move from the rhetoric of transformation to decolonisation, drawing attention to the fact the phrase 'transformation' is often abused by the state and other institutions without taking responsibility for what this means in reality. Political analyst and University of Cape Town law professor, Pierre de Vos argues that "real and deep transformation is the enemy of the elite – black and white – because if deep transformation is actually implemented, it will transform the very system that we all benefit from so handsomely, that allows us to drive to work in million rand cars without having to step out into the streets where people are dying of hunger and disease. Why support deep transformation if one is benefiting from the system?" (De Vos, 2010).

In terms of redress at South African museums and other cultural sites, Steve Dubin writes that "when the apartheid government was dismantled, some photographs of discarded monuments turned up, but they were noticeably scant, and images of decapitated behemoth statues, defaced public murals, or ransacked cultural sites and museums were strikingly absent, unlike the experience in Iraq at the end of the Saddam Hussein's reign or during the disintegration of the former Soviet Union" (Dubin, 2009:2). Dubin argues that museums and related cultural institutions are central spheres arenas in which the ideals of the nation (such as national unity, the rainbow nation, reconciliation) are given material form, "and this is either to the delight or contempt of various groups" (Dubin, 2009:2). "Conflict and negotiation habitually occurs over museums and what they do, as well as at related social locations such as monuments, place names, burial sites and historical archives" (Dubin, 2009: 2). As Brenda Schmamann argues, while some regard the inherited material culture from British imperialism or Afrikaner nationalism as troublesome reminders of the extreme injustices caused by this past, "placing them in storage is not necessarily the most appropriate way of dealing with these concerns (Schmamann, 2013: 23). Schmamann's view is that, if an institution like "the university is to be considered a body that directs itself towards the creation of new kinds of discursive understandings, then it should make readily available and conspicuous any objects that have the potential to edify – even if this invites critique of the decisions it has made or actions it has taken in the past" (Schmamann, 2013: 23). In other words, by opening up collections and material culture of the past to investigation and critique, universities and museums have the potential to contribute to new forms of knowledge production and redress.

Museums and meaning production

In the following subchapter I address questions central to this thesis in order to analyse contemporary museum practice and curatorial intervention, particularly in terms of the museum's potential as a transformative/decolonised space. Questions asked are: what is a museum, what should be displayed there and how and can a university museum become a site a site for institutional critique and curriculum reform? These questions have particular bearing on the context within which I am conducting my research, namely Stellenbosch University and the broader context of the Western Cape town of Stellenbosch.

Common metaphorical descriptions of the museum have included the museum as shrine, as temple, colonising space and 'post'-museum. In the following subchapter, I address the museum as archive, as frame and as text in order to set a framework for the analysis of the cultural history and social anthropology collections at the Stellenbosch University Museum, which forms the heart of my discussion in Chapter 4.

3.1 What is a Museum?

Contemporary understandings of the museum could include that it is an institution dedicated to the collection, preservation, exhibition and study of material objects that make up the archive of material culture. The museum is understood as a key agent in the creating of meaning and in shaping identity (Janes, 2007: 135). Museums create and transfer meaning and knowledge in efforts to engage visitors in issues that are relevant and significant to them and to their communities (Janes, 2007: 135). Advocating for the need for museums to consider the historiographic needs and historical perceptions of its local audience, Sheila Watson notes that "recent research into the production and consumption of meanings in museums suggests that these institutions contribute significantly to the construction of personal and shared identities" (2007: 160).

However, the museum institution, its format and practices could also be understood as a key site of nationalism insofar as it assists the formation of national identities, as rooted in the context of Western modernity.¹² Sharon Macdonald (2003: 1) argues that the emergence of the nation-state,

¹² Demonstrating the historical emergence of the museum as an institution of modernity, Tony Bennett (1995) highlights how exercises of expertise help to construct institutions that amplify the value of material assemblages that frame the public's term of affiliation with the nation.

Museums and meaning production

the public, and the public museum in the late eighteenth century were intimately bound together. For Macdonald, the French Revolution, “a key moment in the dawn of the nation-state era in Western Europe, was a revolution of ‘the people’ which saw the aristocracy being replaced with a conception of a collective of equals” (Macdonald, 2003: 1). Hence the private treasures and collections of objects owned by the aristocratic classes were ‘democratised’ and made public. The revolution was a moment where ‘high culture’ could be brought to the masses. It can also be seen as a “symbolic attempt to educate the masses” (Macdonald, 2003: 2).

The earliest forms of display can be traced to the 16th and early 17th century private collections of wealthy or royal classes in the form of the *kunst-* or *wunderkammer*¹³ (Birkett, 2012: 7). “The compulsive interest of such people in collecting expressed as a drive to collate and understand significant objects: the fossils, minerals, specimens, tools and artisanal products that provided evidence for knowledge and theories about the world” (Orbrist, 2015: 39). Without the existence of institutions like museums and libraries at the time, wealthy European individuals saw it as their responsibility to take on this role.

While our contemporary understanding of the term ‘museum’ is situated largely within the public and institutional domain, the original use of the term emphasised its private and exclusionary functions. The move towards the museum becoming more public was the result of the “transformation of the practices of earlier collecting institutions and the creative adaptation of aspects of other newer institutions – the international exhibition and the department store, for example which developed alongside the museum” (Bennett, 1995: 19). Tony Bennett (1995) argues that the development of the museum cannot be viewed apart from a more general set of developments during the 17th and 18th centuries “through which culture, in coming to be thought of as useful for governing, was fashioned as a vehicle for the exercise of new forms of power” (Bennett, 1995: 19). For Duane Jethro (2015), the museum's transformation from rooms and cabinets of curiosities owned by the rich to being formal public institutions, revolved around the question of the pedagogical value of assemblages of historically significant material. Jethro cites Bennett to argue that “one segment of the upper classes was of the strong opinion ‘that should

¹³ During the Renaissance, private citizens collected significant and valued objects in their homes, often in a specially designated room, known as the *wunderkammer* (Orbrist, 2015: 39). Translated from German, these ‘cabinets of wonders’ often consisted of crowded displays of artworks as well as ethnographic and natural artifacts that were considered strange or curious.

Museums and meaning production

museums be opened up to the public, they would fall victim to the disorderliness of the crowd” (2015: 23). In the 17th and 18th centuries, the idea of a collection that belonged to the citizens of the democratic state came into being. Collectors that amassed thousands of objects often left these collections to their countries at their death.

Bennett’s (1995) emphasis is on the museum’s iconic status as an institution of modernity where disciplinary measures asserted over the “unruly populations” are brought to effect through the museum. Bennett writes: “the ameliorative effects of the museum were not simply cultural or cognitive, but rather they were instruments capable of inducing a reform of cultural manners – that is, modifying external forms of behaviour” (1995: 99-100). “As a space of emulation in which the working-classes, in being allowed to co-mingle with the middle classes in a formally and undifferentiated sphere, could learn to adopt new forms of behaviour through initiation, museums imposed their own set of prescriptions on behaviours associated with places of popular assembly” (1995: 100). The working classes were schooled on behaviour that was seen as ‘appropriate’ by implementing rules that forbade “eating and drinking, outlawing the touching of exhibits and quite frequently stating – or at least advising – what should be worn and what should not” (1995: 100). Jethro notes that these rules were complemented by “architectural changes that transformed the relations between 'space and vision' within the confines of the museum” (Jethro, 2015: 23).

In an issue of *Artforum* titled *The Museum Revisited* dedicated to the changing role of museums in society, the artist Tino Seghal (2010) brings the reader’s attention to Didier Maleuvre’s essay *Of History and Other things: The Age of Exhibitions*, where he stresses the connections between the museum and the emergence of European industrial societies. Maleuvre (2010) writes that while Western “religious societies defined themselves with respect to an invisible, subjective presence; by contrast the industrial culture of the nineteenth century derived its identity from the manufactured object – world”. He continues by asking:

What kind of society genuflects for objects precisely for being objects? (and not as in religious cultures, transmitters of divine subjectivity)? The cultish relationship to the ‘object-world’ reveals the existence of a new social reality, one that was unprecedentedly bound up in with the large-scale production and trade of goods, staples, [and] machinery. Without this mass objectification of existence in the sociological background, the creation of the great European

Museums and meaning production

national museum is merely an aesthetic occurrence — but it wasn't. To be, 'to be something' and 'to have' ran together in the bourgeoisie mindset. The museum erected the shrine to this article of faith (Maleuvre cited in Seghal, 2010: 281).

In this sense, the museum became a shrine to the aspirations and conquests of a particular society, but also became a space tied to the individual accumulation of cultural capital in order to achieve greater symbolic power in what the philosopher Pierre Bourdieu (1993) calls the 'field'.¹⁴ For the curious, collecting became a quest of sorts, its purpose being to go beyond the "obvious and the ordinary, to uncover the hidden knowledge which would permit him a more complete grasp of the workings of the world in all its dimensions" (Lidchi, 1997: 158). Referring to the shared contradictory nature of these spaces, Tony Bennett argues that while the gallery (and museum) is "theoretically a public institution open to all, it has typically been appropriated by ruling elites as the key site for those performances of distinction through which the 'cognoscenti' differentiate themselves from the masses" (Bennett, 1995: 11).

Pre-Enlightenment understandings of the museum were of a sacred, private space that held and celebrated the achievements of a society. The institutional understanding of the museum can be traced to the Royal Library of Alexandria¹⁵ in Egypt where the collective cultural resources of the community were organised and preserved. The museum was described in the writings of the Jesuit Claude Clêmes as "the place where the muses¹⁶ dwell" (Findlen, 2004: 159). In the sixteenth- and seventeenth centuries, the word *musaeum* was an apt metaphor for the encyclopedic tendencies of the period. Linguistically, *musaeum* was understood to be a bridge between social and

¹⁴ According to Bourdieu, social agents exist in concrete social situations governed by a set of objective social relations. In Bourdieu's concept of 'field', any social formation is structured by way of a hierarchically organised series of fields (the economic field, the educational field, the political field, the cultural field etc. Each is defined as a structured space with its own laws of functioning and its own relations of force independent of those of politics and the economy (Bourdieu, 1993: 6).

¹⁵ The Royal Library of Alexandria in Alexandria, Egypt, was established under the patronage of the Ptolemaic dynasty and functioned as a major center of scholarship from its construction in the 3rd century BC until the Roman conquest of Egypt in 30 BC.

¹⁶ The early museum was known as the place of the muses, a mythological setting inhabited by the goddesses of music, poetry and the liberal arts. The term 'muse' comes from the Greek word 'to explain the mysteries'. The word 'musaeum' also referred to the library of Alexandria which served as a research centre and congregating point for scholars of the classical world (Findlen, 2004: 162).

Museums and meaning production

intellectual life, moving between, and blurring Renaissance definitions of “social, intellectual, public and private” (Findlen, 2004: 159). The spatial understanding characteristics of the *musaeum* also blurred lines between “philosophical categories of *bibliotheca*, *thesaurs* and *pandocheion* with visual constructs such as *cornucopia* and *gazophylacium* and spatial constructs such as *studio*, *casino*, *cabinet*, *galleria* and *theatro* creating a rich and complex terminology that described significant aspects of the intellectual and cultural life of early modern Europe” (Findlen 2004: 159). The precursor to the museum as we know it, the cabinet of curiosities, emerged during the European period of the Renaissance at a time of “discovery and exploration” (Findlen 2004: 159) when European conquerors from the west sent home objects from the newly conquered lands. The *wunderkammer* or cabinets of curiosities displayed objects that were regarded as the trophies of conquest.

While the early Renaissance period influenced the widespread appearance of museums in the early modern period, contemporary museum practice is rooted in Enlightenment thinking, which favoured rationality, science, empirical evidence and absolute truths. These values supported, in turn, the grand narratives that were produced and managed by the socio-political elites of nation-states. Institutions such as the university, library and public archive were imagined by Enlightenment philosophy as public institutions primarily involved with the production of a public sphere, public exchange and public subject (Alberro 2009: 3). By the mid-nineteenth century, a number of museums with a clear anthropological character had emerged in various parts of Europe. Also by the mid-nineteenth century, societies of ethnography had been established in Paris, New York and London. Because the discipline of museum anthropology took some time to mature, the “great period of museum anthropology only really began in the 1890’s” (Stocking 1988: 7). By then, the university had emerged as a complimentary but alternative and dominating institutional setting.¹⁷ One of the most notable museums to emerge in the nineteenth century was the Pitt Rivers Museum in Oxford. Its founder, Augustus Henry Lane Fox, had developed a particular interest in collecting objects after visiting the Great Exhibition¹⁸ at the Crystal Palace in 1851. He was very interested in the pseudo-scientific racial and human evolutionary theories of the day, which influenced attitudes towards the arrangement and display of objects at the museum. The Pitt Rivers

¹⁷ This is an important idea, and it will be revisited later in this study.

¹⁸ The Great exhibition of 1852 was the first international exhibition of manufactured products. It was organised by Henry Cole and Prince Albert and held in a purpose-built Crystal Palace in Hyde Park, London.

Museums and meaning production

Museum distinguished itself from other museums largely on the basis of the manner in which its objects were displayed. The systematic and sequential display of objects in accordance to groups, genera and species was very different to the way in which other ethnographic museums displayed their objects at the time. The prime purpose of the display was to compare groups of people in relation to one another and in order to 'illustrate' human evolutionary theory. As such, artefacts in the Pitt Rivers collection were subjected to the scientific discourses of the time, which favoured such forms of comparison. These artefacts were displayed and exhibited as supposed proof of the racial and cultural inferiority of those peoples/cultures that they represented. These objects were collected, categorised and displayed according to a classificatory schema whose function was to illustrate the progress of (Western) human history by according different cultures different places on the evolutionary ladder (Coombes 1994: 18).

In his 1967 essay *Different Spaces*, Michel Foucault aligns the museum to a cemetery, echoing the claims by Theodor Adorno and other 20th century philosophers that the museum is a "sepulchre for dead objects"¹⁹ (Lord, 2006: 11). Foucault describes the museum as a heterotopia²⁰ – a space of difference that is:

absolutely central to a culture but in which the relations between elements of culture are suspended, neutralised or reversed. Unlike utopias, heterotopias are real spaces 'designed into the very institution of society' in which all other real emplacements of a culture are at the same time, represented, contested and reversed, sorts of places that are outside all places, although they are actually localisable (Foucault 1998: 178).

¹⁹ The philosopher Theodor Adorno (1983) writes: "The German word *museal* [museum like] has unpleasant overtones. It describes objects to which the observer no longer has a vital relationship and which are in the process of dying. They owe their preservation more to historical respect than to the needs of the present. Museum and mausoleum are connected by more than phonetic association. Museums are like the family sepulchres of works of art"(1983: 175).

²⁰ For Foucault (1986), museums are heterotopias insofar as "the idea of accumulating everything, of establishing a sort of general archive, the will to enclose in one place all times, epochs, all forms, all tastes, the idea of constituting a place of all times that that is itself outside of time and inaccessible to its ravages, the project of organising in this way a sort of perpetual and indefinite accumulation of time in an immobile place, this whole idea belongs to our modernity. The museum and the library are heterotopias that are proper to western culture of the nineteenth century" (Foucault 1986: 26). Prime examples of a heterotopia are the cemetery and the ship. The cemetery is a different place compared to other cultural spaces. It is a space of life or death, duration and eternity; and yet it is connected to all the other emplacements in society because all individuals have relatives that are buried in the cemetery.

Museums and meaning production

Beth Lord's (2011) understanding of the museum is as a contingent document that may be constituent of multiple, discontinuous historical series and presented as a space that is never complete. At any historical juncture, the specific definition of the museum can function as a floating signifier, a naming device, which attaches itself and serves to signify certain kinds of cultural practice. Museums are contingent, not essential (Lidchi, 2007: 162).

3.2 The Museum as Archive

Museums often house their vast collections of objects in archival storage rooms to which the public do not have direct access. Museum visitors will only come into contact with what the curators have chosen to display. In this way, curators exercise extreme control over what aspects of the collection the museum visitors can engage with. In the text *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression*, Jacques Derrida (1995) explores the concept of 'archival violence', a term which he arrives at by exploring the nature of the archive as an authoritative institution of preservation. In the Derridean sense, the archive is both a place of commencement and order – the archive forms a historical record and simultaneously determines what is to be included in that record (Derrida 1995: 9). The archivist/researcher is thus central in this process of defining what information is to be included or, alternatively, muted. Museum collections function as archives in the sense that they are often regarded as repositories of culture and cultural expression. Museums, like archives, shape history and popular discourse, as they are perceived as holding the official history of a place or culture. For George Stocking (1988) museum objects exist in a "three-dimensional space encompassing both the object and the viewer" (1988: 4), and this three-dimensional quality of space distinguishes the museum archive from the two-dimensional repositories of linear text.

In *Refiguring the Archive*, Achille Mbembe (2002: 20) writes that "archives are the products of a process which converts a certain number of documents into items judged to be worthy of preserving and keeping in a public place, where they can be consulted according to well-established procedures and regulations". Similarly, for Foucault (1972: 29), archives are not merely the material spaces of the repositories that are the archive, but "the law of what can be said, the system that governs the appearance of statements as unique events". Museums have assumed ownership of cultural artifacts and thus the right to interpret their meanings and to assign them a place in the museum archive. Museums guaranteed the meaning of cultural patrimony and in many cases the colonial privilege for imperial nations (Gonzalez 2008: 66). In museums of ethnography and anthropology,

Museums and meaning production

objects are assigned a place in an archive that positions them in relation to other objects, a process which is subject to dominant ideologies and hierarchies of power. Henrietta Lidchi argues that because “museum curators are no longer automatically perceived as the keepers of knowledge about their collections; museums are no longer revered as spaces promoting knowledge and enlightenment, the automatic resting place for historic and culturally important historic objects” (Lidchi, 2007: 153).

