

The Curatorial:
An analysis of Xenoglossia, a research project (2011),
and Featuring Simplicity as an Irrational Fear (2010)

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This research report is submitted to the Faculty of Humanities, University of Witwatersrand,
in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in History of Art
by Coursework and Research Report

2018

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Plagiarism declaration

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Abstract

Interrogating the conditions under which curatorial practices have developed and the theories this practice have executed within the South Africa context, this research discusses the curatorial methodologies employed by the Center for Historical Reenactments (CHR) in *Xenoglossia, a research project* (2011), and Lerato Bereng in her curation of *Featuring Simplicity as an irrational Fear* (2010). This is done in relation to how these two projects began to signal a shift towards the notion of *the curatorial*. It is argued that the broader socio-political conditions in South Africa have influenced South African art history trends and the emergence of curatorial practices, which embody ideas of *the curatorial* and have therefore developed particular kinds of curatorial projects unique to this context. This research explores Irit Rogoff's notion of *the curatorial* where she argues that *the curatorial* is a principle of knowledge production that begins to shape and determine other forms in which art can engage. It is critical thought, which does not rush to concretise itself but rather interrogate questions until they point to directions we may not have been able to predict. This understanding of *the curatorial* is further extended to Chus Martinez and Sarat Maharaj's theories on artistic research, as they articulate methodologies of research that work towards indeterminate modes of working. By examining the two case studies in relation to this notion, the research aims to discuss how these curatorial methodologies have cultivated curatorial projects that respond to the South African context.

Acknowledgements

I would like to start by thanking the University of Witwatersrand for support in the form of the Postgraduate Merit Award in 2016 and 2017, which enabled me to complete this research.

Then I would like to sincerely thank my supervisor, Nontobeko Ntombela: without your unwavering support, critical feedback and enduring patience, I would not have been able to complete this research. Your guidance through this process has been truly immeasurable.

I am sincerely thankful to all of those who agreed to take part in this research by offering me their time and resources: Gabi Ngcobo and Lerato Bereng, thank you very much. And thanks to Joseph Gaylard, Jonathan Garnham and Siona O'Connell.

To my family: Dr Sekgokwa Pheeha, Dr Edward Mabaso, Kabelo Mabaso and Thamaga Mabaso, thank you dearly. An immense thank you also goes to all my friends and colleagues Refiloe Mogale, Gontse Mathabathe, Tatenda Magaisa. Lerato Mlambo, your motivation and support has been phenomenal.

Introduction

In 2010, the Center for Historical Reenactments¹ launched *Xenoglossia*, a research project, conceived as a year-long research platform, which sought to foreground questions of strangeness using Julia Kristeva's essay *By What Right Are You a Foreigner* (1997) as a point of departure. The project had several iterations with various forms and approaches toward exploring notions of language and translation, among others. In 2010, Lerato Bereng² curated an exhibition that featured three multimedia pieces by performance artists Nathalie Bikoro, Donna Kukama and Nástio Mosquito in the strip gallery, an experimental project space at the Michael Stevenson Gallery in Cape Town, titled *Featuring Simplicity as an Irrational Fear*. While these two projects are vastly different in nature, duration and content, this present research engaged with them through an exploration of the development of curatorial practice in South Africa. My interest in these two projects as case studies is firstly in the ways they began to demonstrate shifts in curatorial projects in South Africa, and secondly (and quite significantly) these projects' citing of methodologies of working through the concept of *the curatorial*. Both these processes are explored through the conceptual frameworks of these two projects and not their strategies of display.

The curatorial is a principle of knowledge production. Irit Rogoff, in *How to Dress for an Exhibition* (2006a), explores what the possibilities may be, particularly looking at how exhibition spaces provide room to accommodate the expansion of performative curatorial interventions by which audiences shift themselves from being viewers to being participants. This form of participatory practice extends beyond curating as only concerned with aesthetics, but rather proposed other possibilities of artistic practices and participation (Rogoff, 2006a, p. 2). This practice, defined as *the curatorial*, is not only curating, as in the professional practice of exhibition making through research, the arrangement of artworks and visual material to form meaning, but instead speaks to a way of working through a set conceptual framework that transcends the selection of artworks

¹ The Center for Historical Reenactments is a Johannesburg-based artistic intervention that sets out to explore, among other things, questions of historicisation and commemoration. The collaboration comprised curators and artists and was actively in operation between 2010 and 2012.

² Currently an associate director and curator at the Stevenson Gallery, Bereng has participated in a number of significant curatorial programs and exhibitions discussed later in this research.

towards an exhibition. *The curatorial* is used to navigate every stage of the creative project, from conception to the form it ultimately takes, as well as the space of engagement it creates with audiences. This research examines emerging practices in contemporary South African art, that situate themselves between a set of creative ideologies defined as *the curatorial* and more traditional notions of curating.

Through the analysis of the two case studies introduced above, this research explores the nature and emergence of *the curatorial* in South Africa. This is achieved by examining the use of methodologies aligned with this idea of *the curatorial* as briefly discussed above. This research foregrounds this analysis of curatorial methodologies through Rogoff's articulation of *the curatorial*³ and is further supported by two other concepts, the first being Chus Martinez's concept of the 'maybe' (Martinez, 2012), and the second, Sarat Maharaj's concept of 'no-how' (Maharaj, 2009). The elusive nature and ephemerality proposed by Martinez's concept of the 'maybe' speak quite clearly to the understanding of *the curatorial* as a practice that is inherently fluid, complex and overlapping, pushing against the rigidity or restraints of what is perceived as conventional curating methods. Yet Maharaj's 'no-how' extends this understanding to methods of research and a need for the parameters that constitute knowledge to remain open and fluid. How these three concepts intersect will be elaborated on in chapters that follow.

The term curator is derived from the Latin word *curare* meaning to cure or care for, it refers to "a keeper or custodian of a museum or other collection" (Stevenson, 2010, p. 427). In a traditional sense, the curator was often thought of as the individual tasked with preservation of artworks and performing organisational and administrative tasks in institutions such as museums. They further assume the role of a mediator, often playing a somewhat educational role by situating artworks in space, therefore influencing how artworks are perceived by audiences or viewers. Jessica Morgan argues that their role was (and still is) connected to the notion of education – educating viewers not only in the curated histories but also in ways of seeing and behaving in the museum space (Morgan,

³ This research draws from two essays by Rogoff in which she discusses this notion of the curatorial (*How to Dress for an Exhibition* (1998); *'Smuggling' – An Embodied Criticality* (2006)), as well as from a presentation, *Talking about Fugitive Study, infrastructure and education* (2015), delivered at *Rethinking Arts Education*, a 12-hour seminar and conference held in Bragdøya, Norway, in 2015.

2013). Thought of in this sense, the role is professionalised and often situated within institutional structures like museums, collections, biennales and, more recently, commercial gallery spaces.

It is based on this idea of the curator that I am drawing the notion of more traditional conceptions of curating or conventions of curating, yet not limiting it only to this understanding but attempting to push beyond this limitation. *The curatorial* is different in the sense that, instead of describing the profession of curating, it refers to knowledge production. Knowledge is defined as facts, feelings or experiences that are known by a person or group of people; it is an awareness, consciousness or familiarity gained by experiences or learning (Knowledge, 2018). While the word production in this phrase might allude to factories, surpassed industrial modes and the assembly line's mechanical regime, it is used to distinguish from "knowledge transfer". Instead, production "centres on a transformative crossover that throws up a surplus, that churns out something more than what was there to begin with" (Maharaj, 2009, p. 8).

Methodology

Working with a practice understood as relatively new in South Africa and perhaps even less widely written about, I have engaged with two case studies to explore how the curatorial practices occur and manoeuvre under different conditions. This study employs qualitative research methods to analyse the occurrence and significance of shifts in curatorial practices in South Africa during the period between 2005 and 2014. Qualitative methods refer to methods such as participant observations and in-depth interviews that yield descriptive data. Qualitative research follows a flexible research design to develop concepts, insights and understanding from patterns in the data as opposed to assessing preconceived models, hypotheses or theories (Taylor, et al., 2015, p. 8). The qualitative methods used in this research refer to the engagement with archival sources on exhibitions, curatorial projects, workshops, conferences and training programs within the designated period. These resources included archival material (brochures and event programs) from the 2006 VANSAs Curators workshop and video footage from the 2013 Curatorial Talks at the Wits School of Arts. The use of material from conferences and workshops (despite their scarcity) is significant as a means of acknowledging, tracking and understanding moments of collective stocktaking and deliberation over these

emerging curatorial practices and shifting perspectives on ideas surrounding the field of curating. They give a sense of a sort of broader 'public' understanding of these moments.

I have also conducted semi-formal interviews with a selection of individuals who have either been involved in the projects I have mentioned or played key institutional roles in the broader aspect of this study. These individuals include: Gabi Ngcobo, an independent curator and co-founder of the Center for Historical Reenactments and NGO (Nothing Gets Organised); Lerato Bereng, the curator and associate director of the Stevenson Gallery in Johannesburg; Joseph Gaylard, current head of Prohelvetia Johannesburg, who I interviewed in his capacity as a founding member of Visual Arts Network South Africa (VANSA); Jonathan Garnham, director of Blank Projects Cape Town; and Siona O'Connell, a curator and former director of the Centre for Curating the Archive (CCA), Cape Town. These interviews have been integral in augmenting and contextualising the archival resources I have engaged with in this research as they have provided additional information not supplied by the archival material. The interviews have also played a role in understanding the occurrence of and connections between events that have been mapped out in the brief historical outline of curatorial developments.

The texts I have analysed for this research include: journal articles, conference proceedings and essays in exhibition catalogues. These texts have provided both an analysis of particular concepts and broader sentiments around the practices and developments I am discussing.

The curatorial, as I have understood it in this study, posits itself as a non-prescriptive practice constantly reflecting on different modes of knowledge production. Considering the multi-modalities of *the curatorial*, the methods undertaken in producing this research have been conscious of not re-inscribing prescriptive modes of research or conservative notions of knowledge production to analyse these practices. For these reasons, I've quite deliberately written this report with an acknowledgment of the fleeting nature of the footage from conferences, lectures and workshops, which I have only accessed as primary sources.

Chapter Outline

Chapter 1: The first chapter of this study outlines the theoretical material and research articulating this idea of *the curatorial*. Drawing primarily from Irit Rogoff's definition of this term, this section unpacks her extrapolations of the concept through the following texts: *How to Dress for an Exhibition* (2006a); *Smuggling* (2006b); and *Talking About Fugitive Study Infrastructure; and Education* (2015). The concept is further discussed in relation to Chus Martinez's concept of the 'maybe' (2012) and Professor Sarat Maharaj's concept of 'no-how' (2009). The chapter then discusses how *the curatorial* in this research is understood within the development of the South African history of curating. This is executed through the analysis of the emergence of the notion of the independent curator and collective determination, and discussion about emerging and growing interests in curating and key exhibitions, which begin to indicate particular modes of working.

Chapter 2: In Chapter 2 I begin the analysis of *Xenoglossia, a research project* curated by the Center for Historical Reenactments. The chapter defines the project within the understanding of the South African context, mapped out in the first chapter, and then goes on to analyse the ways in which the case study does and does not demonstrate the notion of working through *the curatorial* and further idea of the 'maybe' and 'no-how' through its conceptual framework.

Chapter 3: The third chapter follows a structure similar to that of the second chapter. Through an analysis of *Featuring Simplicity as an Irrational Fear*, curated by Lerato Bereng, the chapter situates the project within a South African curatorial and historical context as an entry point into understanding the methodologies of the project. Following this, the chapter looks at the ways *the curatorial*, and notion of the 'maybe' and 'no-how', can or cannot be aligned with this project, through a discussion of its conceptual framework.

I have chosen the above described structure with the aim of providing a historical context from which to understand the two projects selected as case studies. The historical information provides a broad sense of where the practices of these two curators emerge from, and highlights the way these practices influence the nature of the projects they engage. This is not an attempt to provide a detailed historical account of South African art history, but rather a way of citing the conditions under which very particular modes of

curating emerge. It is important that the analysis of the curatorial methodologies employed by Ngcobo and Bereng is understood within the historical account, to contextualise the main argument of this research, which is that there are particular conditions within the South African context that have influenced the emergence of particular kinds of curatorial aesthetics.

Chapter One

What is *the curatorial* and how does this practice situate itself in South Africa?

1.1 Introduction

As already mentioned in the introduction of this research report, *the curatorial* is a concept, a method of knowledge production, that encourages ever-shifting, time-based engagements. Rogoff has argued that an alternative reading of spaces of display can be used to further a theory of participation that departs from the traditional one (relating to political representation or of straight forward politics of 'visibility'). Such a theory, she argues, would instead look at the ways in which these spaces are mobilised, propagating performative acts through which audiences respond to the underlying concepts and engage with them as possibilities for staging themselves and their own desires (Rogoff, 2006a). Rogoff calls for an alternative reading of the space of the exhibition, which can facilitate a kind of participation that moves away from the tradition of political representation and the politics of visibility alone. This statement can be understood within a history of where the West excluded non-Western societies from the visual arts discourse and modernity more broadly, unless these contributions were framed in exoticising and canonising ways. The westernised art historical canon has historically flourished through exclusionary practices and positioned itself at the centre of knowledge production through visual culture and an exploitation and exoticising of that which they deemed 'other'. Attesting to this, James Elkins writes:

At the beginning of the twenty-first century it is clear even without statistics that art history is fundamentally regional, in the sense that it is produced and consumed principally in Western Europe, Canada and the United States, and that it focuses mainly on a small subset of Western artists (Elkins, in Moxey, 2010, p. 185).

Post-colonial and post-modern theories gave rise to debates questioning exclusionary practices and narratives, auctioning this push-back through the staging of exhibitions featuring artists from varying geographical, social political, and religious contexts, for example. Referring to Julie Mc Gee's writing on how the European canon plays out in South Africa, Moxey notes that in order for European settlers to ascribe spiritual and commercial value to artistic production, it was necessary for them to deny such value to indigenous artefacts which they deemed not to fit in this category (Moxey, 2010, p. 183).

What Rogoff calls for through *the curatorial* is not an attempt at rectifying historical omissions and invisibilities, but rather looking at the possibilities of unterritorialised and prescriptive modes of working curatorially.

In this section, I intend to illustrate a selection of key ideas on how this practice has arrived at these complex notions of *the curatorial*, particularly in South Africa. In order to do this, I have divided this chapter into two parts: the first part of this chapter looks at the theories and description of *the curatorial* as articulated by Rogoff (2006a), (2006b) and (2015), and how this understanding can be furthered by the theories on artistic research discussed by Martinez (2012) and Maharaj (2009). The second part of this chapter outlines a selection of curatorial training programs, visual arts conferences and exhibitions in South Africa that signify shifts in curatorial methodologies and types of exhibition practices that are emerging in South Africa.

1.2 Curating and *the curatorial*

1.2.1 Curating

In order to gain an understanding of *the curatorial*, it is necessary to first grasp what curating is. As already mentioned in the introduction, the work of a curator is historically understood within the framework of institutions such as museums and galleries. The curator functions as a mediator, creating an opportunity for viewers to see and experience art works in relation to one another and the architecture of the exhibition site. It is a process of meaning-making through works or works-in-relation-to-place-and-space, conceptualising how viewers will engage works in a way that communicates both the artistic and curatorial intentions. Curators have been acting as cultural mediators, as emphasized by Maria Lind, who highlighted the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) in New York's role in setting a standard for mainstream museum education through a model instigated by founding director Alfred Barr in the 1930. The exhibitions were consciously didactic, so as to promote Barr's formalist view of art in an attempt to refine the aesthetic sensibilities of visitors and mould particular modes of spectatorship informed by the notion of "the educated consumer" as per art historian Charlotte Klonk's words (Lind, 2013, p. 86). The role of the curator and the nature of curating take on different characteristics, depending on whether they occur within institutional contexts such as museums and galleries versus project-based work carried out by independent curators. Morgan attributes the emergence of divergent curatorial practices that do not situate themselves

within typologies of the caretaker or connoisseur to the proximity of these curators to contemporaneous artistic movements, responding to shifts in production that often relate to larger contextual issues, politics and economics and a rethinking of issues of display and public presentation (Morgan, 2013, p. 23). The modes of working are often also defined by whether the curator is working with an existing collection, commissioning new works by artists or engaging with archives. While there are moments where these differing roles intersect and overlap, curators working within the museum, for example, often carry, facilitate and manage the preservation and management of the institution's collection, and conceptualise exhibitions, research and public programs with works in these collections that serve the interests and objectives of the institutions and expectations of its audiences. Their role, therefore, encompasses not only the staging of exhibitions but also the growth and maintenance of the museum's collections and the institution's program (more broadly) in terms of educational resources and publishing projects. The development of the profession has also meant that the natural progression for many curators has been that of occupying positions as museum or institutional directors. The position of director requires a more business-like approach, employing a certain level of diplomacy but also possessing the ability to function politically in the realm of boards of trustees and deploying strategies for fundraising (Morgan, 2013). These factors often drastically reduce the curatorial duties of the director. On the other hand, an independent curator is understood as someone not directly linked to an institution but instead contracted to work on particular projects at a certain time, often in collaboration with different institutions. An independent curator would in most instances conceptualise an exhibition project along the lines of a brief (either their own or one commissioned by an organization or institution) within a set timeframe, venue and allocated funding. In both instances, curators configure exhibitions based on a theme according to a set of methodologies. By methodologies, I am referring to the different curatorial gestures in the exhibition that audiences become aware of and through which the meaning-making process begins.