3.3 The Museum as Frame

The museum is simultaneously a building and an institution, both an apparatus and an object of display but it is also a construction of the world (Stead, 2004: 4). The museum has been likened to a temple or space of sacred ritual, which Carol Duncan (1995) refers to as a ‘liminal’ space. Duncan uses the term ‘liminality’ to describe the ritualising effect of the museum as a site which can enable individuals to “move beyond the psychic constraints of mundane existence, step out of time, and attain new, larger perspective” (1995: 7-11). This liminal effect is often achieved through the architecture of museums, with grand entrances, elaborate interiors and architectural finishes which provide cues for the appropriate social behaviour and the way in which the space should be experienced. As Mikwon Kwon argues:

The modern gallery/museum space with its stark white walls, artificial lighting, controlled climate and pristine architectonics was perceived not solely in terms of basic dimensions and proportion but as an institutional disguise, a normative exhibition convention serving an ideological function”. Seemingly innocent, the architectural features of the museum are coded mechanisms that “actively disassociate the space of art from the outer world, furthering the institution’s idealist imperative of rendering itself and its hierarchisation of values objective, disinterested and true (Kwon, 1997: 88).

As previously mentioned, nineteenth century Western society saw the museum as a space that was supposed to bring social benefit by shaping the intellect and transforming social behavior (Bennett 1994: 191). The development of anthropology as a discipline was inherently tied to the rapid expansion of the ‘museum idea’ – the belief that museums were an ideal vehicle for public instruction “by contemplating cultural artefacts on display, the common man/woman would

Museums and meaning production

become receptive to their improving influence” (Lidchi, 1997: 191).²¹ As a part of the modernist project, museums have long served as a tool for the ‘education’ of the masses regarding the narrative of, inter alia, western superiority, to ensure social cohesion, order and hierarchy (Keene, 2006: 186-187). Modern notions of ‘authenticity’, ‘authority’ and ‘objective truth’ have further defined the museum as an institution whose practices are firmly rooted in the scientific knowledge(s) of the time. As such, “the museum as an institution is deeply implicated in the scientific paradigm that dominates western thought” (Keene, 2006: 188).

For Janet Marstine (2006: 2) the museum space is not a neutral space that speaks with “one institutional voice”, but it is often the product of a series of subjective choices by individuals. According to Marstine:

Decisions that museum workers make about mission statement, about media statements, architecture, financial matters, acquisitions, cataloguing, exhibition display, wall texts, educational programming, repatriation requests, community relations, conservation, web design, security and reproduction all impact on the way we understand objects. To achieve cultural literacy, museums don’t just represent cultural identity, they produce it through framing. Frames set boundaries, and produce an ideological narrative or context that colours our understanding of what’s included (Marstine, 2006: 4).

Museological practices such as cataloguing and administration are as much a part of the framing of a museum as the curation, exhibition design and architecture, which is more visible to the eye of the general public. I am interested in these frames that may be hidden from public view but have a big influence on shaping the institution in both a material and cultural sense.

3.4 The Museum as Text

Museums are understood in their relation to memory and place, but museums can also be read as text. The textual understanding of the museum considers the voice implicit in museum displays, set

²¹ This is an important idea, given that my own curatorial intervention drew on such anthropological collections and classifications. I explore the repercussions of this phenomenon in more detail in Chapter 4.

Museums and meaning production

up by, inter alia, lighting, sound and labeling. We can read an exhibition as we do literary text, and as Mieke Bal (1992: 7) writes: “The most powerful form of address [in the museum] is narrative.” Bal writes that the space of a museum presupposes a walking tour, an order in which panels are to be viewed and read. A museum display can thus be understood as a “sign system, working in the realm between visual and verbal, and in between information and persuasion, it produces the viewer’s knowledge” (Bal, 1992: 561). Through these sign systems, “museums generate representations and attribute value and meaning in line with certain perspectives or classificatory schemas which are historically specific” (Lidchi, 1997: 160). Carol Duncan (1995) argues that museum exhibits may be organised in a way to construct and convey predetermined narratives of a version of history that may only represent the interests of those in power: “those who are best prepared to perform [the museum] ritual - those who are most able to respond to its various cues - are also those whose identities (social, sexual, racial etc) the museum ritual most fully confirms” (Duncan 1995: 8).

Objects in the museum are used to “mobilise representations of the world, past and present” (Lidchi, 1997: 160). Museums produce representations that are linked to discourse, which, as Michel Foucault has argued, occurs in discursive formations – referring to the “systematic operation of several discourses or statements constituting a body of knowledge which works together to construct a particular object/topic of analysis in a particular way, and to limit the other ways in which the object/topic may be constituted” (Lidchi, 1997: 192). Lidchi argues that in the case of museum displays, such a formation might include anthropological, aesthetic, and educational discourses (Lidchi, 1997: 192). In the essay *Foucault's Museum: Difference, Representation and Genealogy* (2006), Beth Lord argues that the museum can be and has been “categorised as an Enlightenment institution whose power to collect and display objects is a function of capitalism and imperialism and whose power in the formation of subjectivity is exercised through the careful and ordered deployment of knowledge in within an institutionally controlled and publicly monitored space” (Lord 2006: 12). In the case of museum displays, these include anthropological, aesthetic and educational discourses. These discourses create a body of knowledge or body of truth around an object or collection in a seemingly systematic and ordered fashion.

During the 18th century, as institutions strongly influenced by principles of scientific taxonomy, museums placed emphasis on observational differences between objects, rather than their hidden (that is conceptual) similarities. Common or ordinary objects were “accorded priority over the

Museums and meaning production

unusual, and things were arranged as parts of a series, rather than as unique items” (Bennett, 1995: 96). Bennett argues that it is the shift from the classic to the modern episteme which can best account for “the discursive space of the public museum” (Bennett, 1995: 96).

According to Bennett (1995: 96):

in tracing the emergence of the modern sciences of man, things ceased to be arranged as parts of taxonomic tables and came instead in being inserted within the flow of time, to be differentiated in terms of the positions accorded them in within evolutionary series. The birth of the museum is coincident with, and supplies a primary institutional condition for, the emergence of a new set of knowledges, – geology, biology, archaeology, anthropology, history and art history – each of which, in its museological departments, arranged objects as part of evolutionary sequences (the history of art, the history of life, etc.) which in their interrelations, formed a totalising order of things and people that were historicised through and through.

These systems influenced the categorising and display practices that emerged in nineteenth century ethnographic museums. Janet Marstine argues that museums, as imperial/ colonising spaces have constructed the ‘other’ to justify the self (Marstine 2006: 14). Ethnographic museums have imposed evolutionary hierarchies of race, ethnicity and gender and have naturalised the category of “the primitive” where non-western people are frozen in time – metaphorically dead (Marstine 2006: 14). Historically, 'Ethnography' has its roots in the research methods of the human sciences anthropology and ethnology, which were concerned with the study of humans both in a social and physical sense. Ethnographic museums are situated in the discipline and theoretical framework of anthropology.

Lidchi reminds us that up until the nineteenth century, much of what is now labeled as 'ethnographic' objects were collected in a:

spasmodic and fortuitous way, acquisitions whose value lay in their novelty or curiosity, for these objects to be labeled as ethnographic or lodged within an 'ethnographic' museum department, necessitated the development of a human

Museums and meaning production

science that would identify them as such and therefore set in train a different system of classification and generate other motives for collecting them. Older human sciences of ethnology, ethnography and the discipline of anthropology sought to primarily study the way of life of non-European peoples or nations. The objects in ethnographic collections collected by Europeans therefore, were mostly made by those who were at one time considered to be 'exotic', 'pre-literate', 'primitive' or 'savage'. Ethnographic museums produce certain kinds of representations and mobilise direct classificatory systems which are framed by anthropological theory and ethnographic research (Lidchi, 1997: 161).

The discipline of anthropology has classified and constructed difference systematically in accordance with a particular view of the world that emerges in a specific place, at a distinct historical moment and within a specific body of knowledge. Similar to Foucault's concept of discourse formation is the idea of racial formation. Jennifer Gonzalez argues that racial formation "can be found in both small moments of racial encounter and in systemic epistemological approaches to both cultural and ontological understandings of human beings" (Gonzalez, 2008: 3). It can be understood as that which underlies "conceptions of cultural difference understood as absolute otherness and patterns of social reasoning that were formed out of the practices of enslavement and the economic pursuits of colonialism" (Gonzalez, 2008: 3). In *Black Skin, White Masks* (1952), Frantz Fanon's concept of epidermalisation presents that idea that the Black subject's inferiority is internalised via his/her skin. The body is thus treated as the site of race discourse, as race is presumed to reside in the body. The raced body is the discursive site where 'racist knowledge' is produced and circulated, and there is thus no escape from its 'epidermalised'²² status. Museum objects and the way they have been classified, ordered and arranged have historically played a big part in the processes of identity formation. Drawing on the work of Fanon, Jennifer Gonzalez (2008) argues that objects can become epidermalised and just as humans can be conflated with material culture, so material culture can acquire the racial status of humans. She writes that "the process of epidermalisation is one in which the object is positioned in history, in a collection, in the

²² Frantz Fanon describes the concept of epidermalisation as the internalisation of an inferiority complex based on socio-economic iniquities and the 'black man's' experience of sensitisation when he encounters the white world. In the foreword to the 2008 edition of *Black Skin White Masks*, Ziauddin Sardar further elaborates: "When the black man comes into contact with the white world he goes through an experience of sensitisation. His ego collapses. His self-esteem evaporates. He ceases to be a self-motivated person. The entire purpose of his behavior is to emulate the white man, to become like him, and thus hope to be accepted as a man" (2008: xiii).

Museums and meaning production

marketplace, or in a museum display as racially defined” (2008: 5). There are obvious examples of this: caricatures of the black body like 'gollywog' dolls along with less obvious examples, such as African masks that are exhibited differently from European material culture in fine art museums. Exhibitions and artefacts can therefore work to produce the subject as raced, thus becoming part of a “broader iconographic history that serves as reservoir of circulating signs for this purpose” (Gonzalez, 2008:6). In the museum, expeditionary techniques can resonate strongly with predominant racial discourses insofar as such techniques can produce fixed, stereotypical subject positions. As race discourse also works with discourses of gender, class and geography, race is written differently according to the gender or economic position of the given subject that is represented.

3.5 The Transformative Museum and the Museum as Transformer

Elizabeth Rankin (2013) argues that, while the need to redistribute cultural capital may be perceived as unimportant or even extravagant in the face of other challenges the country may face, “it is crucial that racist readings of culture, deeply imbedded in the country’s recorded history, should be reshaped if South Africa is to reformulate its long established social hierarchies, which privileged white culture to a degree that almost entirely erased black values. The cultural empowerment of all groups is an essential ingredient for a successful democracy” (Rankin 2013: 73). The first ANC government-appointed Arts and Culture Task Group’s (2004)²³ stance towards dealing with the past was made clear in its *White Paper on Arts, Culture and Heritage (1997)* in the statement, “nation building ... shall further encourage mutual respect and tolerance and intercultural exchange between the various cultures and forms of art to facilitate the emergence of a shared cultural identity constituted by diversity”. Firmly taking a stance on the reconciliatory role of sites housing the country’s material culture, “the ANC’s policy towards museums, monuments, memorials, national symbols of South Africa rests on the premise that these institutions and cultural structures should foster national unity, reconciliation and democratic values and be accessible and be

²³ In November 1994, the minister of Arts, Culture, Science and Technology, Dr. Ben Ngubane appointed a 23-person Arts and Culture Task Group (ACTAG) to make detailed recommendations on arts and culture policy consistent with the country’s new democratic constitution. ACTAG’s terms of reference were widely publicised and interested parties invited to submit written proposals. Sub-committees were established to prepare sector-specific recommendations. During 1995, public hearings were held across the country and a national conference was convened to discuss and formulate recommendations. A final report outlining these recommendations was published in July 1995 (The Archival Platform, 2015).

Museums and meaning production

preserved for the education and benefit of all South Africans” (Dominy, 1993: 69). Rankin notes that while scholars were engaged in researching the past anew long before the end of apartheid, their writings target a limited readership: “To reach wider audiences, reshaping the visual histories recorded in public monuments and museums may be a more accessible form of redress” (Rankin 2013: 73). In the transformation of former monument and museum sites in South Africa, Albert Grundlingh (2001: 105) notes that “the [ANC] government itself has adopted a fairly low-key approach to former symbols of Apartheid. Apart from removing certain statues of H.F Verwoerd, Prime Minister from 1958-66 and ‘architect of apartheid’, renaming airports and redecorating parliament, there has not been any concerted attempt to wipe the slate clean.” After the removal of a statue of Verwoerd in Bloemfontein in 1994, then president Nelson Mandela warned to use sensitivity in removing former Afrikaner symbols, saying: “[we] must be able to channel our anger without doing injustices to other communities” (Rankin 2013: 73). Subsequent to the removal of Verwoerd’s bust in Bloemfontein, virtually no more changes were made to the reminders of the old order in South Africa (Marschall 2009: 137). The ANC government has chosen instead “to reinscribe the past by developing its own legacy projects, so far eschewing huge monumental structures and opting for instead for practical, living, open museum sites. Robben Island is the Government’s flagship project in this respect” (Grundlingh 2001: 106).

This *laissez-faire* approach to adjusting the memory landscape is apparent in the way that signifiers of colonialism and apartheid continue to exist in their visibly uncontested state throughout South Africa’s major cities. As Sabine Marschall (2009: 148) notes, “heritage officials in particular are well aware of the great importance communities in South Africa attach to their political icons and the heritage sector would hardly dare engaging in ventures that might undermine its widely perceived role as contributing to morally elevated societal goals such as community empowerment, reconciliation, education and nation-building”. Marschall suggests that monuments or museums “can be reinterpreted or recontextualised through small modifications to the structure [or exhibits] itself; through the wording of its inscription; through renaming; or simply through official, media supported efforts at redefining its meaning and significance” (2009: 151).

Arguably one of the most successful new museums to have emerged in post-apartheid South Africa is the District Six Museum in Cape Town (Figure 5). District Six was a once-thriving and culturally diverse urban residential area in Cape Town's inner city. The area was systematically destroyed by apartheid-government forced removals, which began in 1966 under the Group Areas Act (1950) and

Museums and meaning production

continued until 1981. It carries an iconic status on a local, national and international level and has “become metonymic of all those dehumanising instances of forced removals that were an integral part of apartheid's masterplan from the 1950's onward” (Coombes, 2003: 117). The museum emerged in response to the *Hands Off District Six* campaign, which was launched to keep property developers off the land in the 1980's. This campaign successfully prevented a private property development led by BP²⁴ from developing a large-scale residential complex in the area. The *Hands Off District Six* campaign consisted of 21 organizations that rallied together in 1998 against the proposed development. Their main objection was it was absurd to develop an open residential area when certain basic demands such as the lifting of the national State of Emergency and releasing anti-apartheid detainees failed to be met. It has since developed into a site for communal memory or as, as Dipesh Chakrabarty (2002) writes, “not a nostalgic monument to a dead past but a living memory that is part of the struggle against racism in post-apartheid South Africa” (2002: 10).

For Steven Robins (1997), a professor in the department of Sociology and Social Anthropology at Stellenbosch University, the museum is distinct from other national museums exhibiting grand narratives of the anti-apartheid struggle such as the Robben Island museum. Instead, the museum “recollects what Hannah Arendt has called the everyday banality of evil” (Robins, 1997). The District Six Museum is designed to operate like a “community centre and a place to share memories rather than a museum collecting precious artefacts” (Coetzer, 2012: 64). Mandy Sanger, head of the museum's education department refers to it as a “memory box”²⁵ for the District Six community (Sanger, 2016). The museum has no permanent collection as such but rather relies on the testimonies of ex-residents and the fragmentary remains of their possessions that were often literally unearthed from the debris of demolition (Coombes, 2003: 123). The museum also does not rely on architectural features or strongly scripted exhibition design to produce its overarching narrative. Instead, it is a hybrid of installations and objects “reflecting the jumble of memories and the heterogeneous nature of the community itself” (Coetzer, 2012: 66).

²⁴ BP, also referred to as its former name, British Petroleum is a British multinational oil and gas company. In 1986, British Petroleum offered to rebuild the District Six area into South Africa's first legally integrated neighbourhood. This proposal was met with divided responses. It was opposed by the National Government, then led by P.W Botha, the central Methodist Church and the Cape Town City Council but was welcomed by Rev Alan Hendrickse, leader of the Mixed Race Chamber of Parliament.

²⁵ Interview with Mandy Sanger, head of education at the District Six Museum, September 2016.

Museums and meaning production

The museum is situated in what was once the Central Methodist Church, which was a well-known sanctuary for political opponents and victims of apartheid (Coombes, 2003). Its central image is a map of the original District Six on the floor where ex-residents can inscribe where they lived and places they recall. "As such, it enacts a rebuilding and reclaiming of the territory that was lost and overwritten by apartheid spatiality" (Coetzer, 2012: 66). It also makes special effort to remember the streets of the neighbourhood through an installation of old street signs. Coetzer notes that the taxonomic impulse is explicitly missing from this museum and this de-emphasis of the ordering and classification of objects (and people) can be seen to reinforce its position as a post-apartheid, postcolonial space.

The museum has also become a place of public scholarship, where complex, theoretically informed studies of life histories in Cape Town's past began to be generated in exhibitions and publications. Ciraj Rasool, a District Six museum board member and one of the "activist intellectuals" that shaped the early vision for the museum argues that it is a hybrid space, which combines scholarship, research, collection and museum aesthetics with community forms of governance and accountability" (Rasool, 2005: 6). Rasool notes that the museum can be understood primarily as an open forum for the promotion of critical citizenship.²⁶ While the focus is on the remembering the history of District Six, it has also become an independent, secular site of engagement and a space of questioning contemporary South African society and its discourses. Central to the praxis of this museum has been its commitment as a space dedicated to "interdisciplinary expertise" (Rasool, 2005: 7). For example, its sound archive engages with both technical questions of sound recording while reflecting on "its intellectual practices in relation to those of surrounding collecting and representational disciplinary fields of ethnomusicology, social history and ethnography, especially in their Southern African forms" (Rasool, 2005: 7).

As a living archive, the approach to making histories in the District Six museum is a fluid and dynamic process. Multiple, divergent histories are being inscribed in the space, complicating linear notions of history and memory through installations that invite the museum visitors to alter and contribute

²⁶ Citizenship entails "group membership with common privileges and obligations conferred from without and regulated by a national government" (Martin, 2006: 1). Penny Enslin (2003: 75) argues that South Africa's conception of citizenship is still in development and 'draws mainly on two ingredients: the anti-Apartheid Struggle and the Constitution. A vision of active citizenship, reflected especially in the 1980s in mass mobilisation against the old order, was later extended in the early nineties to the consultation process which the Constitutional Assembly tried to follow in the writing of the Constitution of 1996.

Museums and meaning production

to the installations over time. Mandy Sanger, the head of education at the museum argues that this way of working is not without its challenges: “we are a site of public engagement, and this can be a messy process” (Sanger 2016). This collaborative impulse is extended to artists and state institutions. For instance, the District Six museum collaborates with state museum institutions like the IZIKO museum on projects like the Slavery Emancipation walk, a yearly walk to mark the emancipation of slaves in Cape Town on 1 December, 1834.

The year 2016 marks the 50th anniversary since the first forced removals in the area took place and to mark it, the Museum launched a suitcase campaign which will run for a year and travel to various locations (Figure 6). The suitcase is adopted as a symbol of forced urban migration. These suitcases house the everyday objects that would make up a family archive, which would have accompanied the displaced community to their new homes – family albums and photographs, heirlooms, crockery, birth certificates, religious books. The Museum remains a protagonist in the work of linking memory to social justice and current struggles for spatial equality. In 2016, an initiative to have District Six declared a National Heritage Site²⁷ is spearheaded by the District Six Museum. The urgency of this application in 2016 is especially significant as the Cape Peninsula University of Technology (CPUT) continues to expand its campus across the site of what was once District Six. The university acquired a large portion of this land subsequent to forced removals. The area where the museum is located has also been renamed “The Fringe” by The Cape Town Partnership and The City of Cape Town. The Fringe “is a central city project funded and supported by the Western Cape Government's Department of Economic Development and Tourism (DEDAT) through its Cape Catalyst Initiative” (City of Cape Town, 2014). The city’s vision for The Fringe is to create “the premier African environment for design, media and ICT innovation, creativity and entrepreneurship” (City of Cape Town, 2014). By having District Six declared a National Heritage Site the museum also seeks to ensure that the memory of District Six is not erased by property developers and that significant buildings and other markers of the memory of District Six continue to be preserved.

The museum states on its website:

It is both the real and symbolic value that continues to feed the dynamic significance of District Six. The current emphasis on the District Six land and sites is

²⁷ See more at <http://www.districtsix.co.za/Content/Museum/About/NationalHeritageSite/index.php>

Museums and meaning production

not new. In 1993, the museum hosted a public meeting at which two key projects were discussed, one was to create a Memorial Park at the site of Horstley Street and the second project was to establish the District Six Museum. In this sense, the intention to memorialise the site has been in the making since its formative years. In August 2003 the Museum's long-term strategic plan was launched to signal the shift from a memorial project of land and cultural restitution, to an emerging site museum. This Hands On District Six event introduced plans for the establishment of the Sacks Futeran Complex as a cultural homecoming centre for the new District Six, with the intention of developing a Memorial Park, and plans to work towards the development of a Cultural Heritage Precinct on the broader District Six site (District Six Museum, 2016).

Museum collections are arguably the physical manifestations of the dominant narratives and ideologies of a society and its people. The postmodernist position is that working from inside the museum site can offer opportunities for the re-framing and re-imagining of what is considered as 'history'. Through the search for and retrieval of lost and absent histories, it may be possible to use the site of the museum to begin to create a new sense of belonging amongst groups that were marginalised and essentially excluded from historical narratives. Museums can become spaces that facilitate broader societal goals of transformation in this sense if they are able to provide opportunities for multiple voices to be heard.

Through a discussion organised around the museum as archive, the museum as frame and the museum as text, this chapter summarised key discussions focused on how the museum institution produces meaning through its subjective practices of collection, ordering and display of artefacts and collections. As an example of a contemporary post-1994 South African museum operating as a space of public scholarship (Rasool, 2005: 5), the District Six museum is presented as a museum that operates as a participatory space of memorialisation to reshape the country's historical narrative and representation of the past. Through its commitment to addressing issues around land restitution and contemporary struggles relating to forced urban migration and displacement, the museum continues to contribute towards the transformation of the apartheid city. Working in the tradition of situation aesthetics, artists like Fred Wilson, Reneé Green, Andrea Fraser and Mark Dion have produced work that is critical of museum display practices, often taking on the role of visiting curator, where they examine what is hidden in museum storerooms in addition to what is on display. Using museology as medium, they have curated exhibitions using the museum's own collections to

Museums and meaning production

disrupt the carefully crafted institutional narratives. Work by artists that have played important role in the critique of institutions and that have used the 'museum as medium' will be discussed in further detail in Chapter 4.

4 Towards a Decoloniality of Knowledge and Culture

Western artists of what is now considered to be the second wave of institutional critique examined and commented on the methods through which knowledge and data as aspects of memory are organised and stored by authoritative institutions such as museums. Although artists have explored institutional critique extensively since its inception in the 1960s and 1970s, there is little written about it in relation to current contemporary art practice. The following discussion sets out to question whether museums tasked with collecting and displaying South Africa's material pasts can learn from the subversive strategies presented by artists who worked within the institutional critique framework and, if so, in what ways? It could be argued that artists, as institutional outsiders, are better positioned than museum staff to offer a critique on museum collections. I consider whether institutional critique in the form of artist-led curatorial interventions is sufficient to address and unsettle the legacies of colonial power and subjective authority embedded in museum practice. As Ivan Muñiz Reed (2015) questions, “is it even possible for museums to restructure knowledge and power to return agency to those who have lost it?” (2015: 15).

In an effort to make sense of the task at hand, Muñiz Reed (2015) cites Peruvian sociologist Anibal Quijano, who describes coloniality as a “matrix of power that produces racial and gender hierarchies on the global and local level, functioning alongside capital to maintain a modern regime of exploitation and domination” (2015: 15). As already discussed in Chapter 2, Quijano’s thesis is that decoloniality should not only be understood in reference to colonialism but also in reference to coloniality, (Maldonado-Torres, 2011: 12) which is ever-present and is distinguished from colonialism in the sense that it is made up of the underlying logics of colonialism (Mignolo, 2007). While formal colonialism has ended, the effects of colonialism have persisted through structural forms of privilege and bias (Muñiz Reed, 2015: 15). Mignolo defines decoloniality as ‘epistemic disobedience’, ‘epistemic delinking’ and ‘epistemic reconstruction’. It aims to liberate education and knowledge production from the epistemology of power, inequality, various forms of discrimination and exploitation. Jonathon A. Neufeld (2015) argues that aesthetic disobedience runs parallel to the political concept of civil disobedience: “acts of civil disobedience break some law to publicly draw attention to and recommend the reform of a conflict between the commitments of a legal system and some shared commitments of a community. Aesthetic disobedience sheds light on much of what is interesting in certain transgressive actions and practices” (Neufeld, 2015: 115).

Towards a decoloniality of knowledge and culture

To imagine different futures for the museum institution we need to imagine what a decolonised curatorial practice might look like. In the discussion that follows, I suggest that artist interventions that interrupt problematic museum narratives may offer an important starting point towards achieving a decolonised museum practice when these practical strategies are supplemented by decolonial thinking. I consider the ways in which selected artists have worked with institutions (the museum in particular) and how their work presents epistemological challenges to the curatorial practices of these institutions. Artists discussed include Fred Wilson, Renee Green, Pedro Lasch and Chimurenga Magazine.

4.1 Situating Institutional Critique

What has now become known (and canonised) as institutional critique was conceptualised as a political, critical art practice in the 21st century, during which artists and art practitioners critiqued the art establishment from within but worked within the parameters of the art world. During the first wave of institutional critique from the late 1960s and 1970s, the main subjects of this critique were institutions such as the art museum, art gallery and the collections housed by those institutions (Sheikh 2009: 29). Thus the term 'institutional critique' references a direct connection between a method and an object, the method being the critique and the object the (art) institution. The first wave of institutional critique took on many forms, such as artistic work and interventions, critical writings or political art-activism. Here the artists of the first wave like Michael Asher, Hans Haacke, Daniel Buren and Marcel Broodthaers investigated among other things, the relationship of art museums to corporations and the state and the framing of art objects by curators in order to ascribe meaning and value. Their collective aim was to oppose, subvert or break out of rigid institutional frameworks (Rauning, 2009). Hans Haacke's 1974 work *Manet-Projekt74*, for example, exposed links between museum patrons, trustees, politics and business (Bishop, 2005: 32). Haacke was invited to participate in a group exhibition, *Projekt 74* at the Wallraf-Richartz museum in Cologne on the occasion of the museum's centennial anniversary. Several years earlier the museum had acquired Eduard Manet's *Bunch of Asparagus* (1980). For the opening event to this exhibition, Hermann J Abs, financier and chairman of the Wallraf-Richartz kuratorium (the museum's sister institution) had been invited to address the audience. As precedent for his work, Haacke used the brochure advertising the museum's recent acquisitions, which contained a photograph of Abs in front of the painting and a reproduction of the painting. For his work, which he called *Manet-Projekt 74*, (Figures 7 & 8) Haacke examined and exposed the institutional circumstances of the work and

Towards a decoloniality of knowledge and culture

its display in the museum. He did this by disclosing the paintings' contingent value and economic support, including the price for which each buyer had acquired the painting as well as the buyers' financial circumstances and professional affiliations. This information would normally be hidden from the viewer due to modernist rhetoric of autonomy in the display of contemporary art. Haacke's research was displayed on ten paper panels, each representing one of the painting's owners, arranged in chronological order, highlighting the ways in which cultural objects are bound to socio-political and personal histories.

By the 1980s many artists had begun to question their roles within an institutional system and "consciously avoided production of small portable objects on which the market depended" (Bishop, 2005: 32). During the second wave, the framework of institutional critique was expanded to the artist' role in maintaining and affirming institutional structures as well as investigations into working and exhibiting in spaces outside the art gallery or art museum. Work by two protagonists of the second wave of institutional critique, namely Fred Wilson and Reneé Green, is discussed later in this chapter. The second generation of artists working within the framework of institutional critique – mainly in the United States during the period of the late 1980s and 1990s – pursued the systematic exploration of museological representation, examining its links to economic power and exposing its epistemological connections to colonial ethnography and anthropology, as well as its tendency to other the subjectivities of colonised nations. Their work was influenced by feminist and postcolonial thinking, which "allowed them to recast external power hierarchies as ambivalences within the self and opened up a conflicted sensibility to the coexistence of multiple modes and vectors of representation" (Holmes, 2009: 57).

As Simon Sheikh (2009 29) notes, it is ironic that today both the first and second wave of institutional critique are part of the institution insofar as they have been canonised as part of Western art history. This is ironic because the actual process of canonisation is essentially a form of depoliticisation. Gerald Raunig and Gene Ray (2009) argue that "following the first two phases of institutional critique, a new phase of critique is emerging – one that goes beyond the two earlier phases, particularly as a combination of social change, institutional critique and self-critique". Raunig (2009) proposes that the third phase of institutional critique, which is situated in contemporary society, could be more about extra-disciplinary collaborations that expand into institutions beyond the art institution and which develop in conjunction with political activism. Raunig (2009: 3) warns that "if institutional critique is not to be fixed and paralysed as something established in the field of art and

Towards a decoloniality of knowledge and culture

castrated by its rules, then it must continue to change and develop in a changing society". Further, he argues that a new form of institutional critique must link up with other forms of critique both within and outside the art field (2009: 3). Brian Holmes argues that for this to happen, the first thing to be done is to redefine the means, the media, and the aims of a possible third wave. Connections need to be made outside of the art institution. He describes the notion of 'transversality', developed by practitioners of institutional analysis, which helps to theorise the assemblages that link actors and resources from the art circuit to projects and experiments that extend elsewhere. He proposes that this approach is essentially extra-disciplinary, not unambiguously defined as art, often involving work by collectives that include social movements and political associations.

4.2 The Language of Institutional Critique

Institutional critique can take on different dimensions and forms, but generally the artists working within this framework produce interventionist, site-specific installations. Intent on developing a working definition of 'installation', Erika Suderberg (2000) writes in the introduction to *Space, Site, Intervention: Situating Installation Art* that:

Installation art was initially focused on institutional art spaces that could be altered through installation as an action. The site of the installation becomes a primary part of the content of the work itself, but also posits a critique of the practice of art-making within the institution by examining the ideological and institutional frameworks that support and exhibit a work of art (2000: 4-5).

Suderberg defines installation as an art practice in and of itself where, "to install is a process that must take place each time an exhibition is mounted" while "installation is the art form that takes stock of the parameters of the space and reconfigures it" (2000: 5). Installation art practices developed in the 1970s as a way of democratising the art experience and can be traced to Dadaist and Surrealist exhibitions of the 1950s and early 1960s (Gonzalez, 2008: 7). In the late 1950's Allan Kaprow used the term 'environment' to describe his large room-sized multimedia works and it is often assumed that installation developed from this, although there are other theories of its genesis. Suderberg suggests that installation art has a history which predates "modernist genres and labels" (2000: 7-8), suggesting that both the *wunderkammern* and *kunstkammern* (cabinets of curiosities) from the 17th and 18th centuries "have more than a passing resemblance to the

Towards a decoloniality of knowledge and culture

contemporary practices of installation” (2000: 7-8). This she attributes to similarities in the collecting, consuming, arranging and juxtaposing of objects in an era that preceded the modern museum.

Installation art enables the viewer to actively engage with an artwork instead of being a passive observer. Thus, the meaning of an installation is derived from both the artist's conception and expression of such a work, as well as the viewer's response to and interaction with it. Jennifer Gonzáles (2008: 7) writes that the term 'installation art' describes “temporary, site-specific art works designed to surround or interact with the spectator and/or extant architecture in a given exhibition space”. Similarly, Julie Reiss (1999) notes that the essence of installation art is spectator participation, but that “the definition of participation varies greatly from one artist to another. It even differs from one work to another by the same artist. It could mean that the viewer is offered to participate in various activities or that the viewer walks through the space and simply confronts what is there” (Reiss, 1999: xiii). Reiss further argues that “spectator participation is so integral to installation art that without having first-hand experience of the work, analysis of installation art is difficult” (1999: xiii). In response to the lack of scholarship on installation art practice, she notes, “perhaps as a result, few historians have seriously studied it despite its proliferation as an art form in the last forty years” (Reiss, 1999: xiv). In *Installation Art: A Critical History*, Claire Bishop (2005: 10) makes the argument that like all art, installation art presumes a subject “insofar as it is made by a subject (the artist) and is received by a subject (the viewer)”. However, installation art presupposes that the viewing subject physically enters the work to experience it. From its conception in the 1960s, installation art sought to break radically with the artist—work of art—viewer triad, where the interaction between the three is relatively discreet. She argues that “instead of making a self-contained object, installation artists began to work in specific locations, where the entire space is treated as a single situation into which the viewer enters” (Bishop, 2005: 10).

Through institutional critique, the notion of a 'neutral' exhibition space has gradually been eroded. Reiss argues in this regard that “the history of the exhibition locale is inextricably intertwined with the history of installation art on several levels” (Reiss, 1999: xix). The physical properties of the spaces – the raw, unfinished alternative exhibition space or the pristine white cube – are important factors for considering how a given space becomes integrated into the work. In this way, the spaces that frame installation art facilitate connections between the installation itself and the outside world.

Towards a decoloniality of knowledge and culture

Artists working in the 1960s and 1970s were looking to redefine “the role and function of a work of art” by rejecting the ‘rules’ presented by the art-world as to what constitutes an artwork and the preference of traditional media like oil paintings and sculpture over media that incorporated “ephemeral material” and performance (González, 2009: 7). Reiss argues, “for some artists, the temporary nature of installation art was a gesture of protest at a time when the museum's authority as institution was being questioned” (Reiss, 1999: 70). However, Reiss also notes, “the environmental idea included a rhetoric of inclusion that was appealing to museums. So, inviting artists to create works in situ demonstrated cooperation with groups that were publicly questioning the institution” (Reiss, 1999: 70). By making art that questioned the institutions that defined what was considered ‘art’ became a gesture of political protest by the end of the 1960s, “in part because the museum was seen as by many in the art community as the embodiment of evil” (Reiss, 1999: 70). For example, artists had made connections between museum Board Members to the Vietnam War, so “critiquing the museum became a way of expressing larger political views” (Reiss, 1999: 70).

González notes that “installations produced during this time generally followed at least two different, although not mutually exclusive, trajectories in their conception of space as a set of formal conditions to be manipulated by the artist and another that addressed space as a social construct” (González, 2009: 7). For some artists working in the United States exploring the possibilities of installation art, the social movements of the 1960s (such as student protests, civil rights and feminist movements that sought to overturn the political and artistic institutions at the time) were influential to their practice. In the late 1980s and early 1990s, artists began to take over the gallery and museum space itself by performing the roles of the curator, museum director and museum educator. They viewed museological practice as a performance and the roles of examining, classifying, indexing and teaching were drawn upon as processes that could potentially be more illuminating than the finished product of museum display. In recent decades, it has become fashionable and commonplace for artists to be invited to produce art projects that comment on the museum institution at the site of the institution. Miranda Stearn (2014) corroborates that this converges with reflexive, revisionist trends “emerging from museums and an awareness amongst curators that artists might become enablers, facilitators or partners in this process (2014: 106). As various commentators have noted, working within the institution to critique it can present many challenges to artists. Hal Foster comments on instances where invited interventions “often seem like a museum event in which the institution imports critique, whether as a show of tolerance or for the purpose of inoculation” (Foster, 1996: 137). Others (Kwon, 1997; Graw 1990) argue that artist

Towards a decoloniality of knowledge and culture

interventions in museums could be viewed as an extension of the museum's own self-promotional apparatus and that the criticism can become spectacle. Sue Latimer (2001) argues that such interventions could be considered acts of avoidance, where the museum shuns curatorial responsibility. She asks, "why don't museum curators do it themselves rather than turn to contemporary artists?" (2001: 29). Alternative, somewhat positive readings of institutional critique, such as those presented by Jennifer González and Frazer Ward (1995) point to the pedagogic benefit of institutional critique for the museum audience who, once exposed to a new way of thinking about exhibitions, continues to enact the project of critique. In this way, institutional critique is potentially a methodology that moves outside of a given institutional structure and becomes an everyday practice that can be utilised in various environments by a range of people. Such a view supports the idea of institutional critique as a democratising gesture.