Through the history of exhibitions, one can begin to identify methods and approaches employed by different curators in varying contexts. These range from the curating of exhibitions based on the medium of the work, the artists, works from a certain period or a selected theme, whether it is a retrospective exhibition for a single artist or works by a selection of artists.

1.2.2 The curatorial

Discussing the notion of *the curatorial*, Rogoff states the following:

For some time now we have been differentiating between ‘curating’, the practice of putting on exhibitions and the various professional expertise it involves and ‘the curatorial’, the possibility of framing those activities through a series of principles and possibilities. In the realm of ‘the curatorial’ we see various principles that might not be associated with displaying works of art; principles of the production of knowledge, of activism, of cultural circulations and translations that begin to shape and determine other forms by which arts can engage. In a sense ‘the curatorial’ is thought and critical thought at that, that does not rush to embody itself, does not rush to concretise itself, but allows us to stay with the questions until they point us in some direction we might have not been able to predict (Rogoff, 2006b, p. 3).

This statement proposes an understanding of *the curatorial* as a methodology, one which foregrounds processes of experimentation, engagement and criticality. Central to this notion is also that of practice-based research (popularised ten to fifteen years ago due to an increased interest in the idea in academia and the development of artistic practice), which foregrounded research and study and the presence of interstitial spaces (which could accommodate these practices) (Rogoff, 2015). Practice-based research differs from classical research in the sense that operating from inherited knowledge differs from working from a set of conditions.

A number of scholars and curators have engaged with the notion of this ever-expanding field of curating. *The Curatorial: A Philosophy of curating* (2013), edited by Jean-Paul Martinon, features a selection of texts from significant figures exploring the premise of thinking through curating. The publication makes the distinction between curating and *the curatorial*, stating that if curating is the professional practices for the setting up of exhibitions, then *the curatorial* explores both the intentional and unintentional set-up by the curator. *The curatorial* therefore focuses not on the staging of an event but rather the event of knowledge itself (Bloomsbury Publishing, 2015). *The curatorial* is understood as an extension beyond the organisational tasks encompassed in the setting up of exhibitions, involving a sensibility or methodology for making connections between works, contexts, places and publics.

In his book, *Ways of Curating* (2014), Hans Ulrich Obrist extends on these understandings of curating introduced above in how he explores different approaches to curating through his personal initial interest in the field, and interactions with artists and projects he has engaged with in his career. Shaping the nature of his curatorial practice through various encounters with artists, Obrist states in the beginning of the book that exhibition making was less about the display and arrangement of existing artworks than about one's ability to actively create spaces for the impossible. He puts forward that the role of the curator or exhibition-maker is to work with ideas that cannot be realised under existing conditions and therefore he, she or they have to create the conditions under which they can occur (Obrist, 2014, p. 11). In other words, Obrist, in his practice, is interested in expanding and broadening the scope of curating in a way that allows it to move beyond display and demonstration, and rather begin to form new meaning and knowledge in collaboration with artists, to realise a creative project and processes of engaging archives. The history of collaborative and collective curating is tentative, as the history of the curatorial profession is largely recognised in relation to individual initiatives (Arriola, 2010, p. 21). Miwon Koon suggests that the development of exhibitions from passive receptacle to discursive sites has opened space for curatorial collaboration and collective curating (Arriola, 2010, p. 23).

According to Obrist (2014), changes in the way curating is understood today is ever-expanding and as a result, the term has taken on different meanings and interpretations at different times and even in different environments. Jens Hoffman writes that the end of the 1990s, in the period following characterisation and artistic development by Harald Szeeman to Hans-Ulrich Obrist, saw an emerging differentiation and complexity to the notion of curating, which signalled a kind of oeuvre similar to that of a film director or visual artist (Hoffmann, n.d.). The new centrality of the curator in the organisation of exhibitions has been met by continuous criticism from artists in particular.

The above sentiments from a selection of practitioners have highlighted the developing nature of the practice of curating and its continuous ability to rearticulate itself according to the needs of the time. Hoffmann's contributions also serve to highlight the significant role that artistic developments have played in liberating the practice from constrictive norms of the institution. It is therefore interesting to observe and understand the role of artistic practice in the development and sophistication of curating. Rogoff too, points to the inherent relationship between *the curatorial* and the notion of practice-based research

(Rogoff, 2015). The following sections will discuss two concepts that articulate methodologies of artistic research, with the aim of pointing out how they have been applied to this understanding of *the curatorial* and their similarities to mechanisms of *the curatorial*.

1.2.3 Maybe

The notion of *the curatorial*, discussed above, lends itself to the concept of the ‘maybe’ presented by curator and writer Chuz Martinez⁴. In an essay titled *How a Tadpole Becomes a Frog, Belated Aesthetics, Politics and Animated Matter: Toward a Theory of Artistic Research* (2012), published in the Documenta 13 catalogue *The Book of Books*, Martinez discusses the notion of artistic research and how we might define this. Defining it through ideas of intuition, concepts, non-concepts and memory, the text engages the possibility of the exhibition as a space that facilitates moments of knowledge production. Martinez introduces us to the ‘maybe’ and proposes prioritising knowledge production as a speculative and propositional stance in the sense that the ‘maybe’ affords agency to knowledge production that has not happened yet, that is not finite, but is possible. My understanding of what Martinez is proposing is that creative methods of inquiry into ideas yield speculations, possibilities and new ways of looking and understanding. Martinez argues that through the exercise of “accepting the riddle of ambiguity”, a manner of research that calls for a reconsideration of the role of language and the collection of monologues (produced by forms of meaning) is established. This is where the ‘maybe’ comes into play. She defines it as a non-concept stating that:

The ‘maybe’ is a non-concept, instead it is a modifier. This modifier denotes the attempt to introduce a difference into the relations that define knowledge, the limits of language and the event of thinking through art (Martinez, 2012, p. 46).

Later in the essay, she clarifies that a non-concept does not equate to an absence of notion, ideas or words to express the expectation of the exhibition, but rather that it is more of an event and a moment to reformulate the connection between experience and

⁴ Martinez is currently the Head of the Institute of Art of the FHNW Academy of Arts and Design in Basel, Switzerland. With a background in philosophy and art, she has curated significant projects such as the National Pavilion of Cyprus for the 51 Biennale di Venezia, served as the Chief Curator at the MACBA in Barcelona, and has held positions as the Director of the Frankfurter Kunstverein, Head of Department and member of the Core Agent group for Documenta (13) (Independent Curators International, n.d.).

language (Martinez, 2012, p. 55). If we are to relate what Martinez argues in relation to Rogoff's articulation of *the curatorial*, it proposes an understanding of the space of the exhibition as an occasion to produce new knowledge, rather than a collection or representation of existing knowledge. I argue that what Martinez proposes as this notion of the 'maybe' speaks to the methodologies discussed in relation to this notion of *the curatorial* in creating a participatory environment within the space of the exhibition, an ephemerality of knowledge, intersecting voices and time-based engagements between works, space and audiences. Therefore, the 'maybe' speaks to shifting meanings and interpretations of curatorial projects, which remain unfixed. The exhibition proposes a set of ideas through the constellation of the works or aspects the curator has put together. It also provides an extended space for other kinds of meaning to be produced through the participation of audiences, as well as new ways the exhibition may be interpreted and received.

It is through the appearance of such methods that curatorial practice shifts beyond traditional curatorial actions (which we could categorise as research, display, representation, illustration, etc.) into a space of thinking through space and artworks, modifying their reception to allow for thought to occur beyond our existing knowledge. This approach to curating differs dramatically from the earlier conceptions of the curator as an individual operating firmly within the institutionalised conventions of spaces, such as museums, to one which is unbound and intuitive. My sense is that what *the curatorial* proposes is an embodied form of knowledge production, which is often of an ephemeral nature, experienced during the curatorial and viewing processes and beyond.

1.2.4 No-how

Continuing from ideas around artistic research and the modes of knowledge production discussed above, the following section will engage ideas argued by writer, researcher and curator Sarat Maharaj⁵ through the concept of 'no-how'. Maharaj introduces this concept in an essay titled *Know-how and No-how: stopgap notes on "method" in visual art as*

⁵ Maharaj is currently a Professor of Visual Art and Knowledge Systems of Lund University and Malmo Art Academies in Sweden. Maharaj's specialist knowledge covers Cultural Translations and Difference as well as movement and consciousness studies. In 2002, he was the co-curator of Documenta (9) alongside Okwui Enwezor (Iniva, n.d.).

knowledge production (2009). In this essay, he explores five elements of method, which he relates to art practice and research. For this research, I shall focus primarily on two: firstly, the question of visual art as knowledge production⁶, and secondly, “thinking through the visual” in conflict with “visual thinking”, which Maharaj dubs the *Agglutinatives mode*. This refers to a grammarless zone of unknown possibility, which may sound double-tongued but actually aims to move beyond the organising, classifying spirit of grammar (Maharaj, 2009). In the essay he draws on a number of philosophers, namely Gaston Bachelard, Giorgio Agamben, Gilles Deleuze, Samuel Beckett and Paul Feyerabend, to build his argument around how a tendency toward institutional captivity of artistic research and the academicisation of “Thinking through the visual” threatens what he refers to here as the “Nameless Science” (a term he lends from Aby Warburg), tagging it with a determinate identity, “setting it up as a recognizable, academic terrain with disciplinary borders” (Maharaj, 2009, p. 13). Maharaj’s article argues for the need to allow an openness with regard to methods of research, particularly in relation to the idea of artistic research. My sense is that it could be quite limiting if visual art as knowledge production is bound and restricted by rigid methodologies of research and categorisations of knowledge. ‘No-how’ underlines the need for methods of knowledge production to remain fluid. Maharaj introduces ‘no-how’ as a re-setting of methodologisation inherent in Paul Feyerabend’s ‘Anti-Method’⁷ and more specifically an earlier historical moment in the English Art School, regarded as a site of “unschoolability” in which one engages unknown possibilities, the ‘no-how’ instead of the ‘know-how’ of a practitioner (Maharaj, 2009, p. 7). He also refers to Agamben’s⁸ theory of ‘whatever’, which he proposes as a more spelled-out methodological alternative to a polemic between *the universal* or *the particular*, existing between these polarities without complete distortion (Maharaj, 2009, p. 2).

⁶ This is posited as a question not because it is suggesting the visual arts is not considered a form of knowledge production but rather as a way of questioning what shape this knowledge takes.

⁷ Paul Feyerabend was a famous Austrian philosopher who went on to become a critic of philosophy itself. He particularly made “rationalist” attempts to lay down or discover rules of scientific method (Preston, 2016).

See: <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2016/entries/feyerabend/>.

⁸ Giorgio Agamben is a leading figure in Italian philosophy and radical political theory. His work has had a deep impact on contemporary scholarship in the Anglo-American intellectual world (Mills, n.d.).

Applied to curating, this would suggest that the elusive nature of *the curatorial* allows for it to resist the 'know-how' inherent in traditional modes of research, and rather facilitates moments where *the curatorial* takes form through exhibitions or interventions in space, such that new methods are proposed.

João Ribas in *Curating as Spatial Resistance* (2015) writes that a notion central to curating, as it has been commonly understood in the space of art production and exhibitions, is the idea of care, and the practical and historical concerns around exhibitions practices (Ribas, 2015, p. 29). He states that exhibitions are among the various types of formalised social interactions (such as funerals) and are types of gathering and means to unite people, objects, ideas, movements or gestures all brought together by an agreed purpose and space (Ribas, 2015). Ribas articulates the significance of the politics of understanding the museum as a space and the exhibition as a temporary structure being housed in the museum. Understanding exhibitions as formalised social interactions beyond their function of exhibiting works leads to the argument that they are then ordered by a shared unwritten set of rules. I would argue that Ribas' articulation of the exhibition as a site ordered by a set of somewhat socially agreed upon conventions is the basis from which to engage with Maharaj's desire for knowledge in this space to remain unfixed. Maharaj's call to muddle method and allow for a fluidity to the "science" of creative research is what I am relating to the notion of *the curatorial* (Maharaj, 2009, p. 2). I am further linking the grey area suggested by the notion of 'no-how' to the propositional aspects of the 'maybe', discussed in relation to Martinez in the section above. What the two point toward is the idea of knowledge produced through continuous probing and questioning, as opposed to intensive research towards definitive conclusions. While the exhibition in its complete form may have historically alluded to a kind of finality and conclusive 'knowing', Ribas probes us to understand the exhibition as an event, liberating the form, allowing exhibitions to foreground questions as opposed to definitive statements. It becomes a space within which participation in this questioning is opened to audiences and the public. The muddling refutes a universalised approach to exhibition making. Questioning how to theoretically illustrate the tensions between the methodological poles of universal application and that of the particular, Maharaj makes reference to Deleuze's notion of "any space whatever", which he argues "takes on the force of method: it embodies the concept of 'singularity' that cuts across the poles of the universal and particular dissolving them" (Maharaj, 2009, p. 2). I would argue that *the curatorial*, thought

of in relation to this notion, allows for ways of working that leave room for what Maharaj discusses as a singularity, one which gives agency to the particularity of time and place.

While I have demonstrated interest in questions around the practice of curating globally, it is necessary for this research to explore how these questions relate to the South African context. The practice of curating is arguably an emerging practice in South Africa and the African continent. It is thus important to interrogate these developments from this context in conjunction with global conversations. It is also important to highlight my awareness that the theoretical framework of this study relies heavily on writing from the West. Due to scant writing from a local context, I have, through the case studies, engaged critically with the existence of these ideas in the local context. This research demonstrates the parallel existence of the South African and Western practices, despite the limited in-depth accounts within the South African scholarship.

1.3A brief history of curating in South Africa

Rogoff states that when speaking about *the curatorial*, she is referring less to curating in the sense of the professional practice of exhibition making than to a mode of knowledge production, a principle that can and may not exist in curating (Rogoff, 2015). Other writers who have delved into this concept include Beatrice von Bismark, Paul O'Neil and Maria Lind, in a 2010 article published in e-flux journal titled: *Letters to the Editors Eleven responses to Anton Vidokle's "Art Without Artists?"* (Admin, 2010).⁹ Vidokle's polemic essay and the responses to it demonstrate a moment in which the notion of the curator is shifting, one where, collectively, the visual arts were trying to find ways to define this practice. These dynamics also exist in the South African context.

There is a growing number of practitioners from varying disciplines who are engaging in curatorial work as a means of knowledge production in South Africa. Concurrently, there are also several projects that can be used as foundation for our discussions on how

⁹ The article included critical responses by eleven curators and writers to Vidokle's polemic essay, which argued that the expansion of curating to this idea of the curatorial should not allow for the work of curators to supersede that of artists. Vidokle's sentiments state that curators cannot claim any sense of authorship over the work they do and reduce the practice to the profession of exhibition-making as opposed to a creative methodology.

developments in the discourse of curating influenced and can continue to influence how contemporary art is experienced. In South Africa, several factors contribute to the development of this practice, namely: a) the rise of the independent curator; b) moments of collective determination of emerging and growing interest in curating; and c) exhibitions indicating shifts in the curatorial methodologies of exhibitions.