4.3 Praxis: Towards New Strategies

Artists that have contributed to a contemporary understanding of institutional critique in the museum context include Fred Wilson, René Green and Pedro Lasch. Wilson and Green employ critical situational aesthetics to explore how public and private spaces are imbedded with histories of race discourse and related forms of subjection, while Lasch works within the framework of Mignolo's concept of decolonial aesthesis to draw attention to the viewer's complicity and participation in the maintenance of coloniality. These artists produce their work by infiltrating public spaces like museums, libraries and universities as spaces that play a central role in the process of subjection (González, 2008). Fred Wilson produces installations that attend to the historic materiality of the objects he presents: he is interested in where the objects came from, who created them, who owned them, who bought or sold them, how they were stored, how they were collected, how they were marketed, how they were used in different cultural traditions and how they were part of a given cultural hegemony. Wilson and other artists who work within this field produce work by strategically using objects that attest to the presence of bodies, be it the body as a site of discourse or the idea of a body of knowledge.

Second wave artists of institutional critique include United States-based artists like Fred Wilson, René Green and Mark Dion. Building on the first wave work of institutional critique (like Marcel Broodthaers' *Musee d'Art Moderne*) they sought not to vilify the museum, but to "make it a more interesting and effective institution" (Bishop, 2005: 35). They did this by investigating and

Towards a decoloniality of knowledge and culture

overturning museum taxonomies and, by implication, the ideologies that underpin them. Claire Bishop observes that “although all three artists are motivated by different political tendencies, it is significant that they choose to articulate these through a parody of museum-display conventions. It is important that so many of these artworks harness the viewer's own capacity to free-associate in their installations, revealing subversive, marginal perspectives doing combat with grand narratives” (Bishop, 2005: 35).

It is necessary, however, to question whether institutional critique has been sufficient to address the power imbalances in museums that are an effect of colonialism. While first and second waves of institutional critique have exposed some of the power relations implicit in museum display, how effective has it been in changing these institutions, especially considering that over recent decades the artworld has become more ‘reflexive’? Nav Haq (2015: 10) corroborates:

postmodernism has allowed [the artworld] to take apart its own partialities of taste and collapsed its understanding of aesthetics; it has become more aware of how it has mediated the cultural narrative in broader socio-political hegemonies and it has eventually “authorised” other perspectives to enter into the fold in the name of inclusivity. Broadly speaking, it has claimed the understanding that it possesses a locus of power at its core and that it’s taking steps to address it.

The central discussion in this subchapter centers on Fred Wilson's work within the frameworks of institutional critique and Walter D. Mignolo's ideas on decolonial aesthetics. Wilson’s experiences as a museum educator at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the American Crafts Museum and the Museum of Natural History are thought to be important influences on his work, which considers the museum's role in society. Importantly, Wilson’s installations question curatorial judgement at museums, interrogating not only what museums choose to display but also what they choose not to display, with the racially biased motivations between both decisions being a key point of departure (King and Marstine 2006: 270). By re-contextualising museum displays, Wilson confronts and then reveals how institutions define themselves, and how this definition influences and shapes historical narratives. He describes this process as a “trompe l’oeil of curating”, suggesting that he is scrutinising what is presented as reality or as historical fact. Ken Yellis (2009) argues that museums can be useful in helping their visitors make sense of the past by openly communicating the ways in which an exhibition creates meaning and how the museum visitor is part of this process. For Yellis, Wilson had done the museum world an enormous favour with his landmark 1992-1993 exhibition,

Towards a decoloniality of knowledge and culture

Mining the Museum. Wilson's work presented the public and museum professionals with an alternative "vocabulary" for thinking about the various of "making sense of the past" (Yellis, 2009). His exhibitions were often injected with a sense of dark humour and irony that offered relief but also touched a nerve in order to reveal hidden histories and deal with collective pasts that are considered painful and difficult.

In 1992, the Maryland Historical Society in Baltimore approached Wilson to reinstall the collections in a new way that would critically probe their complex past. In order to do this, he reclaimed objects that were hidden in the museum's storage rooms because of the problematic racial history they represented and juxtaposed them with what the museum celebrated as important pieces (King and Marstine, 2006). This work became known as *Mining the Museum* and encompassed various exhibits that adopted traditional museum categories – categories that are based on the medium of a given object or artwork. In a case labelled *Metalwork, 1723 – 1880* (Figure 9), he juxtaposed silver goblets produced for wealthy Maryland households with iron shackles made for the slaves that such house-holder's owned. In another display, titled *Cabinet Making, 1820 – 1860* (Figure 10), he added a crude whipping-post to a grouping of elegant antique chairs. The chairs were positioned in such a way that the imaginary guests were to be seated facing the whipping-post (a gift to the Baltimore Historical Society from the Baltimore City Jail Board) as if they were facing a performance of some kind. Wilson's collaborator on *Mining the Museum*, Lisa Corrin writes:

Wilson sought to explore our reading of historical truth through sometimes startling juxtapositions of objects representing vastly historical 'fact', revealing stereotypes and contrasting power and powerlessness. Wilson explores the relationship of what is on view to what else is on view. (Corrin, 1993: 313).

An example of this critical exploration can be seen in the way that Wilson uses a previously unexamined plantation owner's inventory book, which he found in the archives of the MHS. This book was used to add names to the slaves who are depicted in a particular painting of workers in the fields. The slaves were listed in the ledger, "along with other household property and livestock" (Corrin, 1993: 313).

Within the western context, slavery occurring from the 16th century onwards, was a colonising of being, and is, arguably, still happening today on a global scale. Walter Dignolo argues that one of the tasks before us is to engage in decolonial projects, learning to unlearn the principles that

Towards a decoloniality of knowledge and culture

justified the creation of museums and to formulate a new understanding of human living conditions beyond the belief that accumulation is the secret to a decent life.

Mignolo argues that once the colonising role of the museum has been identified, the next step is decolonisation – both through scholarly work around the museum institution as well as in exhibits and performances that examine the role of the museum in the decolonisation of knowledge. For Mignolo, Wilson's *Mining the Museum* is an example of decolonial curatorial practice and an exemplar of epistemic and aesthetic disobedience. Mignolo considers *Mining the Museum* to be a powerful decolonial statement in what he refers to as “the heart of an imperial, colonial and national institution” (Mignolo, 2006: 76). Although, as he notes, museums should not be sentimentalised as only this. They have been and can become important spaces of learning and knowledge production. As Mignolo writes, “the future is open” (2006: 76) and museums have the potential to play an important role in societal change. For this reason, it is important to recognise the contribution that work like *Mining the Museum* makes to our understanding of the nature, meaning and potential of the medium of exhibition-making. It also explores how the visitor is or, more often, is not part of making sense of the past (Yellis, 2009: 334).

In a more recent exhibition by Fred Wilson, entitled *Site Unseen: Dwellings of the Demons* (2004), he was asked by the director of the Museum of World Culture²⁸ in Gothenburg, Sweden, to “help the museum bring its demons to the open” (Mignolo, 2006: 76). The supposed demons Wilson was to bring to the surface were indigenous artifacts ‘brought’ to Europe from South America, Africa and Indonesia. These objects are witnesses to the colonial enterprise that benefited the entire European continent and were often acquired in violent ways. Taken aback by the enormity of the South American collection, Wilson decided to use it as his subject matter. In an interview about the project with the online cultural platform Art21, Wilson recalls how strange and uncomfortable it made him feel to not be able to speak with anyone at the museum about this collection. It is this discomfort that led to the conceptual thinking on this project, which involved notions of displacement and migration, and of objects being arbitrarily moved, becoming disconnected and broken in transit. Wilson has often referred to a feeling of strangeness as a kind of genesis for creating his museum installations. He spoke of a feeling of alienation in the Maryland Historical

²⁸ Previously, the Gothenburg Ethnographic Museum.

Towards a decoloniality of knowledge and culture

Society, the site of *Mining the Museum*, and as he states, “I originally felt completely alien in that environment – which intrigued me. I wanted to know why” (cited in Yellis, 2009: 334).

Wilson’s curatorial methodology and working practice when engaging with museums involve an investigation or mining of the museum catalogue cards, photographic archives and collection storerooms. This is where and how he generates the concept for the design of the exhibition, which in the case of the Museum of World Culture involved the physical alteration to the architecture of the museum interior. The final design incorporated built-in areas, raised platforms, shallow pits and the tilting of the pitch of the gallery floor at 70cm in two directions. In this work, Wilson responded to the collecting practices of late 20th and early 19th century European ethnographic museums that amassed collections of objects from around the globe to display grand narratives of human development from a European perspective. In their prime, these museums were important sites for education, as museums were institutions through which Europe controlled the coloniality of knowledge. Today these museums have storerooms that bear witness to this colonial past and the practice Wilson is engaging with is an attempt to use the museum site itself to decolonise this knowledge. One of the potent impacts of Fred Wilson’s work lies in the fact that his exhibits and installations highlight the violence of classifying categories of museums that are usually taken for granted.

While postcolonialist and postmodernist thought is often written with reference to Fred Wilson's work, Mignolo argues that Wilson makes a radical contribution to decolonial thinking more so than either postmodernist or postcolonial thinking. Mignolo’s position is that postcolonialism was a consequence of postmodernism or postmodernity. Essentially it emerged in the global North, in urban centers such as Paris, London and New York, as the result of poststructural thought brought into conversation with orientalism and postcolonial theory. He articulates, “basically then, postcolonialism emerged at the crossroads at the end of English colonialism in India and, in Egypt, the emergence of a powerful group of 'third world intellectuals' who were able to articulate their experience in ex-colonial countries and their mastery of continental philosophy, literary theory and comparative literature” (2011: 78). He submits that decoloniality is to be thought about as something different entirely. As a concept, its ancestor is the period of decolonisation which was happening in Asian and Indian countries during the cold war years. In an interview with Rubén Gaztambide-Fernández (2014), Mignolo describes this as referring to “indigenous struggles to expel the coloniser from their territory and to build their own nation-state” (2014: 197).

Towards a decoloniality of knowledge and culture

Fred Wilson's *Mining the Museum* and *Site Unseen* can be analysed in the frame of decoloniality in the sense that it is a “move toward the decoloniality of knowledge and being, that on the one hand reveals the underlying assumptions of the institution itself and on the other, uses the institution to reveal what lies hidden in the colonial histories of slavery and the consequences of racism” (Mignolo, 2011: 78). Mignolo writes about oppression and denial as two aspects of the logic of coloniality that manifests in institutional spaces such as the museum or gallery. He cites Fred Wilson in conversation with Leslie King-Hammond where Wilson suggests that decolonisation of being is the direct consequence of the awareness, of the consciousness of being colonised:

In the museum, you're in this environment that you're supposed to understand and feel good about. All of these ‘supposed to’s’ – and the artwork is still there, but there's this stuff that's not being talked about as it relates to the real world. All this denial, all this history of America, all this history of Europe, and the relationship of between people is not being talked about. Museums just pretend that we can overlook it, that we can experience culture without having those feelings of oppression. This compounds those feelings. That’s why I like working in museums, because they're so much of America to me, unconsciously (Wilson cited in Mignolo, 2011: 79).

In 1999 Wilson was invited to represent the USA at the Venice Biennial and in 2003 he was awarded the prestigious McArthur award. While Wilson is an extraordinary artist, by his affiliation with these organisations, Mignolo argues that he has become a part of the institution he critiques partly because there is no alternative paradigm for society in which to celebrate Wilson's achievements as an artist. Pointing to the problematics around the complicity of artists and scholars that are engaged in critical work, Mignolo argues that the “decolonial paradigm to which Wilson's work contributes is erased and his work is incorporated into the imperial paradigm that he not only contests, but also delinks from” (Mignolo, 2011: 80). Ultimately, Mignolo argues here, the decolonial paradigm is one without institutions as these continue to belong to the colonial/imperial paradigm and the recognition that Wilson receives comes from this paradigm (Mignolo, 2011: 80). Therefore, he argues, it is not Wilson's “artistic achievements”²⁹ that contribute to decoloniality but his decolonial

²⁹ He argues that what is considered an achievement in the contemporary art world is tied to modernity, which in turn is tied to coloniality. To take it further, one has to detach the artistic achievement to the thinking, which makes an epistemic contribution.

Towards a decoloniality of knowledge and culture

thinking which works towards an alternative frame of mind “revealing the imperial underpinning of artistic modern standards and the imperial foundations of museums and institutions like the Venice Biennial” (2011: 80). For Mignolo, Wilson's contribution cannot be restricted to art history and museums, but should be read in the frame of the decolonial turn where Wilson's work is “unveiling the logic of coloniality and opening up the gates to imagine possible futures detached from the mono-topic cosmology of the modern art world” (Mignolo, 2011: 84). Given the complexity of this argument, further discussion on the complicity of scholars, intellectuals and artists in maintaining the influence, power and relevance of institutions tied to the paradigm of 'modernity/coloniality' is necessary. It is also important to recognise the difficulties and challenges involved in decolonising one's own practice when operating inside institutions such as the university, the museum or the 'art-world'. This is an issue that I return to in Chapter 5 when I discuss my own curatorial practice.

While it could be argued that Fred Wilson's work transmits explicit political messages, René Green's work, in contrast, has obvious political connotations without being prescriptive about the message she is trying to convey. Her installations, such as *Commemorative Toile* (Figure 11) are characterised by counter-narrative strategies and by complexity rather than certainty. Like Wilson, Green is concerned with the legacies of colonialism, slavery and the ethnographic tradition, and how these impact on identity. As such, Green's interests lie with historical discourse, its intersections and its flows, its unconscious and deliberate omissions (González, 2008: 17). Employing a minimalist, clinical aesthetic and a self-critical, genealogical approach, Green tackles questions such as: how is history recorded, how is memory constructed, how is power consolidated and who has the right to decide? Similar to Wilson, Green produces a critical response to the intersection of race discourse with spatial discourse, and both Wilson and Green employ a materialist approach to the history of subjection. For both Wilson and Green, “installation art serves as an appropriate form for their critical practice because it allows for staging objects in architectural settings that often mimic the very spaces and display mechanisms they wish to critique” (Gonzalez, 2008: 18). Gonzalez cites Walter Benjamin, “the role of the materialist historian must act as one who digs, to pull signs from the past into new confrontation with the present. To write History, therefore means to quote history. But the concept of quotation implies that any given historical object must be ripped out of its context” (Gonzalez, 2008: 18). Green works genealogically to investigate the activity and the history of looking and seeing as it intersects with the politics of colonialism and race discourse, with history and memory (Gonzalez, 2008: 205). Contemporary use of the term 'genealogy' largely derive from Michael Foucault's distinction between the genealogical approach to the past that develops a

Towards a decoloniality of knowledge and culture

provisional account from fragments and of always partial evidence, and a more traditional historical approach to the past that produces overarching explanatory narratives or general characteristics of a historical epoch. Foucault writes that a genealogical model of critical analysis is no longer to be practiced in the search for formal structures with universal value but rather as a historical investigation into the events that have led us to constitute ourselves and to recognise ourselves as subjects of what we are doing, thinking, saying. A genealogical approach to the past might be said to follow an interlocking capillary spread of facts without imposing an absolute order of things. Green's genealogical method reveals an effort to chart the relation of bodies to systems of power through which they have been marked and dominated. In this respect, she follows Foucault's assertion that "the body is the inscribed surface of events. Genealogy as an analysis of descent is thus situated within the articulation of the body in history. Its task is to expose a body totally imprinted by history and the process of history's destruction on the body" (Gonzalez, 2008: 206). Partially Buried in Three Parts (Figure 12) (Partially Buried, Ubetragen/Transfer, and Partially Buried Continued), "involves a web of genealogical traces probed through the notions of sites of memory as well as site-specific work. Each part is an overlapping exploration of ways in which we attempt to interpret the past, as well as our contemporary relations to our designated origins" (Leung, 2001: 55).

Green's concept of site is not 'purely' a phenomenological one, but includes a historical context specific to the installation and the dynamic and changing nature of the site and its surroundings. Her interventions within museums or galleries consider the historical relationship of a particular institution or location to its racial and cultural ideologies and practices. Her installations represent issues of race in an arbitrary manner, emphasising their contextualism, expressing the idea that race discourse is grounded in a historical context and cannot be discussed in a generalised manner. The installation *Bequest* (1991), produced for the Worcester Art Museum (WAM) in Massachusetts, USA is a good illustration of this. Reminiscent of Fred Wilson's *Mining the Museum*, the object of investigation seems to be an aspect of history and culture that is negated by the institution, along with the nature of the ideology behind those acts of negation. Green sets up a 'fictional' museum within the WAM. To enter the space of the installation, the viewer must pass through a gold-painted free-standing doorway, suggesting a picture frame. Thus, one enters through the frame of 'Art', emphasising that her installation, as well as the representations of the museum, are staged. Inside, the patriarchal lineage of the museum's founder, Stephen Salisbury III, is visually presented in the form of portraits hung on the walls. Two rows of white, clipboard-like walls, suggestive of the

Towards a decoloniality of knowledge and culture

architecture of the area and a 'gangplank', which creates a path on the floor between the walls, lead one to a small fabricated room. Quotations from writings by E.A. Poe, H. Melville, N. Hawthorne, and W.E.B. De Bois relating to concepts of 'blackness' and 'whiteness' are stenciled "between the lines" of the clapboard walls and plank. The constructed room that one is led to is locked with master locks. Part of the walls of this room are created with muslin, allowing one to peer in, but the locks prevent one from entering.

Another example of such interventionist practices include Pedro Lasch's 2008 exhibition *Black Mirror*, (Figures 13 & 14), which was presented at Duke University's Nasher Museum to accompany its showstopper exhibition, *Els Greco to Velázquez* (2008). Sixteen pre-Columbian statues were selected from the museum's permanent collection, were positioned on plinths with their backs turned to the viewer. On approach, it became clear that the statues faced a series of black reflective glass sheets that acted as mirrors. Behind the reflective glass sheets hung paintings of Spanish colonial figures so that "in a single plane, indigeneity, coloniality and the self collide, implicating the audience through their moving reflections" (Muñiz Reed, 2015: 17). The expected power relations of the exhibit are somewhat distorted in this exhibition, but not reversed. In colonial narratives about Mesoamerican civilisations, their people, buildings and institutions were always in the background even when the Aztecs and Mayans were the main characters in the story (Mignolo, 2014). In an essay in the exhibition catalogue, Walter Mignolo (2014: 4) argues that most viewers of this exhibition had come to it with an understanding of "history framed and maintained by coloniality, the triumphant imperial narratives that highlighted the march of civilisation and disguised what it had to destroy, dismiss, devalue in order to justify its forward march". Mignolo argues that it is decolonial thinking that is behind the exhibitions, not just the complexity structured by the colonial power relations that are being unveiled by the exhibition. The statues that Lasch exhibited were not part of the regular collection on exhibition at the museum, but stored in the archival storeroom of the museum. Lasch's work enacts a radical shift from Western conceptions of art and museum installations. Mignolo argues that *Black Mirror/Espajo Negro* digs into "the imaginary of modernity, of the myth of art, of the role of the museum in forming subjectivities" (Mignolo, 2014).

The work of Wilson, Green and Lasch involves working with pre-existing collections or within museum institutions to further the decolonial agenda. In a somewhat different vein but following the same kind of thinking on decolonising knowledge, is *Chimurenga* magazine, a Pan-African

Towards a decoloniality of knowledge and culture

publisher of writing, arts and politics founded by Ntone Edjabe in 2002 and based in Cape Town. Chimurenga's name comes from a Shona word referring to the 'struggle for freedom' (Frank, 2015). The platform's byline "Who no Know go Know" references the song by Nigerian musician and activist Fela Kuti. The multitude of publications under the Chimurenga umbrella include a quarterly Pan-African gazette titled *The Chronic*, a journal referencing a newspaper format that covers writing on African arts, culture and politics and features a large range of influential African writers such as Binyavanga Wainana, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie and Achille Mbembe. The Chimurenga library is an ongoing archive/interventionist project that was established in 2009. The project consists of an online archive and a curatorial intervention into physical library spaces. The project began when Chimurenga magazine was commissioned to produce an artwork for Cape 09, which was to be the first Cape Town Biennale. The library took the form of an online archive of independently produced magazines, films, journals, essays etc. As Edjabe described it, the projects would mimic an online archive similar to Wikipedia but the contents of the archive would include works that would not make it onto Wikipedia itself (Edjabe, 2015). The descriptions of the work included in the archive contained factual research material merged with fictional narratives commenting on the what is real and what is not real in the internet space. The first physical library intervention took place at the Cape Town library in 2010. One of the first things the curatorial team did was to recategorise the entire library into "user friendly categories" (Edjabe, 2015). In this way, the project was engaged with the institution's categorising systems. Another methodology the curatorial team used was to spend six months prior to the installation of the exhibition to observe what the library was used for and who used it. The team discovered that parallel to the 'everyday' activities associated with the library, it was also used for those activities not usually associated with the space, such as a nursery for mothers who dropped off their children after school, a place for resting and sleeping, an office for freelance workers or simply a place to show up to in the morning for those without work. Edjabe says the team was interested in bringing the subterranean uses of the library to the forefront of its space. The project involved breaking down some of the existing signs and categories in the library to disrupt the hegemonic library categorisation systems. A map was designed which was replicated on the floor of the space merging the fictional and factual narratives of the archive. Edjabe describes the Chimurenga library intervention as a negotiation with the institution they intervene into. The exhibition guides employed by the Chimurenga team were trained by library staff. For Edjabe, it was important that the exhibition team operated in the same way that the library operates, using the language of the library itself to question its existing systems.

Towards a decoloniality of knowledge and culture

The project has since been installed in other locations, such as the San Francisco Public Library (Figures 15 & 16) and The Showroom in London. The project has set out to build an archive that transcends the national boundaries of African nation states. As a project focused on collaborative ways of working, the *Chimurenga Library* “allows participants to join in and be part of the creation of an archive that is deeply rooted in Pan-African knowledge systems and connections” (Frank, 2015). In the latest installation of the Chimurenga Library project at The Showroom in London in 2015, routes and cartographies in the gallery demonstrated *Chimurenga’s* “vision of realities and imaginaries created by Africans for Africans” (Frank, 2015). This approach is reflected in an edition of *The Chronic* titled *New Cartographies*, which “subverts the use of cartography as a technique of empire by exploring what happens when Africans make maps for their own use” (Frank, 2015). For Chandra Frank, it is “this subversion of colonial knowledge systems through the creation and imagining of African futures underlies *Chimurenga’s* vision”. During the first week of the *Chimurenga Library* installation at The Showroom gallery, the Pan African Space Station live stream, featuring journalists, curators, musicians and writers, was recorded and subsequently screened in the gallery to form part of the exhibition. The Showroom gallery now houses a participatory archive that functions as an active site shaped by a multiplicity of narratives and sounds. The *Chimurenga Library* is a living archive that “can be seen as a third space, as it is not limited by singular locations or made geographies” (Frank, 2015).

Works by Fred Wilson, Reneé Green, Pedro Lasch and Chimurenga compel the institutions they work in, and the audiences they serve, to challenge notions of an unbiased and objective account of history and the archive. They do this by temporarily transporting their audiences to unfamiliar and sometimes uncomfortable environments that invite emotional as well as intellectual responses (Stearn, 2014). Stearn (2014: 105) argues that “artist interventions invite emotion into the museum”, which can seem at odds with an institution that was historically conceived of as a container for the representation of rational, empirical truths. However, does this critique survive when artists work and collaborate closely with the institutions themselves? The following chapter addresses this question through the installation *The Chair*, exhibited at the Stellenbosch University Museum from November 2015 to March 2016.

5 Unsettling Monuments: The Chair as a Curatorial Intervention into the Stellenbosch University Museum Archive

In February 2013, while co-teaching a medical anthropology course to undergraduate students at the Stellenbosch University Museum, Mandisa Mbali and Handri Walters, a lecturer and doctoral student at the department of Sociology and Social Anthropology, were confronted by the material remains of this museum's institutional legacy. The objects discovered at the museum included a human skull and instruments that were used to classify human hair and eye types, the latter housed in a metal case that was engraved with the name 'Eugen Fischer' (Figures 17 & 18). Fischer was a leading Nazi eugenicist in Germany in the 1930s (Mbali, 2013). An investigation by the department revealed that the items had found their way to the then Sasol Art Museum (now the Stellenbosch University Museum) subsequent to the closure of the 'Volkekunde' Department³⁰ at Stellenbosch in the mid-1990s (Mbali, 2013). Walters was handed the objects by Lydia de Waal, the former director of the Stellenbosch University Museum, who wanted to 'return' the objects to the Department of Sociology and Social Anthropology. De Waal felt that the objects were unfit for exhibition, and had to date been stored in a cupboard in her office for safekeeping. They had been stored this way at least since since de Waal took up the position of director more than ten years earlier (Walters, 2015) but how long before then is uncertain. At the time, Mbali wrote in the national newspaper, the Mail and Guardian of the recovery of the objects:

Their recovery by our department, Sociology and Social Anthropology, has raised a number of research questions regarding the history of their use at Stellenbosch University and the deployment of scientific knowledge produced here to justify racism during the 1930s and 1940s. It has also sparked interest in the ethical issues surrounding scientific research involving humans in South Africa today. Such scientific racism was not uncommon at the time: it was, rather, a mainstream and internationally prevalent approach to the study of human types. In essence, these eugenics objects reflected a worldwide obsession with racial science and human

³⁰ 'Volkekunde', a brand of Afrikaans that had found a home at Stellenbosch from 1926 to the mid-1990s, aimed to address both the 'native' and the 'poor white' questions of the 1930s by proposing separate development. These anthropologists' thinking was that this approach would ensure the cultural preservation of each group. Max Eiselen, a Stellenbosch anthropologist, was a key figure in the development of 'Volkekunde' and has been described as one of the intellectual 'architects of apartheid'.

Unsettling monuments: The Chair – a curatorial intervention into the Stellenbosch University Museum archive

classification based on the visible, physical attributes of human individuals and groups such as their hair type, eye colour, and skull shape. In the post-war period, with the revelation of the Nazi Holocaust across Europe, a shift occurred in the international scientific consensus on race. (Mbali, 2014)

The recovery of these objects raised many questions about the role of traditionally Afrikaner institutions like Stellenbosch University in the establishment, maintenance and justification of racist apartheid policies and the role of the practice of scientific racism in the establishment of apartheid. Mbali (2013), Dubouw (2005) and others have argued that in South Africa scientific racism was not the only way in which apartheid was justified, as Christian-nationalist and cultural theories were also used to promote the idea that black Africans were morally inferior to their white counterparts in order to support 'separate development'.

Stellenbosch University, previously known as Victoria College, was established in 1866 as an Afrikaans-medium tertiary institution. The institution's connection with the intelligentsia of emerging Afrikaner Nationalism in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century (and even later National Party rule in South Africa from 1948 until 1994) has been well documented (Spaull 2014; Sanders 2002; Mabokela & King, 2001). Six out of the seven former prime ministers of South Africa from 1910 until 1971 attended classes here – J.C. Smuts, J.B.M. Hertzog, D.F. Malan, J.G. Strijdom, H.F. Verwoerd and B.J. Vorster (Odendaal, 2012). Highlighting this history in an open-letter to the now deceased former rector of the university, Russel Botman, a graduate student, Pieter Odendaal (2012) wrote:

D.F. Malan, SU chancellor from 1941-1959, led the NP's victory in 1948, became prime minister of South Africa and helped to lay down the foundations of apartheid. B.J. Vorster, SU chancellor from 1969-1983, was Minister of Justice when Nelson Mandela and 8 others were sentenced during the Rivonia Trial. He was also instrumental in completely abolishing non-white political representation, and was prime minister during the Soweto riots of 1976 and Steve Biko's murder in 1977. P.W. Botha was sitting in both the SU chancellor's and South Africa's presidential chair during the political unrest of the 1980's.

In addition, Stellenbosch University's geographical position in the town follows the socio-historic patterns of economic inequality and social polarisation that is still found in the Western Cape. "In

Unsettling monuments: The Chair – a curatorial intervention into the Stellenbosch University Museum archive

line with the typical apartheid urban planning practices of many South African towns and cities, Stellenbosch consists of a town center, reserved for white people during apartheid by the Group Areas Act (1950), surrounded by spatially disconnected and racially segregated suburbs and townships” (Valley, 2014). Many studies and reflections point to either a divided and/or disaffiliated society, breaks in the social bond or the absence of such bonds altogether (Castel, 2000). In 1968, residents of a once-thriving neighbourhood known as Die Vlakte³¹ were forcibly removed, after which the university acquired some of the repossessed land and erected the current Arts and Social Sciences building (formerly the B.J. Vorster building). After my first year of study there, I wrote of my experience:

legacies of colonialism and apartheid are etched into social dynamics of the town in the way its inhabitants occupy public space – real and imagined boundaries are still constructed according to race and class. Spending a significant amount of time there has reminded me that the architecture of a place, both in the physical and social sense, is always deeply embedded in relationships of power. (Valley, 2014)

Prior to the implementation of formal apartheid in 1948, the university had a troubling relationship with the inhabitants of the town. In 1940, students at Stellenbosch University attacked the coloured community of Die Vlakte and vandalised their homes in what has come to be known as the 'Battle of Adringa Street'. Steven Robins reflected on the political context of the 'Battle of Adringa Street' in an article authored in the Cape Argus on 11 August 2015. He suggested that the attack can be linked to Afrikaner nationalist support for Germany's war effort during the Second World War, writing, “students took their anger out on residents because they were still 'smarting' after their defeat at a noon-day skirmish with soldiers in Adderley Street. They were looking for a scapegoat after having lost the battle for South African neutrality in the war” (Robins, 2015). In the article, Robins cites a supplement to the Cape Standard issued by the Non-European Front of South Africa on 6 August 1940, where the students’ actions are described as “a mass attack on the non-European quarters, beating and terrorising the whole community”. The Cape Standard supplement refers to the students as “fascist hooligans and mentions that the Stellenbosch race riot was one of numerous

³¹ After emancipation, free slaves in Cape Town moved to the less politicised rural areas; such as Stellenbosch (Scully, 1990). As a consequence of increasing urbanisation, by 1850, a predominantly, yet not exclusively, coloured neighbourhood, Die Vlakte (The Flats), had developed within the central part of the town of Stellenbosch. By the 1960s, roughly 3,500 people lived in the area of Die Vlakte, 90% of whom were coloured.

Unsettling monuments: The Chair – a curatorial intervention into the Stellenbosch University Museum archive

similar events occurring in South Africa during the early 1940's" (Robins, 2015). These events had been allocated minimal visibility in the material culture of the university or in its surroundings until an installation spearheaded by the former dean of Arts and Social Sciences, Johan Hattingh had been installed in the Arts and Social Sciences building in November 2015. During Russell Botman's tenure as rector of the university, he initiated the Memory Room project located in the university archives but the visibility of this exhibition preceding the student activism and protests of 2015 is questionable. The door to the exhibition is often closed and it is not really accessible to the community whose history it represents. Just as exhibitions are not mute, the absence of this historic material in museums and display spaces in the town of Stellenbosch and the university speaks about centuries of negated and excluded histories.

It is within this cultural, socio-political and historical context that the Stellenbosch University Museum is located. The museum was officially opened to the public on 3 October 1991, having taken occupancy of the former Bloemhof School Building. Renovations to the building were made possible by a one million rand grant from Sasol, the South African energy and chemical company. While Sasol has in subsequent years made no formal donations to the university museum in terms of its operational funding or otherwise, the inclusion of Sasol in the name of the museum seems to have stuck for more than two decades. In 2015, it was officially renamed the Stellenbosch University Museum or the US Museum. As mentioned previously, the anthropology collection was acquired after the closure of the 'Volkekunde' Department at the university and the cultural history collection was donated by the families of the owners of the objects in the collection. For instance, the D.F Malan collection in the Cultural History Department was a bequest from the Malan family who provided strict conditions in terms of the display of the objects (Mgijima, 2015).

In 2014, the university appointed Bongani Mgijima (museologist and former curator of the Lwandle Migrant Labour Museum in Cape Town) as the director of the US Museum and successor to Lydia de Waal. Suggesting the need for transformation at the museum in an interview with *Kampus Nuus* (Campus News) at the time of his appointment,³² Mgijima states that:

³² See February 2015 issue of *Kampus Nuus*, the Stellenbosch university newsletter distributed monthly in hardcopy and electronic format.

Unsettling monuments: The Chair – a curatorial intervention into the Stellenbosch University Museum archive

Stellenbosch University, like many other institutions in South Africa, has a very unpleasant past. It has always been seen as the intellectual home of apartheid. However, in recent years it has owned up to this past and committed itself to building an inclusive society. SU has also committed itself to become a 21st-century university – a university of the future. And I would like to be part of this future. (*Kampus Nuus*, 2015)

Currently, the museum employs about ten staff members, four of whom are curatorial staff. In a personal interview in 2015, Mgijima claims that there are no overlaps between departments in the way curators work together: “The approach has not really been interdisciplinary” he stressed. He suggests that part of the work of transforming the museum involves forging stronger connections between departments within the institution in addition to collaborative work with academic departments at the university (Mgijima, 2015). The museum is organised internally in a manner typical of most public museums, with separate collections, in this instance the museological ‘disciplines’ of anthropology, cultural history and fine art. Notably, its anthropology collection is framed as distinct from cultural history. While the anthropology exhibition room is devoted to showing the material culture of the non-urbanised black African population of Southern Africa, the cultural history collection (not designated a specific exhibition room but rather shown throughout various displays in the building), is devoted to showing objects belonging to the South African population of European descent. Contextualising this, Carolyn Hamilton and Elizabeth Rankin (2008: 3) explain:

The earliest historical and cultural museums in South Africa were based on a classificatory division between the disciplines of cultural history (concerned with the material culture and glorious history of so called civilised westernised societies and their settler offshoots) and ethnology or later, ethnography [in the US Museum this is referred to as anthropology] focused on what were regarded as the timeless traditions, the life and habits of indigenous peoples presumed to be primitive and located somewhere earlier on the evolutionary scale.

The exclusion of African cultural history from the cultural history collection in a contemporary post-1994 university museum should raise questions about the values of the institution. In South Africa as well as internationally, ethnographic or anthropology collections at museums have traditionally been grouped with natural history collections as non-western populations were seen to belong to

Unsettling monuments: The Chair – a curatorial intervention into the Stellenbosch University Museum archive

the natural world. This draws attention to what Patricia Davison (1991) refers to as an “ideology of separation”. Davison argues that in apartheid South Africa, this ideology of separation was made explicit when the South African cultural history museum was declared a ‘white own affairs’ institution following the implementation of the Tricameral parliament of 1983. Whereas the South African Museum, housing natural history and ethnographic collections were grouped under general affairs. Mgijima's future plans for the US Museum include the merging of the Anthropology and Cultural History disciplines into one department (Mgijima, 2015).

Kathleen Mclean (1999: 85) writes that “the public nature of exhibitions makes them the obvious stage on which to play out the tensions of our times – tensions between access and exclusivity, common and expert knowledge, the prescribing and the challenging of meaning”. Reflecting this position, Mgijima's vision for the future of the Stellenbosch University Museum is that it should become both a research space and a space for dialogue³³ (Mgijima, 2015). It is clear that in order to achieve relevancy in the academic project and to become a space for knowledge production, this museum needs to become an interrogative space, focused on teaching, research and dialogue. Ivan Karp and Corine Kratz argue that “the interrogative museum strives – through exhibiting, research and even collections management – to develop a plural sense of answers to the enduring and changing questions that museums ask” (Kratz and Karp, 2015: 281). As these authors maintain, “the dialogic, pluralist view of the world central to the interrogative museum must operate through the institutional structures that provide the context in which projects and daily practice take place, with their panoply of interests, resistances and claims to authority” (Kratz and Karp, 2015: 281). While this cannot be an easy thing to do in the context of Stellenbosch, given the contested views about its legacy by members of its community, it is evident that the US Museum has made some attempts in this regard through its work with the Indexing the Human project run by the Sociology and Social Anthropology Department and through collaborations with the Visual Arts Department – the latter

³³ However, it is important to note that since the museum falls under the management of the public relations department at Stellenbosch University, the space for robust critique and inquiry in order to answer some of the questions raised by the objects housed in its archive may be limited. The museum has since partnered with the Art Department again in 2016. I am co-curating a project called Open Forum with the Stellenbosch University museum, the Visual Art Department’s art gallery (Gallery Stellenbosch University or GUS) and students that have been involved in the 2015- 2016 student activist movements. Open Forum is a laboratory for ideas that respond to current and past struggles in South African tertiary education institutions. It comprises of a series of interventions around Stellenbosch over October 2016 that are meant to raise questions about art's role in shifting how and under what conditions knowledge is produced. The collective approach is to place decolonial thinking at the center of our art practice. The Open Forum project consists of curated film screenings, a residency programme, the building of an archive and a mobile exhibition of the work produced that will travel to various sites during 2017.