1.3.1 The rise of the independent curator

The development of emerging curatorial practices is significant in reflecting on the current position of the discourse of curatorial practice in South Africa. These developments can be traced through the growing need for and development of curatorial training programs in South Africa over the last 20 years (between 1995 and 2010). The appearance of this idea of the independent curator¹⁰, ever-growing interest in this idea and discussions on the institutions at the forefront of fostering these developments, are key in that they highlight individuals and institutions that frequently appear in this history. It is important to point out, however, that the material engaged here does not directly or only speak to the practices rooted in the notion of *the curatorial* as it has been foregrounded in this research. Instead, the material provides a broad overview of and a point of reference to the discourse within which *the curatorial* is situated.

Responding to Vidokle's essay, briefly discussed above, curator Jens Hoffman writes:

Yet many of the independent curators who have emerged over the last twenty years, mostly in Europe and to a somewhat lesser extent in the United States, have been looking for ways to open up rigid exhibition protocols and stiff institutional structures, and to propose unorthodox exhibition formats that can be highly critical of the art system itself. With the rise of the independent curator in the late 1990s, academic programs focused on curating, as well as theoretical discourses around exhibition making, began to flourish. The current concept of curatorial practice as

¹⁰ An independent curator is someone who engages in curatorial work in their individual capacity, as opposed to on behalf of an institution such as a museum or gallery. Independent curators work on a project-to-project basis for contracted periods of time in collaboration with institutions or on their own projects independently.

one that transcends the mere organization or display of artworks in gallery spaces owes much to these developments (Hoffmann, 2010: p.5).

If related to the South Africa context, Hoffman's words clearly articulate the relationship between the emergence of the independent curator and the availability of curatorial training platforms, as similar patterns appear.

1.3.2 Curatorial training

The creation of curatorial positions and learning opportunities are inherently linked to South Africa's socio-political history and landscape. Several global scholars, such as Emmanuel Nnakenyi Arinze (1998), Julie Mc Gee (2008) and Carmen Mörsch (2016), have written extensively about the colonial legacy of museums across Africa. South African museums are no exception (Gamedze, 2017) (Gamedze & gaMedze, 2017) (Mc Gee, 2008). In a recent article for the Cape Times, Wandile Kasibe (2017) writes about the connections between the founding of South African museums and the institutionalisation of racism. Kasibe (2017: para. 7) recounts projects, such as the 1906 Human Casting Project, carried out by the South African museums in Cape Town, which supported the "grandiose colonial idea that San people were going into extinction and were defined as the "missing link", thus had to be studied and preserved in museums for future generations." He also describes how acquisitions policies and curatorial mandates of such institutions have been historically informed by ideals of 'othering', which go as far back as renaissance Europe's 'Cabinets of curiosity'. With the advent of democracy and decolonisation, it has become necessary to re-evaluate the role of collections, curating and exhibitions in our current societies. Thuli Gamedze (2017) discusses how university students in South Africa and abroad have created activist spaces to urgently address the decolonisation of institutions and the larger society. Gamedze argues that institutions (in this instance she speaks particularly about the educational systems) have been curated to perpetuate certain ideologies, not only through the curriculum (and in the case of museums I'd argue the collection and exhibitions), but in the inclusion and exclusion of particular knowledges – in this way validating certain knowledges over others. Bereng noted in 2013 that in South Africa, curators are still few and far between, and the field is only opening up now owing to the introduction of curatorial programs in some universities and platforms like seminars and talks (Bereng, 2013).

The second Johannesburg biennale signifies an important moment in South Africa's history of exhibitions, something I will discuss further in this chapter. However, it is important to note it here in terms of the role it played in the interest of the idea of the independent curator in South Africa. A growing interest in this notion emerged following the appointment of Okwui Enwezor (an emerging, international, African curator at the time of the biennale) as the curator of the biennale. Amid the early 2000s, we began to see institutions like the South African National Gallery and VANSA (Visual Arts Network South Africa) facilitating workshops and organising training programs that set out to make the training of curators accessible to a diverse range of individuals previously unable to gain access to such opportunities. There was a push for institutions to offer training and mentorship opportunities that would be accessible to previously disadvantaged groups. This comes across in the intentions of the VANSA 2006 Curators Workshop:

It will provide a dynamic and interactive forum in which these groups can share experience, ideas and initiate collaborative curatorial projects, with a particular focus on the opportunities and challenges facing curatorial practice in contemporary African contexts. Emphasis will also be placed on the role of the visual arts and curatorial practice in social change and activism (Rensburg, 2006: para. 2).

Prior to the establishment of training programs and workshops, curators were primarily acquiring their skills from practical experience in the field. The appearance of these training programs can be linked firstly to the push to transform predominantly white cultural institutions, and secondly to the growing interest in the notion of the independent curator. This is not to suggest that curating was not an established profession in South Africa, as exhibitions had been staged by curators long before the period discussed here; however, this period is reflective of a diversification of the understanding of the role of the curator as well as a push towards the transformation agenda of that time in response to the new democratic dispensation. In this section, I am less focused on the developments of curating pre-democracy than on the emergence of varying and diverse forms of curating post-democracy. I would claim that the emergence of these different forms coincides with the rise of independent curators and an exploration of projects and practices that could exist outside of institutional frameworks (which were still grappling with issues of inclusion and diversity). In an informal interview conducted with former director and founding

member of the Visual Arts Network South Africa (VANSA), Joseph Gaylard¹¹, he describes the conditions under which the decision was made by VANSA to host the Conference and subsequent Robben Island Curators Workshop in 2006. He states that the emphasis for both these events was to forge professional networks that were transparent and countered the insular and exclusionary practices of existing institutions, as well as to engage with practitioners from the rest of the continent to extend these networks beyond the local context (Gaylard, 2017). Gaylard's sentiments reiterate the need for institutions to implement programs that will provide opportunities to individuals who were formerly excluded from its structures. They also call on the various stakeholders to forge networks of exchange outside of these institutional structures. The emergence of curatorial training and mentorship initiatives play a significant role in attempting to do so.

1.3.2.1 Keble Award and Iziko curator trainee

In 2004, in its second year, the Brett Keble Arts Award introduced the Brett Keble Curatorial Fellowship, awarded in that year to curator and writer Khwezi Gule¹². As part of the fellowship, Gule was offered an opportunity to learn curatorship under the guidance of Clive van den Berg, who was the curator of the 2004 award¹³. The following year (2005), the South African National Gallery (SANG) appointed its first trainee curator, Gabi

¹¹ Gaylard is currently the director of Pro Helvetia Johannesburg, which is the Southern African liaison office of the Swiss Arts Council. Interested in rethinking the institutions, structures and practices that constitute the cultural field in South Africa, he has consulted public and private sector entities such as the South African Department of Arts and Culture, the National Arts Council of South African, Business and Arts South Africa and the City of Johannesburg amongst others (Linkedin., n.d.). See: <https://www.linkedin.com/in/joseph-gaylard-bb13584/>.

¹² Khwezi Gule is currently the Curator-in-Chief of the Johannesburg Art Gallery. Prior to this, he held a position as the curator of the Soweto Museums, which include the Hector Peterson Museum and the Kliptown Open-Air Museum. During his time as the curator of contemporary collections at the Johannesburg Art Gallery, he staged several greatly significant exhibitions. These include Meshac Gaba's *Tresses and Other Projects* (2007) and Tracey Rose's *Waiting for God* (2011).

¹³ The competition was adjudicated by a panel of judges that included University of the Witwatersrand Art Gallery curator Julia Charlton and curator of the Constitution Hill Collection Songezile Churchill Madikida (Cohn, 2004).

Ngcobo¹⁴, who occupied the position between March 2005 and June 2006. According to Emma Bedford, the Senior Curator of Contemporary paintings and Sculpture and the Head of Art Collections at Iziko SANG at the time, these appointments were part of a larger plan by the SANG towards meeting its mandate for transformation, that is to provide mentorship and training for more black curators in South Africa (Bedford, 2006, p. 2)¹⁵.

Such interventions are necessary in addressing the institutions' deep colonial legacies that no longer have a place in a new democratic dispensation. These are some of the most obvious spaces that required transformation to allow for diversified participation in the field of visual arts and greater representation of black artists and curators because as national institutions, it was significant that they lead the way in this regard. The tension evident in Bedford's presentation is reflective of the external pressure and push-back for

¹⁴ Recently appointed the curator of the 11th Berlin Biennale, Gabi Ngcobo has facilitated and engaged with collaborative, curatorial and educational projects locally and internationally. With interest in self-organisation outside of dominant, predetermined institutional structures, Ngcobo has co-founded two Johannesburg-based artist collectives: The Center for Historical Reenactments (2010-14) and Nothing Gets Organised (2016 -). She has also curated *A Labour of Love* (2015) at the Welkulturen Museum in Frankfurt, which later travelled to the Johannesburg Art Gallery in 2017. In 2016, she co-curated the 32nd Biennial de São Paulo.

¹⁵ Following Ngcobo, a second call was made by SANG a year later and the position was filled by Loyiso Qanya. In *Curating as a Transformative Practice [Candidate III]* (2006), Emma Bedford discusses debates regarding the second call, which seem to be premised on a sense that the institution was not making a concerted effort to appoint black curators into the training program. "In this context it's noteworthy that few issues have elicited such vociferous debate in the local art community as the call for applications for a trainee curator put out by Iziko Museums in June 2006 [...] that a national institution is ignorant of the Amended Employment Equity Act of 2006 is absurd" (Bedford, 2006, p. 1-3). The statement was responding to sentiments that the museum was not doing enough to facilitate training and transformation. Bedford also raised the difficulties institutions consistently experienced with regards to obtaining funds to facilitate such mentorship programs, pointing out that the curatorial mentorship program was one of three (out of 15) successful proposals submitted to the Department of Arts and Culture for transformation funds (Bedford, 2006, p. 2).

transformation within these spaces and a condemning of the 'gatekeeping'¹⁶, which refuses to allow new people in. In a highly controversial article titled *Doing it for Daddy* (2006), artist and writer Sharlene Khan discussed how transformation in institutions had halted with the replacement of white men by white women in prominent institutional positions, and how this only sought to maintain an overwhelming and unshakable hegemony of whiteness in the visual arts. The need for Bedford to defend the hiring policies of the national gallery is unsurprising as it is one of the institutions Khan mentions in the article as having unheard complaints against white female 'dictators' (Khan, 2006). The second iteration of the Cape Africa Platform '09 also provided training opportunities for young curators with the CAPE '09 Young Curators Program. This platform selected five young black South African curators who were relocated to Cape town in the year leading up to the biennale to develop projects under the mentorship of a local curator. The implementation of this program was informed by the scarcity of black curators in South Africa and the absence of structured curatorial training programs (Kilston, 2009).

The emergence of the programs discussed above began to signal an attempt to create training opportunities for young black curators to gain experience in institutions such as museums and galleries as well as participate in platforms like the biennale. They bring to the forefront issues of transformation and resistance, while emphasising that the reason for the lack of representation by black intellectuals and cultural workers was due to the absence of trained individuals to occupy them.

1.3.3 Collective determinations and stocktaking of the emerging or growing interest in curating

¹⁶ Sharlene Khan's articles *Gatekeeping Africa* (Khan, 2007) as well as *Doing it for Daddy* (Khan, 2006) discuss issues of misrepresentation of works of African artists by curators and the gatekeeping which is rife in art institutions. *The Exhibitionist* (2016), a journal focused on curating, published an article by Nontobeko Ntombela *Remastered*, which also addresses issues of gatekeeping within curatorial practices in South Africa. Ntombela speaks to the ways curating is often seen to perpetuate, as opposed to question "separatist categorizations of race and gender", suspicions that are the legacy of apartheid in its systemic exclusion of people of colour from taking part in the writing of South African Art History (Ntombela, 2016).

In the following sections, I examine some of the archives of discursive platforms (such as conferences and seminars) in order to cite the significance of these moments, not only to collective knowledge and sharing of experiences among practitioners, but in their contribution towards knowledge on patterns of curatorial practices in South Africa. These archives are favoured in this research due to their ability to capture (even though partially so) dominant issues of concern and areas of debate at given moments in this history, therefore contextualising these moments in time. Existing primarily in the form of recorded seminars, conference programs and press clippings, they offer a sense of knowledge as moments in which a multiple voices come together. The use of reference materials that in their very nature resist a sense tangibility, attempting to consider knowledge as time-based and fleeting, form a part of the methodology of this research. It resonated with the associative manoeuvres, juxtaposition, blend and splice brought on by the *agglutinative*, chopping flows of information to present combinatory notes as opposed to a linear sequence of information (Maharaj, 2009, p. 4). A recording of a conversation or presentation is unable to depict the mood and essence of the space in which it was conducted. Through the secondary interaction with the information, something is inevitably missed or left out. There is also the challenge of limited theoretical writing on the curatorial practices in South Africa and the trajectory of these developments, which has informed the decision to rely primarily on the primary sources such as interviews and the archive. Like institutions, archives require us to employ a particular criticality when engaging with them. Their porous nature is such that they are shaped by the societal processes and discourses and therefore cannot be engaged as neutral sources of information. In its very nature, it is constantly changing form through what is being subtracted from it, or added to it, or it is subject to technological alteration such as digitising or new modes of preservation (Hamilton, et al., 2002).

1.3.3.1 Conferences

Organisations like VANSAs¹⁷ and Cape Africa Platform¹⁸ have played important roles in facilitating discussions and collaboration on curating and where the practice situated itself in South Africa and Africa. Sessions eKAPA was an international meeting of the arts held in Cape Town on 4–5 December in 2005. Titled *Mzantsi: (Re)Locating Contemporary African Art Practice*, the conference brought together leading theorists, curators, writers and cultural practitioners from different disciplines, exploring the interfaces between local art production and global art circuits. The conference formed part of CAPE – the international biennale that was set to take place in 2006 (International Federation of Arts Councils and Culture Agencies (IFACCA) , 2005). In 2006, VANSAs convened the first national visual arts conference in post-apartheid South Africa, which brought together a variety of visual arts practitioners¹⁹. Later that year, they facilitated the Robben Island Curators Workshop, which brought together emerging and established curators, both local and international. These events set out to firstly, facilitate knowledge exchange amongst different practitioners in South Africa, as well as to engage with practitioners from other parts of the African continent and the diaspora.

The decision to host the workshop emerged from a response to the shortage of trained curators and the lack of opportunities for local curators to share knowledge and skills. Pointing out that many of the South African curators had acquired their skills through practical experiences in this field, the sharing of knowledge was at the core of this workshop and was evident in the structure through which it took place. By inviting

¹⁷ The Visual Arts Network South Africa (VANSAs) was formed by visual art practitioners in South Africa as a shared response to the absence of a national structure that represents and addresses their concerns (systematically and constructively), and the historical imbalances that continue to affect the art sector. VANSAs has set out to address these issues through promoting networking and the sharing of information amongst different practitioners in the sector as well as informing constructive engagement with government and the private sector (VANSAs - Visual Arts Network South Africa, 2006, p. 1).

¹⁸ The Cape Africa Platform was the organisation established to host the Cape Town international Biennale, TransCape, which was later renamed Cape 08 and Cape 09.

¹⁹ The four-day conference hosted at the University of Cape Town's Hiddingh Hall was the first significant event hosted by VANSAs.

established and emerging curators²⁰ to create an environment in which to build a shared understanding of visual curatorship, emerging curators were invited from different disciplines, allowing interdisciplinary approaches and understandings of curatorial practices in South Africa.

VANSA's 2006 conference cites a moment where South African creative practitioners could engage with significant figures like Bisi Silva of the Centre for Contemporary Art Lagos in Nigeria; curator, art critic and creative consultant N'gone Fall (Senegal); British curator Eddie Chambers; and Giovanni Carmine (Switzerland) (Curator's Workshop, 2006).