Unsettling monuments: The Chair – a curatorial intervention into the Stellenbosch University Museum archive

of which was invited to take part in an interrogation of their archival holdings, of which my own exhibition project was the final outcome.

Recent months have seen a move towards realising Mjigima's vision of making the museum a space of dialogue. In April 2015, the museum hosted the Indexing the Human seminar, *Past Tenses, Relative Presents: Spectres of Race in South African Museums* in which Mjigima himself was a participant and where part of the discussion dealt with the ethics of museum representation and display. In August 2016 it hosted a screening and Q&A of the film *Action Kommandant*, a film by Nadine Cloete about the life of the apartheid-era activist Ashley Kriel. During the Q&A, a lively conversation ensued, including a debate on decolonisation and what it meant to screen a film that talks about revolution and social justice in a museum that hadn't yet been decolonised.

While definite strides have been made in terms of public education programming, almost none has been made to alter (or provide comment on) the troubling ways in which both the anthropology and cultural history material is organised and displayed. In the anthropology exhibition room of the museum, various ethnolinguistic groups in South Africa are organised in separate vitrines. For instance, while one of the cases is labeled "Southern Nguni: Zulu" there is another titled "Southern Nguni: Xhosa" (Figures 21 and 22). Mandisa Mbali observes:

The anthropology display at the Sasol Museum also represents an ideal of Africans as rural and uninfluenced by Christianity, urbanisation, industrialisation or cultural exchange. It can, therefore, be seen to idealise the "tribal", "unWesternised" African in his/her "natural", rural state. Such thinking was reflected in policies such as the creation of the bantustans during the apartheid era. (Mbali, 2013)

Hans Ulrich Obrist (2015: 39) writes that collection-making is a way of producing knowledge, "to make a collection is to find, organise and store items, whether in a room, a house, a library, a museum or a warehouse. It is also, inevitably, a way of thinking about the world – the connections and principles that produce a collection contain assumptions, juxtapositions, findings, experimental possibilities and associations". The permanent exhibitions shown in the Stellenbosch University Museum seem to have escaped the introspective processes of revision that many South African museums have undergone post-1994 and in the years leading to 1994. From the late 1980s onwards, museums "started rethinking classificatory boundaries within collections and between

Unsettling monuments: The Chair – a curatorial intervention into the Stellenbosch University Museum archive

institutions” (Davison, 2005: 188). While this is especially true of the western area of museum practice (of which Davison writes), the same tendency can be seen in the 1990s in South Africa when the formerly separate History and Anthropology sections of the South African Museum (SAM) merged to form the current Humanities Collection. “This symbolic realignment signaled a growing momentum to tell ‘hidden histories’ that had been suspended or distorted under apartheid, a new respect for oral histories, and a call to democratise museum practice at all levels” (Davison, 2005: 189). As Annie Coombes contends, South African museums saw their terrain “as a potential staging post for the re-inscription of public history”³⁴ (Coombes, 2004: 206).

In contrast with the Anthropology exhibition, objects belonging to the US Museum's Cultural History collection are displayed in a very different manner. Firstly, in the text accompanying the objects, the latter are noted as belonging to individuals such as D.F Malan or H.B Thom, former chancellor (1941-1959) and rector (1954-1969) of the university respectively. The displays are also arranged as installations that suggest the owners of the objects were active participants in ‘civilised’, ‘modern’ life – for example, an installation that was supposed to be a recreation of the office of DF Malan was exhibited alongside a large bronze bust of the former chancellor until its removal by Mgijima sometime in 2015, most likely in response to the 2015 student activism at Stellenbosch University. The disparity between how these two collections are displayed reflect colonial/modern binary notions of ‘European’ and ‘African’. The construction of indigenous African people as ‘caught in the vitrines of the past’ is strongly undergirded by the language employed in the Anthropology exhibition. It appears permeated by underlying racist, pseudo-scientific discourse, which originated in 19th century Europe. This discourse placed European civilisation at the apex of progress of humankind (Mitter, 2000: 45). “Western language and thought has often represented the world as dichotomised absolutes consisting of antithetical terms and ideas, with no alternative ground” (Coe at al. 2004: 2). As Heynen argues:

In postcolonial theories, the interconnections between the enlightenment project of modernity and the imperialist practice of colonialism have been carefully disentangled, following the lead of Edward Said's orientalism, it is argued that

³⁴ Coombes argues that “key concerns emerging from the debates on how to effect progressive transformation of heritage sites and museums focus on redressing the perceived imbalances of hegemonic historical narrative so that those histories previously occluded could be represented. Strategies included challenging the often exclusive focus on white settler histories and illuminating precolonial histories, as well as later liberation struggles and conflicts” (Coombes, 2004:206).

Unsettling monuments: The Chair – a curatorial intervention into the Stellenbosch University Museum archive

colonial discourse was intrinsic to European self-understanding: it is through their conquest and their knowledge of foreign peoples and territories that Europeans could position themselves as modern, as civilised, as superior, as developed and progressive vis-a-vis local populations that were none of that ... The other, the non-European, was thus represented as the negation of everything that Europe imagined or desired to be. (2005: 9)

Val Plumwood writes that “in dualistic construction, the qualities (actual or supposed), the culture, the values and the areas of life of associated with the dualised other are systematically and pervasively constructed and depicted as inferior” (Plumwood, 1993: 47). It could be argued that the Anthropology and Cultural History exhibitions at the Stellenbosch University Museum have been designed to form a binary relationship and that this intentionally constructs a hierarchy of identities, making equality and mutuality unthinkable (Plumwood, 1993). Similarly, in the Museum’s archival storeroom, the Cultural History and Anthropology collections are physically divided into two distinct sections of the room, echoing the binaries evident in the museum's displays (Figures 23 & 24). Blatantly obvious is the level of care given to the artifacts of the Cultural History collection. These are meticulously labeled, packaged and stored, while artifacts in the Anthropology collection are treated with disregard. They are stored without labels, or left unpackaged on the storeroom’s open shelves. In addition, the index cards demonstrate a bias towards the inclusion of data, ascension information or notes about the Cultural History artifacts, while the Anthropology index cards are often void of data. (Figure 25). Patricia Davison (2005: 186) reminds us that:

every artefact is a tangible trace, a crystalised memory of its manufacture and use, but at the same time attests to conceptual and spatial displacements resulting from acts of acquisition, classification, and conservation. Once assembled, collections are complex and revealing artefacts of museum practice, as well as fragments of former social milieu. Objects held by museums constitute a material archive not only of preserved pasts, but also the concerns that motivated museum practice over time. These concerns can seldom be separated from relations of power and cultural dominance. Museums have often been described as places of collective memory, but selective memory may be a more accurate description.

Arjun Appadurai, in *The Social Life of Things* (1986: 6), argues that, in constructing biographies of objects in order to understand a culture, one can “ask the same range and kinds of questions of a

Unsettling monuments: The Chair – a curatorial intervention into the Stellenbosch University Museum archive

thing, as one would of a person. Who made it?, how does the thing's use change with its age? and what happens at the end of its usefulness?". He states that "biographies of things can make salient what might otherwise remain obscure" (Appadurai 1986: 67). Susan Macleod refers to museum artifacts as "cultural witnesses" (2012: 227) and argues that, for as long as museums have housed those artifacts, they have also contained the choices of the people who first crafted the object, as well as those who have preserved, interpreted or simply gazed at it. Arguing that objects in a museum collection are often identified as 'solid' and 'indissoluble' connections between the past and present, Henrietta Lidchi (1997) writes that objects can be regarded as evidence of the past, "as pristine material embodiments of cultural essences which transcend the vicissitudes of time, place and historical contingency". She argues that their physicality "delivers a promise of stability and objectivity, suggesting a stable, unambiguous world" (Lidchi 1997: 162). Of course, we cannot examine objects without making a distinction between their undisputed physical presence and their meaning, which cannot ever be stable. This distinction must be maintained, as it is impossible for the object to keep its 'original meaning' intact, despite the ability of the museum to exercise its power and authority to demand that objects be read as 'stable'. Lidchi writes in this regard that "the status of the object as invariant in presence and meaning is underpinned by the popular representation of museums as grand institutions, safeguarding, collecting, exhibiting and engaging in a scholarly fashion with the nation's material wealth" (1997: 162).

Lidchi further argues that the popular perception of curatorial practice is that it is a descriptive rather than an interpretative activity, while we know that it is a deliberate and purposeful act of collecting, interpreting and exhibiting artefacts. Paul O'Neill (2012: 91) echoes this sentiment by arguing that "exhibitions seek to appear as beautiful, natural, true, and legitimate, while absencing the ideological forces behind them. They are political tools for maintaining the status quo – modern ritual settings that reinforce identities, whether these be artistic, avant-garde, gender, racial, subcultural, regional, national, international, global, etc." Exhibitions can therefore be understood as the "institutional utterances" within a larger culture or knowledge industry (O'Neill, 2012). It is along such lines of thinking about the role objects play in meaning-making, knowledge production and spatial transformation that my own work, the exhibition and curatorial intervention *The Chair* (the practical component of my Master's study), came into being. The project was approached as a curatorial intervention that aimed to look critically at the US Museum. By 'rearranging the furniture', so to speak, my intention was to highlight the ways in which this particular museum's material culture was archived, organised and displayed, and how these practices affirmed a white, male

Unsettling monuments: The Chair – a curatorial intervention into the Stellenbosch University Museum archive

heteronormative institutional culture that has long been supported (be it ideologically or materially) at Stellenbosch University.

Jimi Adesina (2005: 33) argues that a “critical obstacle in institutional transformation is the manner in which we understand the amorphous, yet palpable entity that we refer to as institutional culture.” He attributes this to the “tendency to confuse the tendentious and ephemeral with the substantive, that certain institutional practices are considered so essential that an attempt to change them will provoke considerable resistance” (Adesina, 2005: 33). Borrowing from the philosopher, Imré Lakatos, Adesina invokes the idea of a series of practices which form a 'protective belt' around the organisation and which (while often misrepresented as fundamental to the academic project) can in fact change without compromising the university's core mission. The university's material culture, which forms part of the visual rhetoric and tradition of the institution, could be interpreted as manifestations of the 'protective belt' which the institution constructs around itself (Adesina, 2005). It could also be argued that institutional material culture functions to reflect the ways in which the institution imagines itself. The position of a given university's material culture and the kinds of objects (sculptures, exhibitions, commemorative plaques) it chooses to display say something about the values of the institution.

Miranda Robins and Claire Baxter (2012: 247) argue that modes of artistic intervention could be regarded as “an interpretation technology that seeks to reconfigure learning by disrupting taxonomies and contiguous narrative threads in exchange for those that meander and challenge. Its success or failure is largely reliant on dialogism, where the pedagogic potential is located”. By drawing on such a discursive framework, the practical component of this Masters' study was interested in experimenting with the idea of 'exhibition-as-medium', thereby blurring the lines between the role of artist and curator (an idea I return to later in this chapter). My intention was to explore the potential for artistic or curatorial interventions to disrupt the normative space of museum sites in Stellenbosch in a way that could “destabalise fixity of meaning and subvert hegemonic narratives” (Robins and Baxter, 2012: 247). John Peffer (2009) writes in *Art and the End of Apartheid* that “there are many ways to unsettle a monument. One can remove the offending

Unsettling monuments: The Chair – a curatorial intervention into the Stellenbosch University Museum archive

objective or one can *détourn*³⁵ the meaning of the thing and reveal a new semantic wealth by opening up previously occluded meaning” (2009: 240). As discussed in Chapter 3 of this study, and as Robins and Baxter (2012: 247) also corroborate: “Interventionist processes have emerged from an historical trajectory of institutional critique and bring with them parodic, ironic and disruptive methods”. For Robins and Baxter, the following questions arise from these methods: “In what ways do these components contribute to the production of new meanings in museums and galleries? In what ways do visitors learn through disruption? Are these methods ethical and what are the risks?” (2012: 247). These questions also informed my own curatorial intervention into the US Museum insofar as my intentions to unsettle and problematise the way in which the museum and its exhibitions were read.

To prepare for the exhibition *The Chair*, I was offered the chance to work with the museum's Cultural History and Anthropology collections by my supervisor, Ernst van der Wal, a senior lecturer in the Visual Arts department.³⁶ This was a departure from the initial idea for a master's project where I had intended on curating a series of performances around sculptures and monuments of former apartheid patriarchs in the university's public spaces (Figures 19 & 20). In the early stages of the inquiry, I spent a great deal of time excavating the artefacts buried in the museum's archival storeroom and through this process, became conscious of the both the deliberate and arbitrary ways in which this room was organised, as well as the banal nature of the objects that were catalogued and stored there. For instance, the space was cluttered with office chairs and stationary that all belonged to former heads of the university, such as D.F Malan and H.B Thom (Figure 26). I became interested in what the safeguarding of these objects communicated about the relationship between the US Museum and the past and present institutional culture of the University especially given that this institution's past is intertwined with apartheid. In the introduction to *Refiguring the Archive* (2002: 8), Carolyn Hamilton, Verne Harris and Graeme Reid write that “archives are often both documents of exclusion and monuments to particular configurations of power”. Harris (2002: 137) also notes that a key element in the exercise of Afrikaner hegemony was “the state's control over social memory, a control that involved both remembering and forgetting. The network of state-

³⁵ The technique known as *détournement* was popularised by Guy Debord and the Situationists, and the term is borrowed from French and roughly translates to “overturning” or “derailment.” *Détournement* appropriates and alters an existing media artifact, one that the intended audience is already familiar with, in order to give it a new, subversive meaning.

³⁶ Academic staff at the department had been approached by Bongani Mjijima previously to discuss potential collaborations between the University of Stellenbosch Museum and the Department of Visual Art.

Unsettling monuments: The Chair – a curatorial intervention into the Stellenbosch University Museum archive

funded libraries, museums, art galleries, monuments and archives was shaped profoundly by an apartheid imprint". Through their "silences and their narratives of power, apartheid's memory institutions legitimised apartheid rule" (Harris, 2002: 137). The patterns of archival practices, decisions and processes that are made evident in this particular storeroom raise many questions about the role of traditionally Afrikaner institutions like Stellenbosch University in the establishment, maintenance and justification of racist apartheid policy. Questions surrounding what is stored in this storeroom/archive, how it is preserved and how the artificial divide between 'anthropology' and 'cultural history' is maintained all feed into larger questions into how a particular material culture has supported (and, I would argue, still supports) an institutional culture in which the traces of racism and patriarchy remain.

As the theoretical framework that was set out in the previous chapters demonstrates, an important shift occurred in curatorial and archival discourses from thinking about museums/archives as pristine containers to increasingly understanding them as repositories for ideological and emotional directives. With this in mind, three ideas are central to the curatorial methodology for the exhibition *The Chair*, namely thinking about the exhibition as medium, merging the roles of 'artist' and 'curator' and lastly conceptualising and executing my curatorial intervention in the Stellenbosch University Museum in the format of a dilemma label.

Such an idea of a discursive/textual practice, a dilemma label, is echoed in contemporary writing on curatorial practices. In *Thinking About Exhibitions* (2005) Bruce Ferguson's analysis of exhibitions include thinking about them as "rhetorical, ideological media, regardless of their particular form" (O'Neill, 2012: 90). Drawing on Ferguson's rationale, O'Neill (2012: 90) argues that:

Exhibitions are part of the consciousness industry, complex tools of persuasion that aim to prescribe a set of values and social relations to their audiences. Communication lies at the heart of exhibitions, whereby the communicative medium is not a neutral transmission but something that contributes to the positioning and controlling of the spectator in a space of display.

According to such a perspective, exhibitions can be understood as the intermediary through which knowledge is produced and disseminated. For Ferguson (1996), exhibitions are "central speaking subjects" in the narratives about museum objects that institutions and curators communicate to

Unsettling monuments: The Chair – a curatorial intervention into the Stellenbosch University Museum archive

their audience. Ferguson (1996:176) argues that exhibitions can be considered to be like texts, if the linguistic model were to be invoked, but they are also “intertexts situated as moments of articulation within systems of signification of which they are all but one, a material moment in which extra-aesthetic forces impinge and can be revealed as competing systems of strategic representation”.

Jennifer Gonzáles argues that Fred Wilson’s “critical assessments of art institutions, practices of display and race discourses can be read as the unraveling of authoritative frameworks, and as a method for locating other subjectivities” (Gonzales, 2009: 68). Recognizing that many museums have been structured around the fact of colonial and imperial relations, Fred Wilson’s *The Other Museum* (1990) which showed at the White Columns in New York, took seriously the notion that one might produce a different version of museum discourse, a view from the ‘other’ side (Gonzales, 2009). “The word ‘other’ in the title invoked both the otherness of cultural or racial difference (ie the colonised other) and the otherness of a new ideological perspective” (Gonzales, 2009: 68). Wilson used the language of anthropology/natural history ethnographic exhibition: glass cabinets, curatorial text, identifying labels and ‘primitive objects’ to critique and parody these types of exhibitions. Also noteworthy in this regard is Yves Klein’s 1958 exhibition at the Galerie Iris Clert in Paris, entitled *Le Vide* (The Void). Klein removed all of the furniture from the gallery and painted the interior completely white. By exhibiting an exhibition, Klein called attention to the often intangible structuring medium of the exhibition and its ideological effects on physical space.