Conferences and workshops have been important vehicles for shared exchange and contemplation over the nature of curatorial practice in South Africa. In 2013, the Heritage Studies and History of Arts divisions of the Wits School of Arts hosted *Curatorial Talks: The Educational Turn*, which offered new discussions on the need to account for where curatorial practices were and where they were going²¹. The theme '*The Educational Turn*' set out to address the increasing development of curatorial educational programs in South Africa at higher learning institutions and independent art spaces²². The discussions about

²⁰ The Workshop brought together 11 local established curators, four international curators and 13 emerging curators. These included: emerging curators: Abdul Dube, Angela de Jesus, Beathur Mgoza Baker, Cindy Poole, Ernett Vhoene Nkwana, Fatima Maal, Motseokae Klas Thibeletsa, Rita Potenza, Sarie Potter, Yvette Dunn, Ijeoma Loren Uche-Okeke, Loyiso Qanya, Mokgabudi Amos Letsoalo; established curators: Andrew Lampecht, Brett Pyper, Carol Brown, Christopher Du Prees, Monna Mokoena, Nontobeko Ntombela, Gabi Ngcobo, Siphon Mdanda, Sylvie Groschatau Phillips, Thivynaidoo Perumal Naiken and Zayd Minty.

²¹ The discussions were open to the public and engaged with the different kinds of curatorial projects and exhibition practices these practitioners were producing, and how these spoke back to the curatorial practices in South Africa and abroad. The platform intended to take the shape of an annual platform; however, it has since only occurred once. These talks were conceptualised by Nontobeko Ntombela, a curator, art historian and lecturer of History of Art and Heritage studies at the University of Witwatersrand.

²² The speakers selected for the conference included: Lerato Bereng, Clare Butcher, Joseph Gaylard, Raimi Gbadamosi, Rangoato Hlasane, Clive Kellner, Portia Malatjie, Bettina Malcomess, Riason Naidoo, Siona O'Connell, Renaud Proch, Claudia Marion Stemberger and Rat Western.

curatorial education started in reaction to ongoing, global debates on the role of education in the advancement and development of curatorial practice. The occurrences of a variety of the conversations in South Africa between 2006 and 2013 point to an urgency to engage in discussions and the production of knowledge in the local curatorial discourse. Currently, courses in curation are available at higher learning institutions such as the University of Witwatersrand²³ and to some extent Rhodes University²⁴. The Centre for Curating the Archive (CCA) is based in the Michaelis School of Fine Art, situated within the University of Cape Town²⁵.

1.3.4 Key Exhibitions Indicating Shifts in Curatorial Methodologies

Parallel to and intersecting with the development of training programs for curators, and moments of collective discussion and definition around this practice, the staging of exhibitions are also important in mapping out shifts in curatorial methodologies. Different kinds of exhibitions that embrace more ephemeral site-specific works and practices embedded into notions of institutional critique, are emerging. While these shifts were linked to global trends in artistic practice, they also emerged from an inherent disconnect between institutions, audiences and artists in the sense that there was still the challenge of grappling with the Western notions of art and civilisation that were inserted into the social landscape (Gaylard, 2017). Large-scale exhibitions that sought to capture the complexities of contemporary African art, attempting to challenge the old representations of Africa in art history and transcend traditional boundaries in the visual arts, gained prominence in the period around the late 90s (Hassan, 2008). They were also an attempt

²³ The History of Art Department offers courses in Exhibition Histories, Curating Exhibition and Museum Education. See: <https://www.wits.ac.za/wsoa/history-of-art/postgraduate/postgraduate-courses/>.

²⁴ Rhodes University's Master's of Fine Arts (MFA) offers an option in Curatorial Practice, in which candidates are expected to curate an exhibition at an established art gallery or museum and develop a thesis exploring the curatorial approach of the exhibition.

See: <https://www.ru.ac.za/fineart/about/programmesoffered/postgraduate/>.

²⁵ The center offers courses, publications and projects that set out to combine historically separated domains of the creative arts and the seemingly factual discourses of history, the social and the natural sciences (Anon., n.d.). In 2015, a conference on curatorial practice was held at the university under the then director of the CCA, Siona O'Connell.

to place South Africa on the global map following the cultural boycotts and exclusions. Looking at three exhibitions in South Africa, namely the *Second Johannesburg Biennale Trade Routes: History and Geography* (1997), *Africa Remix* (2007) and *CAPE '07* (2007), I am interested in discovering how these exhibitions began to signal conceptual and aesthetic shifts in curatorial methodologies, as well as how they are promoted publicly in a way that opened up conversation around the professionalisation of curating, curatorial training programs and the representation of previously marginalised groups into the field. In the *Curator's Roundtable* (2008), published in *Nka: Journal of Contemporary African art*, Chikka Okeke-Agulu questioned whether, despite the idea that all African exhibitions have played an important role in bringing African artists to the global arena, are they still necessary, as they can falsely promise an all-inclusive representation of artistic practices in Africa or by African artists (Okeke-Agulu, 2008).

The Trade Routes: History and Geography brought forth the notion of the independent curator through the appointment of Okwui Enwezor, but also came at a time when South Africa was still grappling with the social transition into democracy, participating in the global cultural economy after several years of cultural boycotts during apartheid, issues of representation of black South African artists and issues around who gets to represent whom. During preparations for the exhibition, Enwezor stated in an interview that the biennale team was intent on avoiding the setting up of a fetishistic relationship between audiences and object, and that they were concerned with the overtly violent nationalistic tones that challenged the limitation of the biennale to issues of national representation. To counter this, Enwezor invited a selection of curators with whom to collaborate²⁶. While ambitious, this strategy did perhaps not allow Enwezor to focus on the particularities of Johannesburg and South Africa, given its unique socio-political history, by attempting to appease an international audience. Rasheed Araeen argues that Enwezor fell into the trap of treating South Africa with same paternalism of white/European curators, which was evident in the first Johannesburg biennale (Araeen, 2000). Hosted across a selection of venues in both Johannesburg and Cape Town, the exhibition generated keen international interest in South Africa, who was still coming out of an extensive period of cultural

²⁶Gerardo Mosquera from Cuba; Hou Hanrou from China, based in Paris; Yu Yeon Kim, based in Seoul and New York; Octavio Zaya from Spain, living in New York; Kelly Jones from the USA; and Collin Richards from South Africa (Binder & Haupt, 1997).

boycotts²⁷ under the apartheid government. Despite the international interest in the project, there was not extensive buy in from the local community. The exhibition faced early closure due to too little financial support from the City of Johannesburg and has since not seen another iteration.

Between the July of 2004 and September of 2007, the mega-exhibition, *Africa Remix: Contemporary Art of the Continent*, completed its three-continent tour, appearing at the Museum Kunst Palast in Düsseldorf, Hayward Gallery in London, Centre Georges Pompidou in Paris, Tokyo's Mori Art Museum and Moderna Museet in Stockholm. The tour ended at the Johannesburg Art Gallery in 2007 (Nelson, 2008). An ambitious project, steered by its curator Simon Njami, *Africa Remix* set out to explore the diversity of the idea of African contemporary art as well as debunk misconceptions and homogenising ideas about Africa around the globe. The exhibition was publicised quite extensively from both the City of Johannesburg and in the press, further entrenching this idea of the independent curator with yet another appearance by an internationally recognised African curator. Bold statements, such as “hold on to your knobkerries for probably the greatest art exhibition in Africa, the Africa Remix exhibition hits Joburg on 24 June and remains in the city for three wonderful months”, were made by the City of Johannesburg (City of Joburg, 2007c). The exhibition, however, also faced criticism, with some saying that it perhaps bit off a little more than it could chew. Colin Richards, in the curator's roundtable discussion, remarked that the challenge with large-scale exhibitions was that they often raised expectations of representation because of the number of artists, possibly to the detriment of the exhibition. According to him, “Tracey Rose's work was horribly positioned and Wangechi Mutu was frankly a travesty” (Richards, et al., 2008). However, the exhibition delivered on its ability to bring together an exhibition that showcased a diversity of mediums, artistic sensibilities and contexts.

²⁷ The African National Congress produced a Cultural Boycott Policy document in May of 1989, which stipulated that no cultural workers, including artists, sportspeople or academics, were permitted to travel into South Africa to impart their services, unless such travel was in the advancement of the struggle for democracy. The first calls for a cultural and academic boycott were made by the ANC in 1958 (South African History Online (SAHO), 2017).

In March 2007, the CAPE '07 exhibition opened in various venues around the city of Cape Town. The project had been reimaged by Jonathan Garnham and curator Gabi Ngcobo following the postponement of the exhibition in 2006²⁸. Despite the financial challenges the exhibition faced, with several of the locations secured, the curatorial team conceptualised an exhibition that kept to some of its original ideas of mapping through the city. The scarcity of funds still meant that the project had to take a different form from what had been originally imagined – that of a European Biennale. Garnham explains that while there were serious compromises made to realise the exhibition due to the absence of funds, the curatorial team sought creative ways to manoeuvre around these. In the absence of a furniture budget, the video installation room at the National Gallery was filled with recycled milk crates: “So here you have the Iziko National Gallery, this bastion of colonialism and inside there you had one very large room projecting two videos at a time and milk crates scattered around so that people could sit on them” (Garnham, 2018). The original approach towards the exhibition, reminiscent of international biennials, was shelved and an alternative experience²⁹ offered. Commercial galleries were involved in assisting with recourses they could spare such as transportation of their artists’ work, while foreign funding bodies like the Goethe Institut and Prohelvetia contributed towards travel costs for some diasporic African artists featured in the exhibition, for example (Garnham, 2018). In an interview with Sue Williamson, published in *Artthrob*, Gabi Ngcobo articulated the following:

²⁸ As a result of Cape Africa Platform (CAPE) not being able to secure the 11 million rand budget for the biennale, the Norway-based curator Gavin Jantjies, who had been appointed to curate TRANS CAPE, resigned from his position, citing that the proposed 2–3 million rand budget would compromise the quality of what he could produce. Following Jantjies’ resignation and the postponement of the exhibition, Garnham and Ngcobo conceptualised a new project, which opened on the 24th of March 2007 (Kretzmann, 2009).

²⁹ The exhibition took audiences through varying spaces throughout Cape Town. Look Out Hill in Khayelitsha hosted the opening of the exhibition and other venues included the South African National Gallery, the subway between St George’s Mall and Cape Town central, Paddy’s Service Station situated in Buitenkamp Street was the venue where *Oasis*, a series of photographs by Pieter Baddenhorst highlighting the embassies of global oil giants, was displayed. The various locations spoke to different works in intimate ways while also consolidation the conceptual ideas of mobility.

The aim is definitely not to keep it local. We are still committed to connecting Cape Town and South Africa to the rest of Africa. The exhibition still features about 40 artists whose work can be seen in Cape Town. It is our aim to sustain the relationships we have built over the last months (Ngcobo in Williamson, 2007, para 7)

In the absence of a logistical budget, the team decided that being able to bring artists in for the exhibition would uphold the notion of the biennale as a space of exchange and conversation. This also presented an opportunity for artists to make works on site and respond to the existing conditions in ways that responded to the curatorial underpinning of the exhibition. Video pieces were exhibited on television screens outside electronics stores near the Cape Town train station (Garnham, 2018). The form of the exhibition in terms of the display of works, interventions by artists and locations are all integral aspects of the curatorial underpinning of the project. Therefore, the shifts we see, from object-based curatorial projects to a non-object specific practices, are not only influenced by artistic trends but also by the circumstances under which these projects are produced, such as the availability of funding for large exhibition projects, infrastructure and questions of audiences in South Africa. *The curatorial* emerges not only as a way of addressing conceptual concerns but also as a negotiation through the conditions within which these projects exist. It is the notion of criticality underpinning *the curatorial* that requires a dual language that is both experiential and analytical (Rogoff, 2015).

In this build-up from the *Trade Routes: History and Geography* to *Africa Remix* and then *CAPE '07*, and I would go so far as to include its sequel, *CAPE '09*, we observe the development of curatorial methodologies that are intrinsically informed by conditions. These moments contribute towards the realisation that our concerns are not only about re-assessing issues of representation but rather about how to participate in the broader economy of knowledge production while remaining rooted in and cognisant of present conditions.

The highly chronological rendering of these historical events, trends and shifts might serve to contradict the proposed non-linear and ephemeral framing of this research proposed earlier – one that attempts to question structured notions of research through an engagement with the propositionality of the 'maybe' in understanding knowledge as a moment and not a fixed product of research processes. I would argue that the seemingly

neat and chronological trajectory of growth and events in curatorial practices in no way alludes to a neat and simplistic history of development, given that the measures of training have been sporadic and opportunistic, dependent on the availability of funding. A significant number of curators who have participated in these programs have remained in the 'developing' phase, given the scarcity of curatorial work and funding to produce independently. As a result, many of them remain unknown today, with only a handful becoming visible and known, and for those who are known, the trajectory has been far from simplistic or linear. The opportunities have also, in most instances, not changed the landscape, with many of the prominent positions in many cultural institutions still being held by white female curators. In 2016, coinciding with the 10th year anniversary of Sharlene Khan's *Doing it for daddy* article, a conference bearing the same title - *A Luta Continua: Doing it for Daddy – Ten Years On...* was held at the Rhodes University in 2016 (Rhodes Fine Art, 2016). The conference sought to commemorate the article and those who 'speak up', while also looking at the ways various social oppressions intersect in visual arts. The conference also followed a panel discussion: *Black artists, White Labels*, held at the Wits School of Arts' project space – The Point of Order. This discussion was propelled by confrontation between the curator of the *Black Modernisms* exhibition at Wits Art Museum, Anitra Nettleton, and co-curator Same Mdluli. The second Johannesburg Biennale also has another set of dynamics to navigate – the position of the international curator, who is invited to work on such a large-scale project. In these instances, there are often skewed dynamics involved, where in some instances international curators have been unable to engage the needs and conditions of the South African context. This is also something worth considering in relation to Jantjies' resignation from Trans Cape.

And so, these issues, among several others, demonstrate the complexity and non-linear nature of this history, given that the sense of an abundance of opportunities for training do not necessarily yield the results and representation that they perhaps should. Instead, the trajectories of events that are visible today are hardly straightforward. To even formulate such a chronology is to sift and decipher through scattered and (at times) conflicting information on events, programs and opportunities.



Figure 1



Figure 2



Figure 3



Figure 4



Figure 5

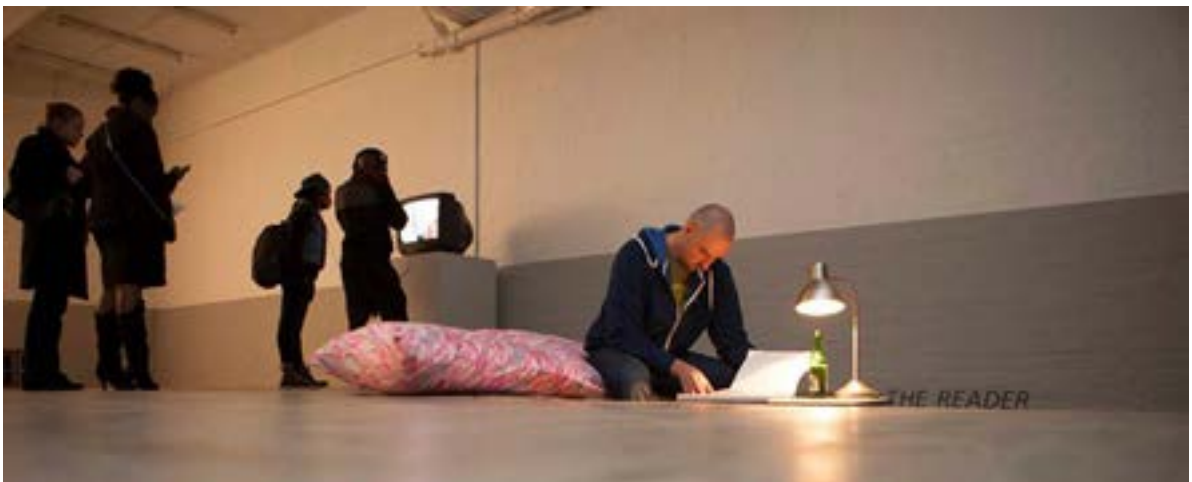


Figure 6



Figure 7



Figure 8



Figure 9

Chapter Two

Xenoglossia, a research project

2.1 The Center for Historical Reenactments

In this chapter, I will discuss the appearance of practices in *the curatorial* in the South African visual arts discourse through an analysis of *Xenoglossia, a research project* (a platform created by the Center for Historical Reenactments (CHR)). The chapter will explore the methodologies employed by this collective and indicate how they illustrate ways of working through *the curatorial* as a means of re-evaluating notions of organising and inhabiting institutions. The chapter looks at the ethos according to which members of CHR collaborated to propose new ways of working. In a text by the curator of the Jewish Museum, Jens Hoffman, titled *The Art of Curating and The Curating of Art*, published in The Utopian Display Platform, Hoffman interrogates the interplays between the roles of artists and curators.