The merging role of the artist and curator was highlighted by Gavin Wade's text *artist + curator =* (2000), in which he argues that artists were increasingly expanding their artistic practice to curatorship to draw attention to the fact that art is not exhibited but that art exhibits. As O’Neill (2012: 105) also maintains about this particular text, “the term artist-curator is applied by Wade to those practitioners using exhibition design, architectural structures, and curatorial strategies as a way of presenting themselves alongside other artists to create composite public outcomes. In this way, the work of the artist-curator may include the display of autonomous objects, the exhibition design, or the provision of an overall curatorial structure as part of his or her expanded practice”. Historically the position of artist-curator has many precedents, “including overtly politicised artist-curatorial initiatives, such as Group Material and General Idea” (O’Neill, 2012: 105) that emerged in the 1980s in the United States. These collectives produced initiatives that were intended as artist-interventions, “to expose unreflexive assumptions about what constituted an exhibition” (O’Neill,

Unsettling monuments: The Chair – a curatorial intervention into the Stellenbosch University Museum archive

2012; 105). The convergence of practices of artist and curator and curator as artist was developed out of the later forms of engaged curatorial practice and institutional critique, which were championed by artists such as Fred Wilson and his contemporaries. Group Material was a collaboration of artists that, from 1979 to 1996, produced museum installations and artworks designed for advertising spaces. In the attempt to directly confront the false neutrality of dominant museum practices, they adopted the methods of curatorial practice and art direction in the advertising sense, to engage new ideas of what art could be and whom it might be for (Ashford: 28: 1998). Julie Alut participated in Group Material between 1979 and 1996 and describes the temporary exhibition format as a medium through which models of social and representational structures are subverted. For O'Neill (2012: 106), Group Material "employed the process of group exhibition-making as a space for political and social formation, the exhibition functioned as a shared site of participation among individuals, with the event of the exhibition conceived as a public forum".

This idea is also taken up in the text *Thinking about Exhibitions* (1996), in which Reesa Greenberg, Bruce Ferguson and Sandy Nairne note that, since the 1920s, the role of the "curator-as-carer" has changed significantly, insofar as the practice of working with a given collection whilst being hidden from public view has been transformed into an idea of the curator as someone who takes a more central position on broader public stage. As these authors argue, "by the late 1960s, despite their many differences in form and content, a number of exhibitions had developed a symbiotic relationship between the exhibition space and conceptually led-artistic production" (Greenberg, Ferguson and Nairne, 1996: 9). As conceptual artists from the 1960s onwards began to consider the "social, relational, situational context of their practice as now being part of their artwork", many employed the exhibition as the vehicle through which to think more critically about the prestigious status of art, afforded to it by bourgeois culture (Greenberg, Ferguson and Nairne, 1996: 9). "The work of the artist became less easy to distinguish from that of the curator at a time when artists were employing mediation strategies in their artwork, through the use of text, linguistics, and systems theories that resulted in more conceptual outcomes" (Greenberg, Ferguson and Nairne, 1996: 9). The intertwining of the various discourses related to archival, curatorial and artistic practice has led to political and performance-oriented practices that have both social and cultural relevance, "they take up and extend techniques that call for the participation in the signifying practices of cultural archives by taking over roles and responsibilities traditionally reserved for the institutional professionals of mediation, namely the curators" (Von Bismarck, 2004: 3). This signals

Unsettling monuments: The Chair – a curatorial intervention into the Stellenbosch University Museum archive

a shift insofar as artists have increasingly appropriated and modified the language of the museum not only to critique what the museum is, but to suggest what such spaces could potentially become and to present new possibilities for and interpretations of museum practice. As Miranda Stearn (2013: 42) argues, artist-as-curator projects as a:

sub-category of artist interventions, can participate in transforming the museum from authoritative purveyor of grand narratives, undermining the false objectivity of impersonal museum interpretation by turning to the opposite extreme of privileging a unique personal response, while also providing a succinct and compelling way of expressing the subjectivity of historical interpretation without resorting to extensive, sometimes abstruse text, or a laborious summary of all possible explanations.

Dilemma labels are texts that are designed to negotiate outdated displays and it is often seen as a 'group therapy' exercise of sorts, both for the museum and its audience. These labels openly admit to past racist, sexist and colonialist attitudes (inter alia) on the part of the museum. Davison argues that, while temporary exhibitions introduced conceptual measures to counter outdated displays, "these strategies were less easy to implement in large museums with semi-permanent exhibitions that inhibited rapid change" (Davison, 2005: 189). In 1993, a series of dilemma labels were placed in the African Cultures gallery of the South African Museum (SAM),³⁷ "asking viewers to consider whether the displays and the earlier labels perpetuated ethnic and racist stereotypes of African people as underdeveloped and unchanging" (Witz, 2006: 118). By 1993, the division between Cultural History and Anthropology at SAM had been dissolved, but the displays themselves had not changed. As an interim measure, a series of dilemma labels were installed in the Anthropology gallery under the heading "Out of Touch", with the intention being to highlight problems of interpretation and omission in the ethnographic displays, which had been mounted in the early 1970's. The introduction to "Out of Touch" (1993), reads as follows:

From looking at these exhibits you might think that all black South Africans lived in rural villages, wore traditional dress and used hand-made utensils. The objects shown in this hall date from the late nineteenth century through to the mid

³⁷ The South African Museum was founded in 1825. It was originally a general museum including natural history and cultural history, but since 1964 it covered only natural history and anthropology.

Unsettling monuments: The Chair – a curatorial intervention into the Stellenbosch University Museum archive

twentieth century. During this period, African people were profoundly affected by economic changes, following the discovery of diamonds and gold. Men migrated from rural areas to work in the emerging mining and manufacturing industries. Despite laws preventing black people from living in cities, many settled illegally in areas surrounding major urban centres. This process, however, is not shown in the displays of traditional African life. Instead African culture is portrayed as trapped in an unchanging past.

In order to further destabilise the narrative of the South African Museum, a series of counter-images were “superimposed on the existing showcases to create a visual counterpoint to the ahistorical depiction of traditional life” (Davison, 2005: 189). For instance, images of San men in the South African Defence Force were superimposed over exhibits of hunter-gatherer material culture, the dress of African female executives was contrasted with traditional clothing and Western religious ceremonial attire was juxtaposed with the African equivalent (Davison, 2005: 189). One of the most extensive semi-permanent examples of the dilemma label in a South African museum was installed over the closed ‘bushmen diorama’ – a scene of a nineteenth century hunter-gatherer camp which included plaster casts of indigenous inhabitants of Southern Africa.³⁸ Leslie Witz observes, “through archiving and affixing a dilemma label to the screen that concealed the diorama, the museum challenged visitors to think about the politics of exhibiting” (2010: 1). Thereby, the dilemma label made the museum audience aware of their complicity in the circulation of this knowledge through the ways in which they ‘read’ the exhibition.

In a somewhat similar vein, my intention for *The Chair* exhibition was to put into practice ideas about exhibition-as-medium and curatorial intervention, using the Stellenbosch University Museum as the site for these explorations. The objective of the exhibition was to trouble the displays and exhibitions in this museum which seemed untouched, uncontextualised and out of date. The exhibition was conceptualised as a co-authored artwork, rather than a space to show separately authored works. I was interested in opening a space for dissidence, for the possibility of the unexpected to happen and decided to work collaboratively with the poets of the Stellenbosch-based InZync Poetry Collective. This collective is known for producing boundary crossing work, in the sense that their shows subvert traditional ideas about the poetry genre and also aims to bridge

³⁸ This exhibit was part the African Cultures Gallery at IZIKO South African Museum in April 2001

Unsettling monuments: The Chair – a curatorial intervention into the Stellenbosch University Museum archive

socio-spatial divides in the town of Stellenbosch. For instance, the InZync Poetry Sessions are held for free in Kayamandi township and Stellenbosch University students are transported via a shuttle service to the shows. InZync also aims to bridge the social divide between black and coloured youth from Cloetesville and Kayamandi through poetry workshops, known as the Inkredibles poetry workshops, held at the English Department at Stellenbosch University. Metaphorically invoking the concept of the 'dilemma label', I asked the InZync poets Allison Claire Hoskins, Adrian Van Wyk, Pieter Odendaal and Xolisa Mbeleko to respond to museum objects that were either on display in the museum at that time, or stored in the museum's archive.

In a review of *The Chair* for the online publication *Africa Is A Country*, Wamuwi Mbao (2016) writes, "Museum storerooms are their own exhibits, of course. They shelter things provisionally (the statue of Rhodes that was removed waits in a shrouded room), keeping what still has value for someone. The decision to archive a statue, a bust, or the myriad items that signal a lived history – a pen, a chair – is a curatorial one". The collection of objects that were displayed in the exhibition were identified by collaboratively 'mining' the museum's archival storeroom for objects and narratives that spoke about the institutional politics of the museum and its relationship to the university's past and present. The objects selected for the exhibition included a large bronze bust of former university chancellor D.F. Malan, A full-length mirror belonging to H.B. Thom, an office chair belonging to D.F. Malan, a leather jacket and pair of pants that were labelled "Tswana", Shoes and hat belonging to D.F. Malan, the first senate table of Victoria College, a clay pot, a horn sculpted from wood and the 'discovered' eugenics instruments that were borrowed from the department of Sociology and Social Anthropology.

Traditionally, curatorial discourse evokes terms such as "reinterpretation, dilution, projection, discrimination, inclusion and exclusion" (O'Neill 2012: 25) and the curator is the mediator, producer, interface and neo-critic (O'Neill 2012: 43) actively authoring the exhibition away from public view. Catherine Thomas writes that the perception of a curator's power is proportional to his or her invisibility, and that the notion of the museum as rational, neutral, and authoritative place of absolute truths and values is intrinsically bound to this invisibility of meaning-making (2012: 33). It can be argued that while the institution acts as a frame for a given artwork or object, artists can in turn mark or frame the institution through their installation practices. Often this is done by incorporating visual markers that delineate a disruption or break in the visual language or aesthetic of the institution they are working in. For example, artists like Fred Wilson use the language of

Unsettling monuments: The Chair – a curatorial intervention into the Stellenbosch University Museum archive

museology – such as cataloguing, text, and sound – to highlight aspects about the collections or displays that haven't been considered previously. Others, like Pedro Lasch, draw on objects from outside the museum, such as mirrors, which he juxtaposes with objects in the museum collection to produce meditations on colonialism and spectatorship. My own curatorial methodology was to make explicit the subjectivity of 'the curator' in the crafting of an exhibition narrative and in what is conveyed as knowledge. I did this by inserting myself into the work, through videos where I filmed myself sifting through index cards and selecting objects in the archival storeroom. These videos were projected onto the vitrines of the Anthropology exhibition room to suggest that the time has long come to reconsider and perhaps even unsettle what is presented there as knowledge.

In the process leading up to my own intervention, the poets each drafted a poem-response to their selected object or collection of objects and these poems were performed at the opening night of the exhibition. Although the poet's responses to the objects were intended to be open-ended, to encourage personal reflection and dialogue with the objects, the performances were created with my direction and curatorial inputs. The finished poems were recorded and played as audio guides that were concealed inside the objects that were installed in the temporary exhibition space. The objects, with their attached sound recordings, directed movement through the museum after the exhibition opening.

The exhibition consisted of a video intervention in the anthropology exhibition room, an object installation, audio visual display and photographic installation in the temporary exhibitions room, a found object installation suspended from the ceiling in the opening at the center of the mezzanine floor and an opening-night performance. A map (Figure 29) of the museum was installed on a wall in the far-left corner of the temporary exhibitions room, located on the mezzanine floor. This map was intended to orientate the exhibition viewer and frame the intervention. I had allocated an index number to each object on display that referenced the four areas of the museum that I had worked in. These areas had been renamed to "burial ground" (anthropology archival storeroom), "obsolete knowledges" (anthropology exhibition), "past presents" (double volume opening in the center of the mezzanine floor) and "reflection testimony" (temporary exhibition space on the mezzanine floor).

In the anthropology room (Figures 21 & 22), videos made at the Stellenbosch University Museum archival storeroom and at the Stellenbosch Village Museum were projected onto the glass vitrines

Unsettling monuments: The Chair – a curatorial intervention into the Stellenbosch University Museum archive

that contained the artefacts of the various ethnolinguistic groups in South Africa³⁹. Upstairs, in the mezzanine exhibition hall, working within the colonial architecture of the room, objects were arranged to be in conversation with one another in relation to the recorded poems played through speakers that were concealed inside the objects. A 4 meter-long panoramic photograph of the archival storeroom was positioned along one of the walls. The centrepiece of the exhibition was a sculptural installation of a selection of chairs from D.F Malan and H.B Thom collections in the Cultural History collection. These chairs were also the centerpiece in the archival storeroom although in this room they had been carefully cushioned with bubble wrap (Figure 26).

On a television placed in front of the D.F Malan Bust that had recently been removed from the Coetzenburg Sports Centre (Previously the D.F Malan Memorial Centre) in August 2015, I showed a time-lapsed video consisting of a performance where I confront this object, aiming to bring attention to the former head of the university, whose legacy continues to confront South Africans in the present. D.F Malan's achievements during his term of office included passing the Group Areas Act that enabled authorities to remove people of different race groups from a residential area that had been designated to another race group. Malan also appointed Prof F.R Tomlinson to develop a socio-economic plan to rehabilitate and develop black townships into self-governing homelands (SA History Online, 2016). In 2014, Nic Spaul (2014) commented on the D.F Malan Memorial Center at Stellenbosch University, which had yet to be renamed:

We have, for example, the DF Malan Memorial Centre, which is used for indoor sports and graduation ceremonies. Malan was chancellor of Stellenbosch University from 1941 to 1959, and prime minister of South Africa from 1948 to 1954, and he was the very embodiment of supremacist racial ideology and paternalistic oppression. He was the one who implemented 'grand apartheid' and infamously concluded: 'The Afrikaner has power over the kaffir. But truly, we would not have possessed this power if it had not been given to us from above. Has God not embedded it with a high and holy calling for our nation?'

³⁹ The museum consists of various homes belonging to 'prominent' members of the first European community that settled in Stellenbosch: The Schreuderhuis, Blettermanhuis, Grosvenor Huis and Berghuis. Museum workers who are all considered to be coloured are dressed as the 'women of the houses' and perform the identities of the wives of the men who owned these properties. In this way, they are frozen in time, figuratively continuing to serve the interests of the long-departed white masters of these homes and the colonial white narrative of Stellenbosch.

Unsettling monuments: The Chair – a curatorial intervention into the Stellenbosch University Museum archive

My intention for this performance was to stage a public reckoning on the Rooiplein, the university's central square, during the month of August 2015 that, in South Africa, is also referred to as 'women's month'. This commemorates the historic march of between ten and twenty thousand women to the Union buildings in Pretoria on 9 August 1956 who protested the proposed amendments to the Urban Areas Act, which meant that all black people living in urban areas would need to carry a 'pass'. Arguing that feminist politicisation demands linking efforts to socially construct self and identity in an oppositional framework that resists domination, bell hooks writes, "the work of liberation demands that we make a new language, that we create the new discourse, the oppositionary voice. The oppressed person that is moved from object to subject, speaks to us in a new way" (hooks, 1989: 29).

I wanted to confront and talk back to the paternal, christian-centric, white supremacist institutional culture of the university that has for a long time occupied a privileged status at this institution. hooks writes that in the southern black communities of the United States where she grew up, "back taking and talking back meant speaking as an equal to an authority figure. To speak when one is not spoken to was a courageous act, an act of risk" (hooks, 1989: 5). As the request to haul this object out onto the Rooiplein was not approved by Bongani Mgiijima, (he felt it would be irresponsible for a museologist tasked with the preservation of objects to put such an object in a public place), I positioned the object in the museum's forecourt, near the front doors to building and facing a public street. The concept for the video was to stand up straight, looking directly at the object for an hour while my camera was set up to shoot stills at 30 second intervals. As this was a time-lapsed video, I deliberately left in frames where my back became arched or slackened or where I appeared physically exhausted.

The exhibition opened on 12 November 2015 with a performance led by the Inzync poets. *The Chair* (Figures 27-38) was conceptualised as a progression from the invocation at the 'gates' of the institution, through contained video interventions in the vitrines of the Anthropology exhibition room. These interventions spoke about hidden feminine histories through subject/object reversals with the use of the projectors to destabilise the stereotypical identities of the vitrine displays. Moving from those spaces into the more conventional and formal white space of the museum, the InZync Poetry Collective performed their poem-responses to the selected museum objects from the archival storeroom, which were intended to alter the way the objects were read. In this space, the objects were installed in an arrangement that drew attention to the delineations the museum

Unsettling monuments: The Chair – a curatorial intervention into the Stellenbosch University Museum archive

makes between Social Anthropology and Cultural History. As Mbao argues in his interpretation of *The Chair*, “In so doing, it challenges the processes that legitimised Apartheid and the regime’s supporting white Afrikaans histories at the expense of other cultural paradigms” (Mbao, 2016). The artificial and ideological nature of this delineation was thus highlighted by displaying these objects in the same space, juxtaposed with their catalogue cards. At the opening of the exhibition the audience was guided through the space by the poets. At the head of the room, this part of the exhibition began with a performance by the poet-emcee Adrian Different in the form of a rap battle titled Diff vs. D.F. (Figure 38) the poet-mcee, Adrian Different was positioned in front of the large bust of former university chancellor, D.F. Malan as he performed his poem which was intended to talk back to this edifice:

Our mere presence in / What is assumed / To be historical yours / Causes the, /
 White supremacist / Capitalist patriarch / To paaap / We are genetically /
 Connected to the soil / Your lame appliance / Of pseudo-science / Tried to divorce /
 Us from the / Ground

In Reflect on this by Allison Claire Hoskins, performed facing a mirror belonging to H.B Thomm, the following poem was recited:

You are dead, but you are still alive in my present / How can I deny the testimony
 of my own eyes / I see your name everyday / Mbongeni Ngema, who is that? /
 Exactly / Not even 1994 could bury you in the deep dark corners of our history /
 There is no mystery only glorified misery / Hark! The Herald Angel sing / a new king
 is born from Jan Van Riebeecks sin.

In his performance entitled Sinqhelo Ndenze, Xolisa Mbeleko, wearing a Nama jacket made from animal-hide, metaphorically pleads with the ancestors to guide the audience, representing the broader South African society to enlighten each other in order to find freedom.