What is particularly engaging is that the emancipation of curating would not have happened without the artists and their concepts and strategies. In order to break free from the artistic and curatorial routine as well as from the political power structures of museums and other art institutions, curators have clearly learned from the artists (Hoffmann, n.d.).

Hoffman's statement not only points to the 'overlappings', but potentially contests the overarching narrative of suspicions by artists against curators, which, while valid in some instances, often flattens and side-lines the interdependent and often collaborative practices Hoffman is discussing above. This is relevant to the collaborative approach employed by CHR as a collective contributing to and partaking in knowledge production from different intersecting points of departure, each one playing a different role towards producing a body of knowledge, reflections and experimentations. The cultivation of sites for collaboration and experimentation remains a significant aspect of Gabi Ngcobo's

career as a curator, even today³⁰. Conceived of in 2010³¹ by Ngcobo and Sohrab Mohebbi³², The Center for Historical Re-enactments (2010 - 2014), is/was³³ a Johannesburg-based artistic intervention, which set out to explore among many other things, questions of historicization and commemoration. The main members of CHR include Gabi Ngcobo, Donna Kukama and Kemang Wa Lehulere. They were later joined by former CHR intern, Sanele Manqele, and Mbali Khoza in 2012. The collective was founded by Ngcobo following her return to South Africa after completing a Master's at Bard College's Center for Curatorial Studies in New York, USA. Ngcobo left for New York following her curation of CAPE '07.

The opening of independent art spaces (often referred to as alternative art spaces) that do not operate from the same institutional frameworks as galleries or museums, is very important in an environment where artists have very few opportunities outside of the

³⁰ Portia Malatje has written about the emergence of 'alternative art spaces' in Johannesburg, linked to the way in which the viewing conditions for art audiences in South Africa were limited to commercial galleries and state-funded museum spaces. These conditions also disadvantaged artists not represented by galleries. While I am hesitant about referring to such spaces as *alternative spaces*, primarily as this may suggest that these spaces operate in the periphery of the art world, they are a vital component of the cultural ecosystem. The article does, however, articulate important concerns around how these spaces operate and about their longevity. The essay emphasises the important role they play despite the challenges they face, often resulting in them not lasting very long (Malatje, 2013).

³¹ The idea for CHR was initially conceptualized by the two who were then classmates at Bard College as part of an assignment. It was later taken up by Ngcobo upon her return to Johannesburg from Bard College.

³² Sohrab Mohebbi is a Los Angeles-based writer and curator. He currently teaches at Otis College of Art and Design in California. He received his MA from CCS Center for Curatorial Studies, Bard in New York, and was also the founding member of 127 Band in Tehran.

³³ While the trajectory of the collective's existence will be further discussed in the following sections of this chapter, I have qualified the collective in both the present and past tense owing to my interpretation from various sources that, following their staged 'ending', CHR continued to present projects internationally until 2014 and in 2017 even held a CHR museum. Donna Kukama's artist biography states that "Kukama is a member of The Center for Historical Reenactments (founded 2010. died 2012. haunted 2013. exorcised 2014. Musemified 2017)" (Blank Projects, n.d.b).

mainstream art market from which to collaborate, research, and produce work. It is under these conditions that CHR was formed. Aware of its danger – becoming the very institution they set out to question – the founders of CHR conceptualised a project which took place over a two-year long period, with the staging of its own ‘death’ in December of 2012 through *We are Absolutely Ending This* (2012)³⁴. There is a significance to the notion of two years in the collective’s first phase, as it references the structure of a biennale – occurring every two years. In the context of South Africa, there is an uncomfortable, eerie relation to this idea following the ending of the Second Johannesburg Biennale and the unresolved questions it left in its aftermath. The Johannesburg Biennale then provided historical reference from which to begin, the time during which the project was active prior to its institutional suicide – two years not only commemorates the history of the biennale in South Africa in particular, but also speaks directly to a resistance against notions of permanence and institutionalisation discussed above. Following this staged ‘end’, the collective embodied a sort of ‘haunting’, one they used as an opportunity to re-evaluate institutional forms and explore an alternative existence, through projects like *2nd Coming* (2013) and *After-after Tears* (2013). I relate Rogoff’s discussion of criticality as being at the core of these kinds of curatorial practices (Rogoff, 2015). Rogoff states that this criticality – which she believes is discouraged by the Neo-liberal, capitalist educational frameworks – is constituted by a way of working that actively questions and interrogates the very structures and modes of working within which they are situated and partake in (Rogoff, 2015). On their website CHR states:

CHR continues to instigate new ways of inhabiting institutions, one perhaps akin to haunting. Its staged ‘death’ in December 2012 foregrounded the project’s intention to not simply conclude a single phase but rather to re-evaluate larger

³⁴ In December 2012, CHR staged an ending or “institutional suicide” with *We are absolutely ending this*, an event which reconsidered what it means to outlive central questions foregrounded in the project’s formation. This event produced *After-after Tear*”, a project that took place at the New Museum, Museum as Hub. The title makes references to terminology relating to after-burial gatherings, a popular youth culture in South African townships. This trend – also known as *Wie sien ons?* (Afrikaans for “Who is seeing us?”) – became a fitting frame for a project that explored commemoration, and more specifically, the cultural performances and rituals around death – whether that of a person, institution, or era (Center for Historical Reenactments, n.d.c).

institutional functions and time frames that could enable a different existence (Center for Historical Reenactments, n.d.a).³⁵

This 'ending' probed the members of CHR to contemplate the next form the project would take, in a way that accommodated their intentions of being a thinking concept more than a physical space, "blurring binaries between concept and form, artistic and curatorial practices, education and production of knowledge" (Ngcobo, 2013: para. 8). Between 2012 and 2014, the project received various invitations to participate in biennales, exhibitions and projects internationally³⁶. CHR was invited to present and exhibit at the 11th Lyon Biennale in 2011, where they presented *Xenoglossia, a research project* to an international audience for the first time, *Condition Report* (2011) at the RAW Material Company in Dakar, Senegal³⁷, and in 2014 they took part in the 6th Berlin Biennale with their project *Digging Our Own Graves 101*. On the 28th of January 2017, the Center for Historical Reenactments presented itself as a museum: "a gesture towards abandoning the scene(s) of history. A journey towards nothingness" (Nothing Gets Organised (NGO), 2017). The evening event was hosted at NGO (Nothing Gets Organised³⁸) in collaboration

³⁵ See: <http://historicalreenactments.org/index2.html>.

³⁶ In December 2012, at the end of its two-year span, CHR staged *We are absolutely ending this*, an event which reconsidered what it meant to have outlived central questions foregrounded during its formation. The act was staged partially due to the question of mystery regarding the audience, partially because of expectations of deliverance, and partially to highlight the trap of sustenance. This end was followed by a haunting phase where CHR instigated new ways of inhabiting institutions. The CHR ghost was exorcised in December 2014 at the corner of Nugget and End Streets, Johannesburg. See: <https://www.facebook.com/events/1106309466164413/>.

³⁷Gabi Ngcobo presented on behalf of CHR at the Raw Material Company 3-day Symposium, *Condition Report: A symposium on building art institutions in Africa* held in Dakar between the 18th and 20th of January 2012 (Anon., 2011). See <http://www.e-flux.com/announcements/34847/raw-material-company-symposium-condition-report/>.

³⁸NGO was founded by Gabi Ngcobo, and artists Dineo Bopape and Sinethemba Twalo. "NGO begins this conversation by posing a question, which will hopefully stimulate an ongoing debate that will continue beyond this beginning: What are we to make of the effervescent rebellion? The rebellion, a tumultuous disarray of objects; acting out against time, space and each other, may allow for a _____ to appear. As an in(ter)vention, it is necessitated by a vehement uncertainty, one that presupposes a certain loss."

with Ntyilo Ntyilo A Vocal Museum, with Masello Motana, Mma Tseleng and The Cook's Kitchen.

2.2 Xenoglossia, a research project

Launched in CHR's first year, *Xenoglossia, a research project* (2011), was a platform, that sought to foreground questions of strangeness, using Julia Kristeva's essay *By What Right Are You a Foreigner* as a point of departure. This essay appears in the catalogue of the second Johannesburg Biennale *Trade Routes: History and Geography* (1997). The Center for Historical Reenactments, situated at August House artist studios at the beginning of the project, the space was being activated through events in which references to art, literature, film, popular culture, politics and recent (as well as historical) events were placed in conversation with one another (Center for Historical Reenactments, 2012b). The title of the project makes use of the term 'Xenoglossia', which is described as a rare or alleged condition of speaking or writing in a language entirely unknown to the speaker. This condition is often explained through the contested phenomenon of reincarnation. The project took the structure of a year-long³⁹ curatorial research project and explored how language has played a central role in some of the greatest historical misunderstandings that have been reincarnated in recent history. The project considered various historical events in relation to one another, taking into account the 1976 Soweto students' uprisings⁴⁰ against the use of Afrikaans as a language of instruction in schools as one instance, to the use of derogatory words like 'kwerekwere' – a term which attempts to mimic the sound of an unrecognisable language and is used in South Africa to refer to foreign nationals (Center for Historical Reenactments, 2012b). In an article on the work of CHR, *Is the Tale Chasing Its Own Tail?* (2015), Khwezi Gule expressed the relevance of the kinds of re-enactments produced by the Center for Historical Reenactments, whose

See: <http://www.contemporaryand.com/exhibition/ngo-nothing-gets-organised/>.

³⁹ While the project was initially cited as a year-long platform for creative research around questions of language and history, questions raised throughout the process continued to form a part of the concerns foregrounded in the project to follow by the Center for Historical Reenactments.

⁴⁰ The 1976 Soweto uprisings triggered countrywide resistance to the implementation of Afrikaans alongside English as the compulsory languages of instruction in schools. Culminating in numerous fatalities, the events of this day profoundly influenced the socio-political landscape of South Africa (South African History Online (SAHO), 2013).

work allowed for a deceleration of time to allow one to move through their work more deliberately (Gule, 2015, p. 91). Gule's analysis of CHR's work alludes to the modes of working suggestive in the notion of the 'maybe' with regards to Martinez's articulation of how it manifests the disowning of knowledge; not an absence of it but rather the presence of knowledge as an event and not a product (Martinez, 2012, p. 48). My sense is that this deceleration of time Gule is referring to suggests a distinctive contemplation through historical moments and how they might relate to the present in new ways, as opposed to a linear historical narrative.

Xenoglossia was launched with a performance in process by the NON-NON Collective⁴¹. The performance was titled *The Unknowing Grammar of Inhabiting a Text*, and the rest of the space was featured works and material from selected artists and writers, some of whom were: Khosi Xaba, Brett Murray, Anton Kannemeyer, Zanele Muholi and Nothando Mkhize. The project facilitated ongoing research prompted by the questions around language (discussed above), through various engagements such as film screenings, performances, book launches and site-specific interventions. Through various research processes throughout the duration of the project, ideas, artworks, notes, etc. were collated to form a kind of archive. The research project invokes notions of practice-based research and methodologies rooted in *the curatorial*. The notion of revisiting, re-enacting and reviewing existing ideas and histories is consistent in the project. The performance by Kukama and Wa Lehlere is a series of ongoing performances, writings, readings, interventions and presentations that explore ideas around language and translation, while simultaneously displaying the impossibility in the process of translation (Visible Project, n.d.). The NON-NON collective define their practice as refusals. Their manifesto, was developed from a series of emails between the two artists.

We are non-lines and non-textual descriptions. We are non-everything. Art included! We make translations, gestures, proposals and rehearsals. We make

⁴¹ A collaborative project between Donna Kukama and Kemang Wa Lehlere, it is an instrument for challenging existing modes of artistic production and representation. Established in 2010, they define their collaborative practice as "ungovernable". Their practice includes public readings, performances, interventions, conversations, writings and presentations, mostly taking place in non-descript venues (Anon., n.d.).

music, dictionaries, write texts, produce maps, give directions, and situations that are "non-art" (Anon., 2012).

By working in ways that oppose being categorised within one set discipline or medium or field of research, the collective embraces the permissions created by artistic research to further push boundaries that attempt to define what practice ought to be.

2.3 Criticality: *The curatorial in Xenoglossia*

Practice that foregrounds study or research is a mode of working that often seeks to question forms of research, its methodologies and how the knowledge it produces is categorised and consumed. *Xenoglossia* foregrounded methodologies of investigation and exploration of ideas in the way it posited itself as a research project, thereby defining itself as a collection of research processes, experiments and investigations rather than perhaps a singular body of knowledge taking the form of an exhibition, publication or intervention. CHR's approach to making is quite heavily routed in notions of practice-based research, a field of visual production that foregrounds study and is also a central trope of understandings of *the curatorial*. The project employs actions that are reminiscent of academic research methods such as footnotes and archives. It is engaged from the position of practice, yet proposes artistic presentations that are not yielding an academic output or rather pushing the boundaries of what constitutes an academic creative research project. The following excerpt from one of the project's iterations is suggestive of these modes of working.

Excerpt from Facebook event page: Xenoglossia, a research project part 3 with f.u.c.t Fridays invitation:

Also featured are research materials and references selected from a growing archive including a commissioned photographic performance by Zanele Muholi *Izidwedwe as part of Insila Yomuntu after Pistoletto* (2010) as well extracts from literature and theory as well as photocopied references and footnotes drawn from contemporary art including Khosi Xaba, Lewis Nkosi, Brett Murray, Tracey Rose, Hlonipha Mokoena, Pablo Helguera, Andrew Putter, Anawana Haloba and Thierry Fountaine among many others (Center for Historical Reenactments, 2011b).

The visual arts provide a set of permissions that allow one to combine bodies of knowledge from different fields and contexts, facilitating knowledge production that “starts in the middle” (Rogoff, 2015). It does not attempt to form knowledge in a linear or chronological way. The connections between works, films, photographs, events, performances and interventions carried out through the duration of the project do not attempt to create a sort of linear conclusive narrative attempting to answer these questions of language and history in South Africa. Instead, they probe new contemplations of existing knowledge and conditions. *The curatorial* is reflected through the ways in which CHR display an embodied criticality, one which questions the forms and methodologies of knowledge production. CHR was a platform through which the deconstruction of readings of history and how artistic creation is informed by historical context could occur through artistic productions. *Xenoglossia*, in its continuity or circularity, responds aptly to Rogoff’s call to “produce criticality through inhabiting a problem rather than analysing it” in the sense that meaning making is not produced by what the subjectivities participants – whether audiences, artists, curators and educators – project onto works, but rather that it is produced through a set of relations through the temporality of the event, exhibition or intervention (Rogoff, 2006b, p. 1). This deconstruction also speaks to Martinez’s articulation of the ‘maybe’ being a manner of research that calls for a radical reconsideration of the role of language, one that allows for straightforward conceptions of the interactions between things, and the inventory of monologues produced by serious forms of meaning (Martinez, 2012, p. 46).

The project facilitates a conversation between history and the present, or perhaps an exploration of the historical through the present. 2011 was a year in which South Africa experienced a second surge of Xenophobic attacks and violence in Johannesburg, following the attacks on foreign nationals in Alexandra township in 2008⁴². So, the project contemplates the role that language plays in ideas around place, identity, history, etc. at a moment confronted with immediate and historical issues.

⁴² On the 11th of May 2008, violence broke out in Alexander township, Johannesburg, against people identified as foreign nationals by their neighbours. Over the next few weeks, these attacks (looting, brutalising, rape) spread to the Johannesburg CBD and other townships and informal settlements in Gauteng, KwaZulu-Natal and the Cape. By June, several camps were opened in Johannesburg and Cape Town to accommodate those stranded after fleeing their homes (Hayem, 2013, p. 78). The violence in 2011 was directed primarily against foreign nationals who owned convenience stores in townships or informal settlements.