Sibanye masichukumiseni iingcambu / Sizale esithabeni esinye / Okukhanyayo
 mdaka / hlazanamthubi / Ke kakade makuxhentswe zesibe mxhebmye / Ubanje
 nkululeko uliqula / Siqhuqhane ubuqaba / Zesithi siqhelo ndenze

Unsettling monuments: The Chair – a curatorial intervention into the Stellenbosch University Museum archive

Pieter Odendaal chose to reflect on the delineation between Cultural History and Anthropology or as Odendaal refers to it, 'the binaries between black people's stuff and white people's stuff'. Odendaal refers to the presence of past ideologies and policies of the apartheid state in the context of the nation-wide 2015 Fees Must Fall protests on university:

In hierdie argief lê lewens weggebêre / Ekstensies van selwe wat eens / Doele
gedien / Het biersiwwe skoene / Kieries lessenaars 'n pyl en boog / Wat 'n springbok
geklap het / Roesbruin leerskeppings glaskrale / Brille musiekinstrumente stoele /
Oe! al die stoele / DF, kom staan vir 'n oomblik / In hierdie Damarraman se skoene
/ En kyk hoe obseen jou nalatenskap / In die argief vol koloniale buit lyk

The focal point of this room and the "set" for the performance by the poets is a wooden table with a leather top which belonged to the first senate of the university. On one side of this table, the poets and myself placed an office chair that once belonged to D.F Malan and on the other, a traditional carved Nama chair, which the US Museum's Anthropology Department had labelled "nama of dama" on its index card, exposing the problems around provenance and acquisition in this collection that is part of the story of so many 'ethnographic' collections around the world. The poets gathered around the chair in a performance that called for the ancestors, represented by this chair, to "lead us on". Thereby, calling for the absent, silent and unrepresented voices in the museum's archive to be heard in order for us to transcend the violence of the past and to create new knowledge systems and futures based on a shared, inclusive history. Davison (1998) is concerned with the ways in which museums institutionalise certain forms of knowledge. To subvert and challenge hegemonic representation practices, Davison observes, "If public memory is to be more than a dominant mythology, new ways of evoking multiple memories will have to be found" (1998: 153).

Conclusion

6 Conclusion

So how to achieve a decolonial curatorial practice? Frank (2015) argues that a decolonial curatorial process is committed to undoing coloniality that is imbedded in the existence of the western museum space. It disrupts the power dynamics that lie beneath the development of exhibition practice. Frank argues that achieving this requires a commitment to incorporate alternative epistemologies as a core part of the politics of curation. She also notes that the application of this process requires the curator and the institution to contribute towards the unearthing of hidden histories. While I think that temporary exhibitions in museums can create a platform for dialogue that otherwise may not exist, they are not sufficient on their own as a revisionist or remedial measure. To truly break through the institutional armour, it requires as, Mignolo argues a delinking from coloniality. Just as decoloniality is the delinking from coloniality, decolonial aesthetics is used conceptually to delink from westernised notions of aesthetics. As visual practitioners, we need to engage with questions of how to decolonise our own art praxis, given that much of our training is influenced by western theory and practice (the incorporation of theory and practice methodologies from the global south into our art education curricula is critical). This is not an easy thing to imagine and even more difficult to put into practice, but the search for what this could be is the task of decolonial aesthetics. What this may require are practices of unlearning which in itself is difficult to imagine. Learning is both discursive and performative praxis. We learn what appears (or what we are told) is important, how to order and differentiate things, and what belongs together and what does not. Nora Sternfeld (2016:10) posits that “similar to Judith Butler’s use of undoing in *Undoing Gender*, unlearning is a form of performative counter-learning that stands in contrast to dominant performative learning”. Unlearning is a form of learning that actively rejects dominant, privileged, exclusionary and violent forms of knowledge and acting which we can understand as hegemonic forms of education and knowledge.

Engaged in questions on how to achieve a decolonial art practice, Jennifer Reynolds-Kaye (2014) asks how do visual practitioners look decolonially?

Can you put on a pair of decolonial glasses through which you begin to see the world differently? What would those glasses reveal about the structure of the image-world around us, from an individual art piece to an entire field of vision?

Conclusion

How can we even begin to develop a vocabulary around decolonial seeing, and what are the stakes of looking through a decolonial lens?

Reynolds-Kaye argues that museums are “ripe for decolonial interventions given that they have been imbricated within both historical colonialism as storehouses for expropriated objects and coloniality and barometers of beauty and good taste” (Reynolds-Kaye, 2014). While *The Chair* exhibition at the Stellenbosch University Museum may be followed by many other collaborations with artists, academic departments and students at Stellenbosch University, my perception is that significant changes are yet to have taken place in the internal curatorial approaches of the museum. Whether these are due to budgetary or other institutional constraints, or a combination of both, I am uncertain.

I perceive the call to for decoloniality in artistic, curatorial and museological practice dealing with material culture as a process of unlearning and rethinking that involves experimental, open-ended work that could take on various articulations and meanings. As Muñiz Reed argues, decoloniality is a “call for arms, an invitation to rearticulate our collective past experience, questioning its weight and biases, in the hope that with every step forward, we might make increasing sense of our condition and contribute to the possibility of a world without coloniality: the world otherwise” (2015: 18).

Illustrations

Illustrations



Figure 1: Greer Valley. 2015. Image taken in the entrance foyer of the Stellenbosch Museum underneath a poster with the title: "The History of Stellenbosch and Its People".



Figure 2: Greer Valley. 2015. Bronze plaque dedicated to H.F Verwoerd. This photograph was taken in the Accounting and Statistics building at Stellenbosch University in March, 2015.

Illustrations



Figure 3: Mail and Guardian. 2015.



Figure 4: Ashraf Hendricks. 2015. Stellenbosch University students and staff gather at the Accounting & Statistics building for the removal of the H. F. Verwoerd commemorative plaque. Open Stellenbosch staged a silent protest at the ceremony.

Illustrations



Figure 5: Jason Boud. 2015. District Six Museum interior showing central map.



Figure 6: District Six Museum. 2016. Suitcase Exhibition.

Illustrations



Figure 7: Hans Haacke. 1974. Manet Projekt 74. Installation view.

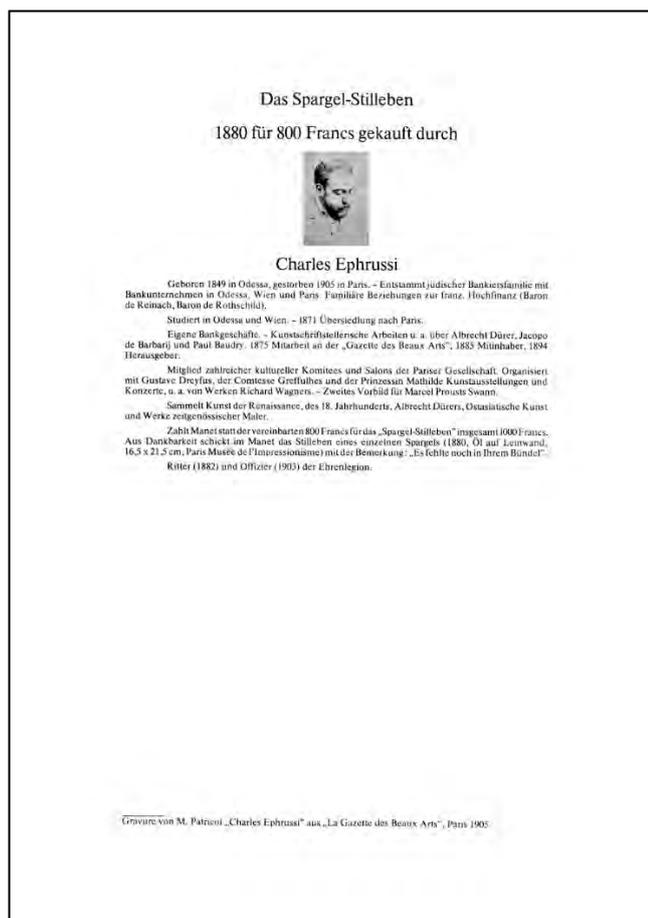


Figure 8: Hans Haacke. 1974. Manet Projekt 74. Panel detail.

Illustrations



Figure 9: Fred Wilson. 1992. Metalwork. Installation.



Figure 10: Fred Wilson. 1992. Cabinet Making. Installation.

Illustrations



Figure 11: Renée Green. 1992-93 Commemorative Toile (Vienna). Installation.



Figure 12: Renee Green. 1997. Partially Buried in three parts. Video Installation.

Illustrations



Figure 13: Pedro Lasch. 2014. Black Mirror. .Installation.



Figure 14: Pedro Lasch. 2014. Black Mirror. Installation

Illustrations



Figure 15: Chimurenga. 2015. Installation detail.



Figure 16: Chimurenga. 2015. Installation.

Illustrations



Figure 17: Greer Valley. 2015. Eye chart.



Figure 18: Greer Valley. 2015. Hair colour chart.

Illustrations



Figure 19: Greer Valley. 2014. Africana.



Figure 20: Greer Valley. 2014. Africana.

Illustrations



Figure 21: Greer Valley. 2015. Anthropology room, Stellenbosch University Museum.



Figure 22: Greer Valley. 2015. Anthropology display.

Illustrations



Figure 23. Greer Valley. 2015. Stellenbisch University museum archival storeroom.



Figure 24: Greer Valley. 2015. Stellenbisch University museum archival storeroom.

Illustrations

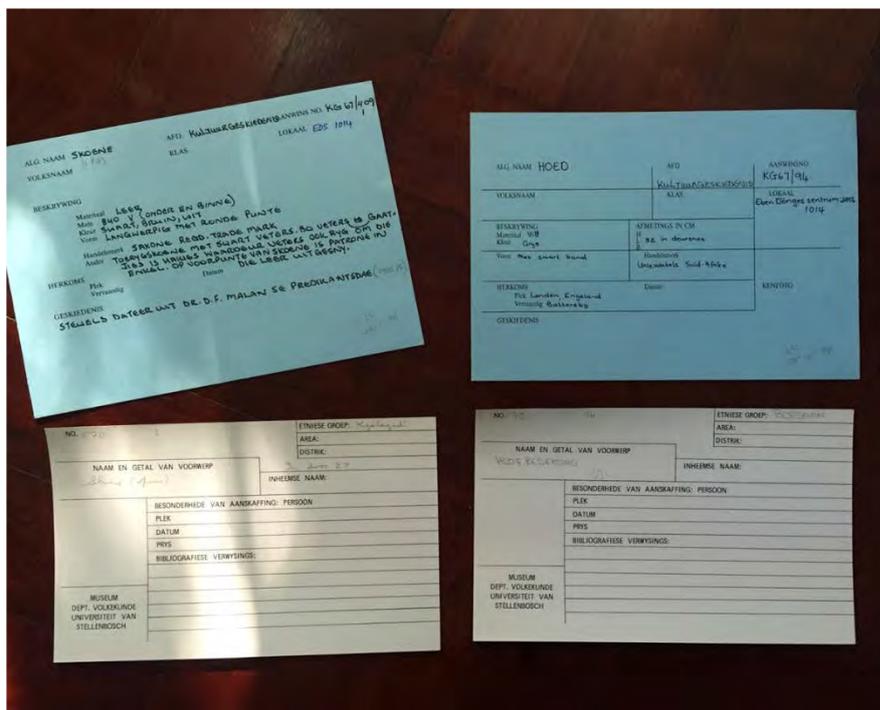


Figure 25. Greer Valley. 2015. Anthropology and cultural history index cards.



Figure 26. Greer Valley. 2015. Archival storeroom, Stellenbosch university museum.

Illustrations



Figure 27: Irene Grobbelaar-Lenoble. 2015. The Chair. Inzync poetry interview.



Figure 28: Irene Grobbelaar-Lenoble. 2015. The Chair. Inzync poetry presentation.

Illustrations

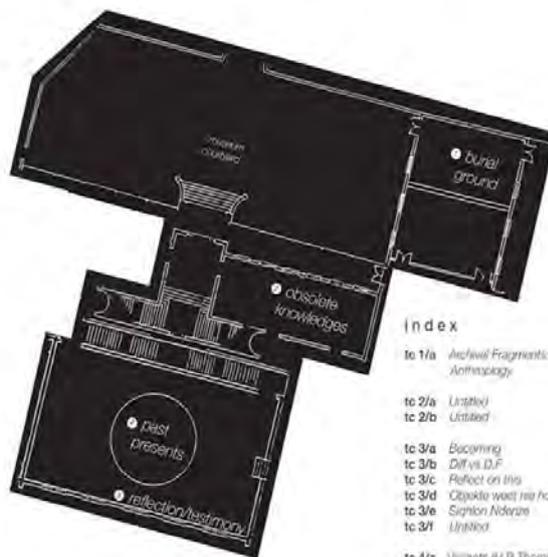
the chair

This intervention revisits the University of Stellenbosch museum's "anthropology" and "cultural history" archive, setting out to unearth the narratives embedded in the material culture of the institution.

Drawing on the methodologies of Institutional Critique where attention was placed on museums as institutions that produce ideologies of cultural containment, cultural hierarchy and cultural legitimacy, museology is employed as medium to comment on how various past and present discourses of power operate throughout the institution. Centered around the concept of the chair (as head; seat; object), it explores the relationship between the museum as institution and the institution of the university and their roles in the production and accumulation of meaning, knowledge and capital.

The exhibition uses the practice of the "dilemma label" to present alternative readings of the museum collections and displays. Dilemma labels are texts that are designed to negotiate outdated displays and openly admit to past racist, sexist and colonialist attitudes on the part of the museum.

The collection of objects on display throughout this exhibition was collaboratively curated with the InZync Poetry collective and is organized according to the following themes: burial ground, obsolete knowledges, past-presents and reflection/testimony.



- index**
- tc 1/a *Archival Fragments: Cultural History and Anthropology*
 - tc 2/a *Untitled*
 - tc 2/b *Untitled*
 - tc 3/a *Becoming*
 - tc 3/b *Diff vs D.F*
 - tc 3/c *Reflect on this*
 - tc 3/d *Obsolete wait too long on the leg table*
 - tc 3/e *Sight on Nkomo*
 - tc 3/f *Untitled*
 - tc 4/a *Walltext (H.R. Thorm and D.F. Madan selection)*

Figure 29: Greer Valley. 2015. The Chair. Map and index.



Figure 30: Greer Valley. 2015. The Chair. Installation view.

Illustrations

thechair



19 november · 18:30 · performance by the InZync Poetry collective

20 november · 13:00 · walkabout

Stellenbosch University Museum, 52 Ryneveld Street

Curated by Greer Valley

in collaboration with InZync Poetry collective, Visual Studies Honours Students,
Alésha Bredell and the Department of Music, Stellenbosch University.



Figure 31. Nicola Kaden. 2015. The Chair. Exhibition flyer.



Figure 32. Greer Valley. 2015. The Chair. Installation view.

Illustrations

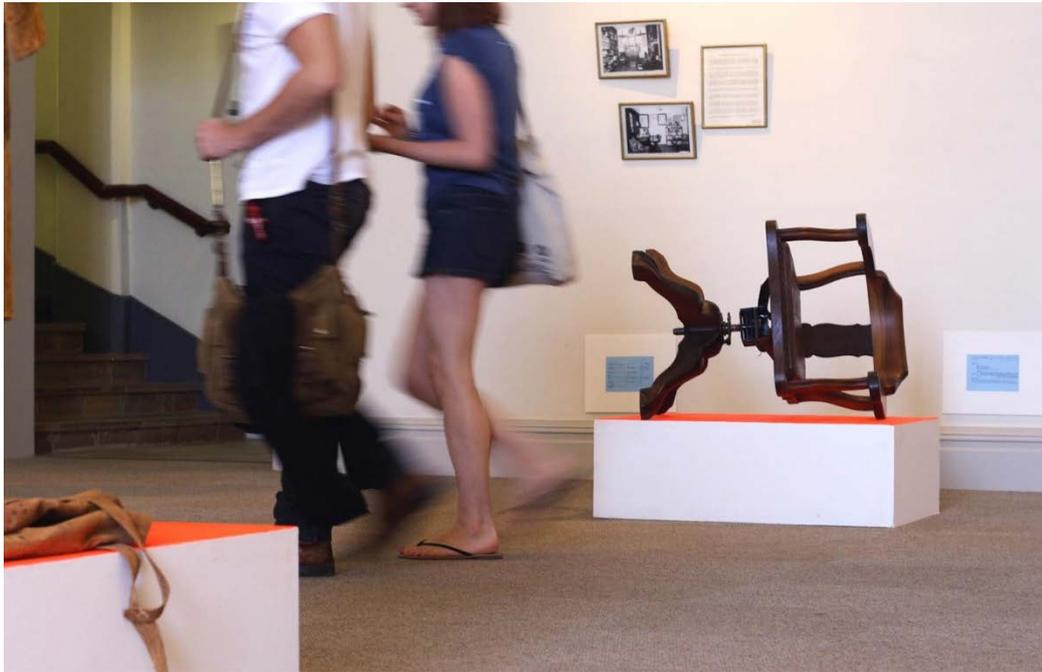


Figure 33: Greer Valley. 2015. The Chair. Installation view.



Figure 34: Greer Valley. 2015. The Chair. Installation view.

Illustrations



Figure 35: Greer Valley. 2015. The Chair. Installation view.



Figure 36: Greer Valley. 2015. The Chair. Installation view.

Illustrations



Figure 37: Greer Valley. 2015. The Chair. Performance: Diff vs D.F.



Figure 38: Greer Valley. 2015. The Chair. Performance.

Electronic data

Electronic data

A USB drive with the following material is provided as appendices to this thesis:

- Video of the opening night of *The Chair*, filmed and edited by José Cardoso.
- PDF document comprising of 4 commissioned poems by the Inzync Poetry Collective: *Diff Vs D.F* by Adrian Van Wyk, *Reflect on This* by Allison Claire Hoskins, *Objekte Weet Nie Hoe Om Te Lieg Nie* by Pieter Odendaal and *Sinqhelo Ndenze* by Xolisa Mbeleko.
- Audio recordings of the poems as mentioned above.
- Videos filmed and edited by Greer Valley that were projected onto vitrines at the Stellenbosch University museum for the duration of the exhibition *The Chair*.

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