2.4 Negotiating sets of permissions

As I have noted in the section mentioned above, *Xenoglossia* yielded other projects emerging from new questions. Ngcobo, in an interview conducted for this research, described how the questions and issues raised by this project became ongoing throughout the existence of the collective and were further explored in the projects that followed, like *Na Ku Randza* (2011), *Fra(gile)* (2012) and *Rechewed* (2012)⁴³, referred to as research appendices that emerged from the project. Successful in probing and questioning, *Xenoglossia* also facilitates the creation of knowledge, as a possibility and not a thing. In a presentation on the *100 Notes – 100 Thoughts* notebook series for Documenta (13), Martinez discusses the act of summarisation that one is often inclined to in an attempt to grasp ideas and knowledge, stating that notebooks, like the work of artists, are by nature interesting exercises in trying not to summarise as they record initial thoughts and ideas and their development and change. She states that the notebook should never be ready,

⁴³ *Na Ku Randza* was the first of the research appendices. The project was part of *über(W)unden – art in troubled times*, a conference hosted by the Goethe Institut, Johannesburg (6-11 September). CHR staged various interventions on Kerk, Nugget and End streets in the Johannesburg CBD. Referencing a popular song by Gito Baloyi, *Na Ku Randza* – which means “I love you” in English. Some of the interventions took place on the corner of Kerk and Nugget streets – where Baloyi was gunned down in 2004. The project explored love, violent conflict and a conceptualising of spaces where mutual recognition can be imagined alongside violent encounters (Center for Historical reenactments, 2011). See: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pojoHVob3p4>.

Rechewed featured a film by Andrés Carvajal and Sandra Gross “Veejays, The Movie” alongside an installation and performance by Mbali Khoza titled “Chapter 1: A Carnival.” The concept referenced Haroldo de Campos is based on the notion that translation goes beyond shifting a text from one language to another, but instead is a passage enabled for the creation of new meaning such as the value of the former is reassessed (Center for Historical reenactments, 2012).

Fra(gile) was a three-day residency at the Alf Kumalo museum, during which members of CHR sorted through Kumalo’s boxes, many of which contained fragile items such as film rolls, printed pages, photographs, etc. The three days were spent sorting, cleaning, learning, talking and engaging with the space and its contents. Kumalo, who died at age 82, 7 months after this project, had to date shot over 500 000 frames documenting the lives of black people during apartheid (Reenactments & Pereira, n.d.).

because it is a source of self-knowledge to which one constantly refers to (Martinez, 2013). I would argue that the research project in its culmination of forms and iterations emulates a kind of collective and embodied note-taking process. The materials exist as notes that are returned to, re-thought, re-imaged and performed again in different moments; a process that presents an intuition, a means of operating through this notion of the 'maybe'. It is interesting how the project is returned to. Each set of 'notes' in the form of works, interventions, performances, texts or conversations facilitates a probing into the next possibility.

In 2013, an exhibition was staged at the Goethe Institut project space, Goethe on Main in the Maboneng, Johannesburg. *Xenoglossia*, the exhibition, took place between the 13th of July to the 4th of August. It comprised works by seven artists, namely: Tracey Rose, Jakup Ferri, Wu Tsang, Keren Cytter and Madeleine Dymond, Mbali Khoza and Megan Mace. In addition to works of these artists, the space was activated throughout the duration of the show by interventions in the space, including a talk-about by Tshidi Matla and CHR Speed Actions' closing event.

2.5 History and memory

The launch of Hlonipha Mokoena's⁴⁴ book, *Magema Fuze: The Making of a Kholwa Intellectual* (2011), co-hosted by Center for Historical Reenactments and The University of KwaZulu-Natal, formed part of the series of events that were a part of *Xenoglossia: a research project*. The book launch also featured archival material and photographic presentations by Jakup Ferri, Sanele Manqele and Zanele Muholi and a discussion between the author and curator Khwezi Gule (Center for Historical Reenactments, 2012). The book was not only Professor Mokoena's first book but also one of the first substantiate biographies written on Fuze – a South African newspaper printer and journalist who wrote

⁴⁴ Professor Hlonipha Mokoena obtained her Ph.D. from the University of Cape Town in 2005. Currently an associate professor at the Wits Institute for Social and Economic Research (WiSER), Mokoena has contributed to articles in several journals, including the Journal of Natal and Zulu History and the Journal of South African Studies. Her first book, *Magema Fuze: The Making of a Kholwa Intellectual*, is on how Fuze represents a set of questions about the emergence and arrested development of a black intelligentsia and literati in 19th and early 20th century South Africa. See: <https://theconversation.com/profiles/hlonipha-mokoena-296367>.

the first book to be printed in isiZulu (Couper, 2011). In a review of the book featured on KZN's Literary Tourism's website, Scott Couper notes that: "Mokoena's transparency leads her to argue that Fuze's intellect generated creative advocacy rather than regurgitated history. Her analysis of Fuze is as surgical as it is sober" (Couper, 2011, para 7). There is a relationship between Mokoena's writing of Fuze's biography that explores the historical figures significance through a new lens, and CHR's approach to re-enacting history to propose new questions.

While the term *kholwa* can be crudely translated as "believer" (that is, in the twentieth century 'western' form of Christianity), Mokoena uses Fuze's life to adeptly tease out the more nuanced and thus more accurate social and political meanings imbedded within (Couper, 2011, para 2).

Mokoena's writing is aware of the understandings of the term 'kholwa'⁴⁵ and uses it with caution. My interests in Mokoena's project is how it critically and specifically proposes new perspectives and engages with reading histories. It is through this entangle and overlapping notion of history that CHR has carried out explorations.

Looking particularly at the projects carried out by CHR during its active stage and in its afterlife, I would argue that *the curatorial* is situated far less in the act of curating and exhibition-making than in a sensibility, encompassed in the creative process. While research, critical thinking and conceptualisation are at the core of curatorial practices, the work of curators is largely administrative, even for curators working outside of institutional frameworks. *The curatorial* acts in relation to this and demands of curators to constantly negotiate between the conceptual underpinning of the project and the practical conditions and concerns encompassed in the process of staging an exhibition or project. Maharaj's proposition of the 'no-how' is reflective of a means of knowledge production that challenges and attempts to escape established modes of research and knowledge production while remaining within and around the discourse or set of ideas. There is a process of questioning and negotiating systems of looking and interpreting that have been

⁴⁵ Hughes is concerned that the term too easily bifurcates those who converted to Christianity from those who did not. The two worlds were far more, as historian Catherine Burns is fond of saying, 'imbricated' (Couper, 2011).

internalised, institutionalised and standardised; an exploration of that which lies between the 'singular' and the 'universal' to engage in practices that speak distinctively to the particularities of context and place. In a context where research is often thought of within the boundaries of science, for example, with relatively set hypothesis, research methodologies and methods of reporting, the notion of artistic research has often sat a little uncomfortably. It probes questions around what creative research ought to look like, as Maharaj questions:

The query that crops up right away with the idea of "visual art as knowledge production" is: "What sort of knowledge?" Hard on its heels is "What marks out its difference, its otherness?" (Maharaj, 2009, p. 1).

What is in this question is not whether visual arts can be a form of knowledge production; the question is rather: what form does this knowledge take to avoid re-inscribing itself within a set of confinements, articulated by more 'traditional' forms of knowledge. The 'no-how' questions these notions of legitimacy and convention and we can argue that it is this notion that distinguishes *the curatorial* from the broader framework of curating.

The term knowledge production has been used in the visual arts discourse, particularly with regard to notions of practice-based research and visual arts as knowledge production. My sense is that, given where a significant amount of the theoretical writing on this notion emanates (the West), it can allude to the idea of knowledge production as a sort of grand concept or methodology situated at a 'centre'. This can further isolate and perhaps invalidate knowledge produced outside this 'centre', which is often European and American, as not operating within this paradigm. In the context of this research, I am referring to a notion of knowledge production that contests that the idea is situated in one particular place or time.

Ngcobo's curatorial practice speaks to an intersecting and fluid conversation between the notions of 'here' and 'there'. While citing ideas akin to writings by people like Martinez, Maharaj, Lind and Rogoff about their proposed methods of curating, she is still concurrently engaging through a conceptual framework and creative aesthetic that is imbedded in the local context. Even when she is placed within these themes of *the curatorial*, there is still a refusal, maintaining the tension between the universal and the particular. Ngcobo's approach questions these categories: 'centre', 'research', 'knowledge' and 'institution'. There is a visual and aesthetic currency generated that speaks to this grey area. Ngcobo humorously remarks that the decision to name the

collaborative as a centre was precisely to challenge assumptions in South Africa, that if one was not operating within commercial gallery and museum structures, one was operating in the periphery. They deliberately question notions of a singular centre of knowledge production, not only geographical but institutionally as well (Ngcobo, et al., 2011).

Xenoglossia, and the broader collectives practice, engage with sophisticated notions of curating with a complex embeddedness in the conditions in which it is situated. This methodology – the combination of both analytical and experiential study – is a means through which they exercise notions of criticality. The recurring notions of death, burial, resurrection and exhumation make crude reference to a historical haunting not only in relation to occurrences in the art world but in history. Gule points out connections to exhumation in the *Digging Our Own Graves* project and the reality that many of the victims of apartheid were placed in unmarked graves, discovered after the fall of the apartheid regime. The exhumations were necessary to afford the deceased proper burials (Gule, 2015, p. 98). There is such particularity to the language of knowledge production, negotiating between language as text but also visual language. References to terms like 'kwerekwere' bear such a particularity to specific geographical, political and spatial conditions, that, while the knowledge produced speaks to broad issues of migration, belonging, xenophobia and violence, they are framed by a sense of particularity. Maharaj refers to Agamben's theory of 'whatever', an alternative to a polemic existence between the *general* and the *particular*, providing a space for knowledge that exists in between the two. This 'grey-area' debunks an idea of knowledge emanating from one centralised location.

There is a poignancy to the naming of this extensive research project as *Xenoglossia* – thinking about language not only as spoken, written or linguistic but also about the nature of visual and/or aesthetic language, which varies according to geography. When we think about the way the work was carried out by CHR and how it finds itself in different global contexts, it arguably speaks in a language specific to its context and at the same time speaks through global ways of working in a localised South African context, constantly negotiating between the two. The project not only speaks to the role language has played in historical misunderstanding but also to the difference in languages of knowledge production. It positions itself as a curatorial research project that does not culminate in a singular conclusive moment in the form of a singular exhibition, where questions posed

are answered definitively through the works. Instead, it functions as a series of moments, offering a space for knowledge production that later disperse into the collaborative's work beyond the project itself – never alluding to a finality of the questions it initially posed around the role language has played in grave historical (mis)understandings. The questions initially posed at the start of the project and throughout its duration then go on to resurface through *Na Ku Randza*, *Rechewed* and *Fra(gile)*.

The Center for Historical Reenactments has provided an extensive repository of research from which to engage the modalities and concepts that foreground Gabi Ngcobo's curatorial practice. The work of the collective has been presented at various forums and conferences globally and has worked through institutions like The Wits School of Arts, Johannesburg and the New Museum in New York. Ngcobo has built on a practice that inhabits the conditions to question new possibilities of existence. In a text, *Endnotes – Was it a Question of Power*, that was published by both the Museum as Hub project at the New Museum in New York and Condition Report in Dakar, Senegal, Ngcobo expresses the moments that have necessitated re-evaluations in CHR's practice in terms of not getting caught adapting to the institutional frameworks while inhabiting them:

But even with this in mind, we have caught ourselves snoozing only to awake with the realization that we are on the verge of becoming just a venue. This is a problem. In a text titled "Does this Window Have a Memory?" (a contribution in the book accompanying the "Other Possible Worlds" project), rather than foregrounding the physical space, I zoom in to the large window located on the west side of the space we have been using for the past two years. To do so is to draw attention away from the promises and confines of the walls, the floor, the roof as an attempt at contemplating that which faces us on a day-to-day basis. Through the window, CHR has allowed itself to be a coming-out rather than a staying-in space (Ngcobo, 2013: para 8).

The quote above necessitates a looking out and engaging these explorations in other spaces. Members of CHR enter other spaces and engage with these notions' alternative modes of working, while organising and questioning structures in the work they carry out in their individual capacities. Both Ngcobo and Kukama teach collaboratively at the Wits School of Arts and Wa Lehulere organizes and interacts with international partners while his artistic career advances (Ngcobo, 2013).

2.6 Conclusion

I have introduced the trajectory of Ngcobo's curatorial career in the first chapter of this research: starting at her appointment as the Iziko South African National Gallery's first trainee curator, her position as co-curator of Trans Cape and the transition to curator of *CAPE '07*, as well as her participations in platforms such as the 2006 VANSAs conference at the University of Cape Town and the Robben Island curators' workshop. Looking at the practices of CHR, I would argue that through *CAPE '07* we are already introduced to a curatorial aesthetic that Ngcobo develops during her practice. Her departure to The Center for Curatorial Studies (CCS) at Bard College, as well as opportunities for further advancement and curatorial training in South Africa at the time, is arguably influential in deepening her understanding of the practice of curating from a broader world view. The graduate school's mission states that:

The curriculum is specifically designed to deepen students' understanding of the intellectual and practical tasks of curating exhibitions of contemporary art, particularly in the complex social and cultural situations of present-day arts institutions (CCS Bard, n.d.)

The statement above further contextualises Ngcobo's curatorial approach by pointing to ways the course may have contributed to her sensibility towards expanded notions of curating, both intellectually and in the practicality of responding to social and cultural conditions. Her return is marked by the founding of CHR, which is an experimental, collaborative space through which she and members of the collective experiment with ideas that make reference to international conversations around curatorial practice. Ngcobo's curatorial training at Bard could also point to her practice as one that explores a localised approach to a curatorial practice and inserts itself into an international discourse of curating.

It is interesting that, upon Ngcobo's return, she chooses to engage in methods of working collectively. Arriola notes that we ought to distinguish between collective curating as either a "shared responsibility of selecting, confronting and putting into dialogue a series of artworks and cultural visions" or collective curating as "setting up a collaborative endeavour of shared authorship uttered as a single voice" (Arriola, 2010, p.4). I would argue that CHR's practice oscillates between these two distinctions, considering that

certain projects are reflective of a shared authorship in how they are carried out and explored. However, in several instances when the collective is invited to present at international platforms, Ngcobo is often seen presenting broader concepts on the projects of the collective, which could almost suggest a greater sense of conceptual authorship over aspects of the collective project of arguably its core founding member. The work carried out by the collective has drawn a significant amount of attention to Ngcobo's individual curatorial practice as well; her involvement in large-scale curatorial projects at the São Paulo Biennale in 2016 and the upcoming Berlin Biennale is perhaps indicative of this. While one might be inclined to understand this as the insistence of the art world on one single curator or authorial voice, or a refusal to understand more deeply Ngcobo's methodologies of collaboration as a strategy of diffusing curatorial power. My sense is that while this may signal more of an acknowledgement of Ngcobo's individual intellectual contribution to the discourse of curating in South Africa, it may also point to a current inability to engage with deeper understandings of what collaborative curatorial practices are and look like.



Figure 10



Figure 11

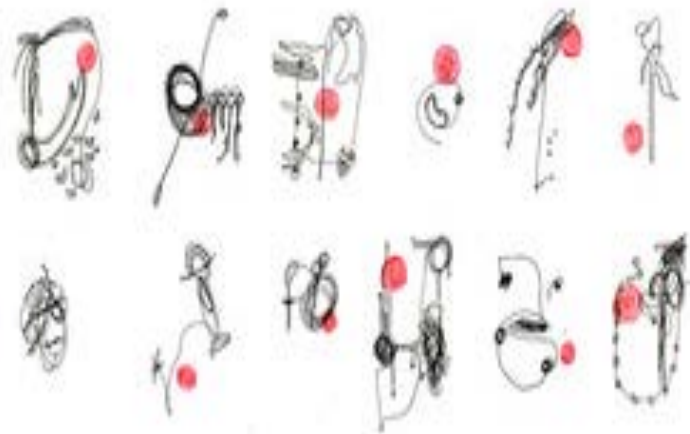


Figure 12



Figure 13



Figure 14

Chapter Three

Featuring Simplicity as An Irrational Fear

3.1 Lerato Bereng

The following chapter explores the notion of *the curatorial* through an analysis of *Featuring Simplicity as an Irrational fear*, an exhibition at the Stevenson Gallery, curated by Lerato Bereng⁴⁶ in 2010. As with Ngcobo, Bereng's curatorial career situates itself within the brief timeline discussed in Chapter 1 of this research. She was one of the five participants chosen for the CAPE '09 Young Curators' Development Program⁴⁷. This case study

⁴⁶ Born in Maseru, Lesotho, Bereng completed both her BA in Fine Arts (2007) and MFA in Curatorial Practice (2013) at Rhodes University. She has completed several curatorial training and mentorship programs including one at the Goodman Gallery in Cape town on behalf of CAPE and The Young Curators Training program of CAPE '09, and she was also selected as one of 13 young international curators to the 6th Berlin Biennale Curators Workshop. My sense is that training and mentorship programs have played a significant role in the advancement of Bereng's career, as well as her exposure as a curator. Currently the associate director and curator at the Stevenson Gallery, Johannesburg, she has curated a number of exhibitions both in and outside the gallery, namely: *Out of Thin Air* (2012) and *SEX* (2016), and was assistant curator for *Scratching the Surface Vol. 1* (2008) (curated by Gabi Ngcobo and Mwenya Kabwe), and *Dada South*, curated by Roger van Wyk and Kathryn Smith (2009/2010). Bereng is a member of the curatorial board for Focus 10, a biennale held in Basel, Switzerland.

⁴⁷ Funded by Economic Development and Tourism Western Cape, the program provided an 18-month focussed training program for young curators with planned internship opportunities locally and abroad. The idea was that the young curators will be given an opportunity to develop new projects for the CAPE 09 exhibition upon completion of the project (Macintosh, n.d.). Bereng went on to co-produce CAPE's session in Maputo Mozambique.

See: <https://www.facebook.com/events/435876363142809>.

focuses on an analysis of the exhibition, which was an introductory component to Bereng's Master's in Fine Arts, with a focus on curating, at Rhodes University. This analysis looks specifically at the conceptual methodologies employed by the curator as opposed to the strategies of display. Both the practical and written components of her research were hinged on the concept of *simplicity*. Lerato Bereng argues that contemporary art making, curating and theory making suffers from a sense of superfluity by disregarding simplicity as a valid and potentially ground breaking tool for communication and engagement. She argues that within visual arts, abstraction of thought and theory are at times instrumental to the artwork, and the transparency of this conceptualisation is assumed to weaken its purpose. There is an element of mystery that seems to be necessary to present a certain position of the masses (Bereng, 2013). The research aimed to engage with the notion of simplicity in relation to accessibility and language in the discourse of visual arts. Loosely defined, accessibility refers to the quality of being able to be reached, or entered, or that of being easy to obtain or use.

Featuring Simplicity is a process-based theoretical and curatorial exploration of simplicity and its potential impact on contemporary South African Art discourse (Bereng, 2013).

The exhibition, which was curated by Bereng as an independent curator (prior to her joining the gallery), comprised three interactive performance pieces by artists Donna Kukama, Nathalie Bikoro⁴⁸ and Nástio Mosquito⁴⁹. The three artists were physically absent from the exhibition site and instead enacted their performances over Skype, appearing on three laptops set up in the exhibition space on the evening of the exhibition. Over the three months leading up to the moment of the exhibition, Kukama, Bikoro and Mosquito, who were in Johannesburg, London and Angola respectively, engaged in conversations with

⁴⁸ Natalie Bikoro is a French-Gabonese artist living in London inhabiting several modes of working including performance, video, sound, installation, text, sculpture, photography, painting and opera-scripting (Bereng, 2010).

⁴⁹ Nástio Mosquito is an Angolan performance artist working between Lisbon and Luanda. He incorporates music, slam poetry, performance, painting, photography and video. Mosquito has taken part in several exhibitions, including *CAPE '09* (2009) and African Pavillion at the 52nd Venice Biennale (2007) (Bereng, 2010).

Bereng (who was based in Cape Town at the time) about the idea of simplicity. The conversations are documented in an online blog, and include transcriptions of Skype conversations between Bereng and the artists. Upon the opening of the exhibition, audience members encountered performative responses to the concept of simplicity that were premised on the three-month long, 'four-way' conversations between the artists and the curator. Bereng's inquiry is foregrounded by a desire for accessibility of artistic interventions to audiences.

According to Bereng, her interest in public engagement and simplicity is informed by the reality that many people do not have access to the arts, and the danger of art becoming (more than it is) a disengaged, separate realm of practice. These are interests that she previously explored in earlier projects. *A re Fanon* (2010), which means "He/She said Fanon" in Sesotho or Setswana, was a performative intervention in collaboration with artist Mohau Modisakeng held at Blank Projects in Cape Town, featuring a blackboard, chalk, duster and a quote by Franz Fanon⁵⁰. The project invited audiences who were members of the 'art world' to engage with the quote by means of notes, play, sketches and discussions, and set out to question the self-marginalisation of art discourse from the boarder spectrum of social language through content blurring mechanisms.

Bereng's maintenance of this curatorial approach was evident in another significant project, *Thank You Driver* (2009), which Bereng curated for the *CAPE '09* biennale as a component of the Young Curators' program. Bereng invited a selection of artists to create interventions, artworks, performances or installations in mini bus taxis that would operate on their regular routes throughout the duration of the biennale. As this was not staged, the works encountered a different audience – general commuters, some of whom might not have been aware of some of the interventions. The intervention required the biennale

⁵⁰ The quote which reads: "I ascribe a basic importance to the phenomenon of language. To speak means to be in a position to use a certain syntax, to grasp the morphology of this or that language, but it means above all to assume a culture, to support the weight of a civilization." Taken from Martiniquian psychiatrist, philosopher and political activist, Frantz Fanon's *The Negro and Language*, in *Black Skins, White Masks* (1952, trans. 1967). The project explored the role of language in common social practice (Blank Projects, n.d.a).

audience to encounter these works by entering a context they may not have been familiar with. These earlier projects contextualise the questions of access, language, audience and performance that emerge in *Featuring Simplicity as an Irrational Fear*. In her presentation at the 2013 Curatorial Talks that took place at the Wits School of Arts, Bereng said:

I would conclude with a set of questions, if the terminology with which we define the curatorial practice in South Africa is in inverted commas and stems from Western ideas and methodologies, can notions such as curating truly be contextualised and owned? Are we to assume that there is some South African curatorial and artistic realm that can exist despite its socio-political landscape? Can we look at how curatorial practice can aid understanding? (Bereng, 2013).

These questions posed by Bereng are greatly significant to the broader questions of her research. That given the conditions, those of language, of access to spaces of display and experimentation or the lack thereof, how do the expanding curatorial practices situate themselves in these contexts? Having spent the early years of her life in Lesotho where there is very little to no infrastructure for creative production, her exposure to the visual arts was facilitated by her secondary and tertiary education in South Africa (Rosengarten, 2016). Starting in 2013, Bereng has been organising a series of dialogues at the Morija Museum and Archives, in Morija⁵¹ titled *Conversations at Morija* (2013). The dialogues had three iterations, the first of which formed the second part of Bereng's Master's project. Bereng invited members of Lesotho's diaspora to engage in a set of conversations with members of the local community around their creative practices, working outside their home countries and potential opportunities for cultivating creative infrastructures in Lesotho⁵². This project is particularly interesting in terms of contextualising Bereng's

⁵¹ Morija is a town in Lesotho, south of its capital, Maseru, and was the site of the first French protestant mission.

⁵² Those invited to partake in the first event included the likes of James Motlatsi (Chairman of Platfields Limited, Executive Chairman of TEBA Limited), Kojo Baffoe (editor *Destiny Man*), Desmond Dube (actor and activist), Bane Maleke (Development Bank Southern Africa international division's divisional executive), Mphethi Morojele (Founder of MMA architects), Pepsi Pokane (tv presenter), Njabulo Ndebele (poet, writer, academic, former Vice Chancellor National University of Lesotho and University of Cape Town), Zakes Mda (novelist, poet and playwright), Hugh Masekela (musician), Pokie Monaheng (founding member and Executive Director of Waymark Infotech), Max Thabiso

position as part of Lesotho's creative diaspora and how her curatorial practice is firmly rooted in South Africa, primarily due to the absence of a cultivated visual arts discourse in Lesotho.

This chapter aims to discuss Bereng's curatorial practice with regards to conversations she conducted in two different contexts and her engagement with questions of accessibility in environments like South Africa (with an active and developing visual arts discourse and industry), and Lesotho, who lacks many of those structures and governmental support. I've discussed these issues with the intention of understanding how her practice situates itself within the broader curatorial discourse in South Africa, but also to discover how it began to propose new curatorial methodologies. Bereng's use of modes like performance and site to explore ideas around access, audiences and dominant cultural centres will be looked at.

3.2 Featuring Simplicity as an Irrational Fear

On the evening of the exhibition, audiences could experience and engage with the three performances. Nathalie Bikoro's work titled *Autopsy* focused on the ideas of simplicity as a theory attempting to explain the magnet of events to human minds in relation to truth. The work incorporated a game of Chinese Whispers⁵³ in which a message is transmitted and changed from one recipient to another, morphing its original meaning.

Autopsy returns to simplicity theory to make several predictions concerning the way distance, recency, prominence (places, individuals), or atypicality influence stimulus and engagement (Bikoro, 2010).

Text in the exhibition space, accompanying the station from which Bikoro was skyped in, articulated a set of instructions that prompted the viewer to engage in two games, one between 6pm and 7pm and the second between 7pm and 8pm. The ideas imbedded in

Edkins (climate change consultant at The World Bank), Associates of CHIMURENGA (pan-African publication/organisation, former employee and creative partner of the late Liepollo Rantekoa), Maria McCloy (founder of Rage media), Puleng Ssali (pilot and first officer at South African Airways) (Anon., 2013).

⁵³ Often referred to as *Broken Telephone* or *Telephone*. See: <http://www.chinese-whispers.com/>

the performance around simplicity theory, enacted in the performance, emanate from the virtual conversation archived on the digital blog. In addition to this, Bikoro made drawings of members of the audience who she engaged with and she sent them to the various audience members after the exhibition.

Excerpt from virtual conversation - Nathalie Bikoro on conceptual simplicity:

If simplicity conceptually could be elegantly understood as a way of shortening time, space and relativity, then could simplicity be an exposé for a moment of inner intensity and intimacy between people and spaces? What is the hidden element of the process of simplicity? It is non-instantial, a space that doesn't belong to a structure and behaves differently, I would like to understand how this affects the link between the audience and the performer and how this 'blur' succumbs to energy and motion to procure the surprise. Autopsy.... (Bikoro, 2010)⁵⁴.

Bikoro engaged notions of play and (mis)understandings to engage with these ideas around simplicity. Donna Kukama's performance titled *1000 Ways of being (Opening Speech)* recited an opening speech to individual members of the audience for the duration of the opening⁵⁵. *Untitled (The Fisherman and The Soldier)* was a piece by Nástio Mosquito. In an excerpt from the artist's contributions to the online conversation on simplicity, he writes:

The idea is to deconstruct any possible attempt of exploring the INTERESTING and making sure to express that regardless of its legitimacy, human COMPLEXITY comes from its "excessive" validation of human existence within its moral conduct, in whatever time and space.

⁵⁴ See: <http://fearofsimplicity.blogspot.co.za/2010/09/conceptual-simplicity.html>

⁵⁵ Statement accompanying the performance: "A speech was delivered (to individuals, one at a time) on opening night. This took place via Skype, from a laptop on a table with a chair in front it, a setting familiar to home offices. Visitors were invited to sit on the chair and listen to various renditions/simplifications of the speech as delivered by Kukama. In a manner of the bricoleur, Kukama composed the speech from fragments of previous private conversations, current TV shows, literature, magazines, philosophy and fashion".

(INTERESTING+COMPLEX)CREATIVITY= POWER

Want to hear the stories? Sit on my lap now... surprise... surprise... The character on this side of the skype loves meat... (Mosquito, 2010).

The performance by Mosquito, for instance, was one where he told a series of stories that were based on or rather responded to the audience members standing 'in front' of him throughout the duration of the exhibition. Martinez discusses how the notion of artistic research entertains a paradox, one of a non-deliberate system or discipline at the core of a deliberate one. My sense is that a similar kind of paradox exists in the possible absurdity these performances yield. That in an attempt to attain simplicity, Bereng, in collaboration with Bikoro, Kukama and Mosquito, orchestrated a performance about the complexity of ideas. There is something to be noted about a sense of collaboration or working collaboratively in Bereng's project, as it unfolds quite differently from the dynamics discussed earlier with regard to the Center for Historical Reenactments. The ongoing conversation that occurs on the blog platform creates a sense of collaboration between the three artists and Bereng, however the sense of authorship of the exhibition remains with the Bereng. It is still reflective however of the collaborative nature of the relationship between curators and artists.

3.3 Performance and staging possibilities of participation through *the curatorial*

An aspect I would like to consider is Bereng's employment of the role of performance as a curatorial methodology to explore questions of access and simplicity. Articulating the distinctions between contemporary performance art and stage theatre and dance, Nomusa Makhubu argues that, unlike stage theatre in the traditional sense, "performance art intervenes in time and space, giving way to site-specificity, active spectator engagement, and a high probability of the unforeseeable (in that it can be defined as a set of actions that are not strictly directed or choreographed and in which the active participation of the audience or any passer-by forms a key part of the work)" (Makhubu, 2012, p. 73). Speaking to notions of participation, Rogoff questions whether our belief in the principle of participation ever concerns itself with what might serve to expand notions of what constitutes modes of speaking in public and of being heard by a public. How then do exhibition spaces provide a space for performative acts in which audiences can shift from being viewers to being participants (Rogoff, 2006a, p. 3). Rogoff identifies three

modes of participation, the first being the attempt to construct a historical lineage of participation; the second is one of identification with transgression, the critical engagement with either behavioural or artistic codes of the normative; and third is the production of forms of self-staging within the space of the exhibition (Rogoff, 2006a, p. 3).

Featuring Simplicity as an Irrational Fear, while seemingly questioning visual art discourse's 'fear of simplification', I would argue that the performances and ongoing conversations, question the audience's conceptions and expectations of what simplicity in the sphere of the visual could be or ought to look like or whether it is even possible. Is it possible that in constructing a space in which the audience views the performances through the mediation of the screen and the creation of distance through something as 'familiar' as a call, Bereng disrupts the dynamics of spectatorship that exhibition spaces may often create between the performance and audiences, in a way that invites the audience to participate? It points to the second mode of participation suggested by Rogoff, by disrupting dynamics of performance and spectatorship. Questions about audiences and how they become a part of not necessarily the work, but the meaning-making process, are important in how we ascribe this idea of criticality to *the curatorial*. It is the distinction between a curatorial approach that provides a space in which the audience can engage in a conscious or unconscious participatory action, in contrast to a curatorial approach, that facilitates a choreographed performance of participation from the audience. I would argue that the Skype performances in *Featuring Simplicity* created this space in setting up this riddle of ambiguity, proposing simplicity while seemingly opposing it at the same time. Is the question of simplicity articulated in the concept or in the modes of engagement (Skype and virtual communications) through the blog? The framing of the performative engagements as conversations created a two-way collaborative process between audiences on the one hand, and artists and the curator on the other. It momentarily disrupts the expectations of spectacle with the banality of conversation. I'd like to consider how this links to Martinez's pronouncement that like notes, art is 'prolegomena', suggestive of a state that is always preliminary, and of language that remains partially unknown, leaving itself outside the realm of mediation (Martinez, 2012, p. 48). Bereng's proposition of simplicity does not rush to concretise itself as a definitive statement or solution to her questions of accessibility. Instead, it continuously returns to the preliminary notion of the simple through several projects and iterations. Bereng's selection of performance, in this instance to engage with the questions of how curatorial practice situates itself in the South African context, resonates with the connections Nontobeko

Ntombela makes between the experimental works of new media, installation and performance and the radical change South African art underwent as a direct result of the country's political dispensation at the end of apartheid. Quoting Kathryn Smith, she states that "work in installation, video and new media [...] demonstrates a real engagement with social and theoretical issues pertinent to contemporary South Africa and Africa at large"⁵⁶ (Smith, in Ntombela, 2012: p. 78-79).

While the curatorial methods Bereng uses, facilitate moments of interaction within the space of the exhibition, my sense is that this participation should be contextualised against the questions of access Bereng attempts to engage. The site of the exhibition seemingly contradicts the very access the other curatorial decisions attempt to create. The issue of place is particularly important, especially if we consider that the exhibition was an introduction to the project *Conversations at Morija* (2013), which took place in a completely different environment and context.

3.4 Accessibility and sites of knowledge production

Bereng's questions of accessibility and simplicity are informed by an experience of spaces and communities that lack opportunities to engage in the creative practices of production and experience due to an absence of cultivated and supported infrastructures. It therefore is interesting that the first iteration, *Featuring Simplicity as an Irrational Fear*, discussed in this chapter, takes place within a commercial gallery space. The objectives of such a space are primarily driven by movements in the art market, and the model is hinged upon the display and selling of artists' works. These spaces are arguably only fully accessible to a niche group of individuals who have the cultural and financial capital to buy and collect works of art. By questioning and aiming to subvert the very knowledge economy and exclusivity in which the commercial art market thrives, it is unclear how a project like Bereng's can be of interest to the Stevenson Gallery. Similar questions could be asked in relation to the 2012 exhibition in the gallery in Johannesburg, titled *Trade Routes Over Time*, which set out to revisit conversations around the Second Johannesburg Biennale. The exhibition was hardly reflective of the issues raised by the biennale. I would argue that this is due to the reality that many of the criticisms of the biennale, such as those

⁵⁶ Kathryn Smith, *Art Ain't What It Used to Be*, in Nessa Leibhammer, ed., MTN New Contemporaries Award 2003, 3.

expressed through Araeen's writing earlier in this research, were not that it was a badly organised international art event, but that in the curators' attempt to bring South Africa to the global arts discourse, they failed to recognise and engage with the complexity of local dynamics. They also failed to consider what the South African visual arts discourse, which had been operating from a politically isolated position, had to offer an international audience on its own terms. This invoking of the biennale's history is very different to CHR's engagement with this same history, which is engaged with an immense deliberateness. I would argue though, that it would not serve this research to expect the Stevenson Gallery as a commercial entity to concern itself with these complexities. *Featuring Simplicity as an Irrational Fear* opened and lasted for only the duration of the opening night, returning thereafter to online engagement. This very short intervention in the space perhaps missed an opportunity to interrogate the politics of engaging in questions of accessibility in a space inherently inaccessible to most general audiences, especially when contrasted with *Conversations at Morija* (2013).

Such practices explore how the curatorial project is undertaken when working with works that are ephemeral, time-based and sensorial in quite a specific way. There is also the performative nature of *the curatorial*, through which the curator is arranging sets of gestures with and among the works to pose particular questions. How does performance and site engage with the questions of access Bereng set out to question? In an interview conducted for this research, Bereng emphasises that the exhibition at the Stevenson Gallery was an introduction to the larger Master's practical project, which was the first *Conversations at Morija*, and coincided with the Morija Arts and Culture Festival. If we are to look at three projects curated by Bereng, namely *Thank You Driver* (2009), *A re Fanon!* and *Conversations at Morija* (2013) (2015) (2017), it is clear that they respond to new possibilities of audience or a contemplation of the kinds of critical conversations people in the 'art world' could have about audiences and language in ways that are more critical than *Featuring Simplicity as an Irrational Fear*.

The fleeting, time-based nature of both curatorial engagements and performance instigate questions around documentation and the archive to determine how these moments exist beyond the moment of the performance or exhibition. The documentation and residue of performative works, in the way they exist and are translated and archived, are a transformative process. My sense is that notions of accessibility do not only speak to the

nature of works and the structures that display or house them, but also to the way information is shared beyond spaces like museums, galleries and project spaces.

3.5 Conclusion

Accessibility in *Featuring Simplicity* is not only addressed through consideration of audience engagement in the space of the exhibition (using Skype and the Internet). The excerpt below shows a text posted by Bereng on the blog prior to the opening of the exhibition:

Excerpt from online conversation between the three artists and Bereng:

So in response to what Donna said regarding the banalities of simplicity and complexity, I say: The whole reason for my interest in simplicity was in fact derived from my frustration with complexity. My understanding being that there is almost always a simpler way to discuss and engage with art that is often shied away from as a result of a fear of transparency (for lack of a better word). One often attempts to fog and mystify in order to create the illusion that their concept or creation transcends the simple or arguably the normal. This is not necessarily untrue, but at times it seems as though conceptualization gets tangled in its own web of complexity. So, in a way, you could say that simplicity is what is natural/normal/instinctive, and complexity is only derived from repressing instinct.

Simply put, in my opinion, the whole reason concepts and theories exist is to entice people to engage, discuss and experience the world in a new and less bland way. Why then would we use language as a tool to exclude and confuse? I think it is perhaps out of fear of mass consumption. The moment an object, a thought or a concept is made to be easily understood or related to, then it is seen as “watered down” and this very watering down means potential interest from larger, more general audiences, and not exclusively the close-knit network of art practitioners. It runs the risk of popularity, which puts in danger the very mystery that holds firmly the pillars of artistic practice. So, in a sense, simplicity ruptures the exclusionary realm of the art world.

It is true that it is a little challenging to begin a conversation on simplicity, perhaps owing to the fact that simplicity is not actually as simple as the term implies.

Through our understandings of art and discussion, we are somewhat baffled when having to talk about something in an “easy” way. I find myself [looking struggling] to resist the temptation to search for complex theories to better understand simplicity. I’m reading a few things you might find interesting. See:

[Simplicity, a Changing Concept](#)

Author(s): Raymond D. Havens

Source: Journal of the History of Ideas, Vol. 14, No. 1 (Jan., 1953), pp. 3-32

Published by: University of Pennsylvania Press

x

Lerato Bereng

(Bereng, et al., 2010)

The excerpt also illustrates Bereng’s interrogation of notions of access, as not only relating to access to creative spaces, but more importantly inaccessibility of curatorial language in the space of exhibition, and the conceptual language of theorising artwork. In addition to the exchanges and conversation before the exhibition, the blog also includes photographic documentation of the exhibition at the Stevenson Gallery⁵⁷. It furthermore includes an engagement by Bikoro, with a photograph of an envelope addressed to the gallery, images and the following note: "Thank you all participants, all your DNA portraits are in your mail boxes x x".⁵⁸ While an earlier text by Bereng notes that transcriptions of the performances would be added to the blog, these are not available. Rogoff foregrounds working from conditions and experiential knowledge as a critical aspect of working through *the curatorial*. In the context of South Africa, where infrastructures for travel and funding within the visual arts are highly limited, *the curatorial* can be a tool that conceptually grounds the exhibition but also navigates the limitations and conditions from which one is operating.

Cape Africa Platform’s Cape ’07 and ’09 provide examples of these limitations, given that both iterations experienced challenges with funding, the reality of the financial and logistical demands of exhibition projects. While the curation of an exhibition is centred around a set of curatorial methodologies, the organisational aspect of the practice plays

⁵⁷ See: <http://fearofsimplicity.blogspot.co.za/>.

⁵⁸ See: <http://fearofsimplicity.blogspot.co.za/2010/09/autopsy.html>.

a great role in influencing these methodologies. The use of Skype in Bereng's project needs to be considered as a methodology that may seek to address the financial and logistical limitations of transporting artists, co-ordinating schedules, etc. Simultaneously, the conceptualisation of an exhibition that takes place with three performance artists without their physical presence probes questions of collapsing geographical distance, the role of the virtual in the space of the exhibition and alternative methods of engagement and conversation between the local and the global. These practical considerations are conceptually considered characterises, described by O'Neill as the *para-curatorial*,⁵⁹ which need to converge. These curatorial methodologies site sensibilities that question particular institutional methods and frameworks, not positioning themselves in confrontation with these frameworks but contemplating alternatives that expose the limitations of the institutional frameworks. O'Neill questions how the *paracuratorial* could begin to disrupt normative notions of curatorial practice (O'Neill, 2012, p. 56). The creative strategies employed to 'transport' the performances into the physical space from different geographical locations not only raised questions around time and place in relation to performance art, but also addressed the logistical challenges faced by curators. This is especially an issue for an independent curator who often requires grants and funding to realise these projects. Bereng's Master's project was conceptualised as an attempt to consider curatorial methodologies that make a space more accessible to varying, more diverse audiences. In the presentation by Bereng at the 2013 Curatorial Talks (2013), discussed earlier in this paper, she expressed how the desire to engage with the notion of simplicity in the project was primarily with regards to access and how she felt that the fine art discourse often presented itself as overly convoluted and complex in ways that made it inaccessible to many people wishing to engage with it.

I would argue that the ephemeral, subjective and context specificity of *the curatorial* can be associated to the temporal and experiential nature of performance. In another vein, in the manner in which the question of simplicity is posed and premised, Bereng almost sets

⁵⁹ O'Neill argues that the *para* concept, which alludes to that which is 'other than' or 'outside' the main curatorial act, assumes a binary between primary and secondary curatorial labour; one which can denote an urge to return to more stable distinctions between the role of artist, curators, educators, etc. O'Neill articulates an interest in the ways in which curatorial practices have instead looked at the margins of practice, refuting categorical resolution and instead operating as a constellation of activities (O'Neill, 2012).

up a proposition which she disproves on several occasions. The exhibition comes together as a collective contemplation, orchestrated by Bereng, Bikoro, Kukama and Mosquito; an accumulation of questions and more questions from each individual point of departure. The conversations feed off each other in the ongoing communicative process facilitated by the blog that begins before the opening of the exhibition, therefore the viewer momentarily joins a conversation that has been happening for some time, but is slightly different in how it presents itself as a performance. The unpredictable nature of performance, and how it plays into notions of chance speaks aptly to Maharaj's discussion of the 'unschoolability' of the English Art School, where unknown possibilities were 'stumbled over', the stumbling over 'no-how' rather than the trained know-how of a practitioner (Maharaj, 2009). Bereng plays between the theoretical technicalities of simplicity and the conventions of conceptualising works and exhibitions in ways she deems inaccessible, to come up with this experimental engagement with notions of simplicity and what they may mean for an engagement with new audiences.

Conclusion

Within the historical and contemporary conditions particular to the South African context, varying modes of curatorial practice have emerged. Rasheed Araeen notes that:

South Africa, with its struggle and achievement against the tyranny of white supremacist ideology, had something historically very special to offer to the world (Araeen, 2000).

With the understanding that the territory around curating is a contested one – with a number of theorists and practitioners (Rogoff, 2006a, 2006b) (O'Neill, 2013) (Lind, 2013) (von Bismark, 2010) defining curating and notions of *the curatorial* from different perspectives – the varying definitions, however, should not be interpreted as acting in opposition to exhibition making. O'Neil articulates that, instead, they support forms of research-based, dialogical practice in which process-oriented forms overlap with speculative actions and open-ended forms of production (O'Neill, 2012, p. 56). I argue that O'Neill's resistance to the notion of the *paracuratorial* in its attempt to separate that which occurs at the margins of practice to retain stable distinctions between the role of the artist, the curator, the educator, the public, etc. Ngcobo's practice, for example through the work of CHR and her individual curatorial endeavours, facilitates a temporary space of cooperation and coproduction that engages with discursivity through processes of doing and speaking together (O'Neill, 2012, p. 57).

The curatorial, conceived of as a constellation, resists the stasis of the curator-artist-spectator triumvirate and supports more semi-autonomous and self-determined aesthetic and discursive forms of practice that may overlap and intersect, rather than seeking a dialectic (image) or oppositional presentation (form) (O'Neill, 2012, p. 57).

My sense is that this new, unbounded curatorial form seeks a kind of relative autonomy within the field of curating. While questioning institutional structures of operation, notions of audience, access and relationships to site and the particularities of place, it seeks to exist as a practice that can remain momentarily autonomous from the arguably traditional modes of curating. Speaking to questions of mediation, Maria Lind discusses how more discursive, experimental practices continue to move further and further away from

mainstream institutional structures, which are beginning to suffer from a kind of over-mediation, with divisions such as education, marketing, PR and curating.

But importantly, it is time to consider and take seriously the fact that the art and curated projects at the forefront of experimentation, which formulate new questions and create new stories, are growing increasingly remote from the mainstream. These sidestreams, many of which test various forms of “constructivist spectatorship,” trickle further and further away from the situations where most people encounter art and curated projects (large institutions in big cities), and here mediation, whatever type it may be, is marginal. This kind of strategic separatism is in many ways a survival strategy in order to guarantee other proportions of self-determination; the mainstream is not particularly welcoming to the sidestreams, and the sidestreams prefer to stick to themselves. And yet the inevitable result is self-marginalization, where only the already-converted are reached (Lind, 2013, p. 90).

The above quote is indicative of the separation between the mainstream, institutional framework that often employs the more formalistic, didactic exhibition and curatorial practices, and the practices which take place in the so-called margins and facilitate experimental modes of working. But as a result of trying to maintain a sense of autonomy from the mainstream, it results in a kind of circular pattern of speaking to itself. The practices of Ngcobo and Bereng, which, while operating in very different ways, propose a sophistication to the practice of curating within the South African context. I still question whether these notions will continue to remain somewhat marginal or if they will at times inhabit formalised institutional frameworks even momentarily.

CHR's projects operate from and engage with non-conventional spaces as a means through which to question institutional structures, notions of access and questions of who art is for, but in a sense these spaces are not quite as public as they may suggest – they can often be somewhat inaccessible. The space at August House, where most of the *Xenoglossia* projects occurred, was only accessible to those who knew about the project. The public interventions too, such as Na Ku Randza, are only accessible to an extent, as not many might have understood what was actually taking place. Issues of safety in the Johannesburg CBD also make it challenging for bystanders to take the time to understand and engage with such public interventions.

Featuring Simplicity as an Irrational Fear foregrounds questions of access; however, the exhibition at the Stevenson Gallery engages the exclusionary spaces and audiences it attempts to question, and while this may be reflective of the kind of inward criticality which Rogoff refers to, it perhaps also results in the perpetual issue of *the curatorial* speaking to *the curatorial*, or as Lind (2013, p. 90) would put it “speaking to the already-converted”. I would argue that *the curatorial*, in an attempt to liberate curating from the generalised notions of care, display, representation and the didacticism of so called traditional exhibitions, seeks relative autonomy that allows it to exist on its own terms within the parameters of the field. Despite how CHR’s practice distances itself from mainstream framework, I am reluctant to deduce that the experimental methodologies that operate within these notions of *the curatorial*, solely exist in the margins. Instead my understanding is that the spaces and projects which distance themselves from the institutional frameworks are necessary to establish new ways of working unbounded by the rigidity of institutional know-how, that can then manoeuvre and occupy institutions momentarily.

Moving to ‘the curatorial’ then, is an opportunity to ‘unbound’ the work from all of those categories and practices that limit its ability to explore that which we do not yet know or that which is not yet a subject in the world. (Rogoff, 2006b, p. 3)

The quote from Rogoff above, captures the possibilities within the curatorial to broaden methodologies of knowledge production within the field of visual arts. This research proposes further questions on how this sophistication of curating, proposed and engaged in different ways by Ngcobo and Bereng, could potentially engage broader frameworks, particularly institutional ones. My sense is that the propositions these practices put forward present avenues of critical thought and knowledge production, with the potential to address the problematic legacies which continue to advance colonial ideologies of segregation, othering and canonising in institutions and, more broadly, the art world, conditions to which South Africa is no exception.

This research explores how *the curatorial* as a methodology can produce and propose new possibilities of practice in research under certain conditions. Both these case studies signal moments of this criticality in different ways that intersect through the history of curatorial practice in the South African context, and the conditions they navigate at different moments. These projects signal forms of knowledge production through curatorial methodologies that, to an extent, inhabit institutional frameworks as a form of

criticality. The curatorial is a theory of knowledge production through which we can begin to interrogate modes of working that are imbedded within the conditions and concerns of the local, while engaging in broader global conversations around the ever expanding nature of curating.

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