

UNIVERSITY OF CAPE TOWN

Terms of Engaging and Project-ing Africa(ns)

An ethnographic encounter with African Studies through *Curate Africa*

KATLEHO KANO SHORO
(SHRKAT003)

Minor Dissertation in partial fulfillment of a Master's of Social Sciences degree
in Social Anthropology, University of Cape Town

February 2014

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It is my own work.

Each significant contribution to, and quotation in, this dissertation from the work, or works, of other people has been attributed, and has been cited and referenced.

Signature: KATLEHO SHORO

Date: 17 February 2013

Table of Contents

Acknowledgements.....	5
Abstract.....	6
List of Abbreviations	7
CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION	8
1.1 Introducing Curate Africa.....	8
1.2 Research Focus.....	11
1.3 Research Methods	14
1.4 Ethics	17
1.5 Outline of Argument	18
Chapter 2: LITERARY AND ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK.....	21
2.1 The University	21
2.2 “Citizen Anthropology”	23
2.3 Curation.....	26
CHAPTER 3: BACKGROUND: ENGAGING AFRICA FROM WITHIN UCT	30
3.1 A Brief History of the Establishment of African Studies at UCT.....	30
3.2 UCT’s Afropolitanism	34
3.4 The School of African and Gender Studies, Anthropology and Linguistics.....	42
3.5 Summary	44
CHAPTER 4: POSITIONALITIES AND POWER RELATIONS IN THE UNIVERSITY “HOME” -“FIELD”	46
4.1 Introduction	46
4.2 Overlaps	50
4.3 Power Relations: Seniority of the Project Leaders	56
4.4 Complex Citizenship.....	58
4.5 Summary	59
CHAPTER 5: THE TERMS OF ENGAGING...ME.....	60
5.1 Introduction	60
5.2 Negotiation of Terms of Engagement before the meeting of the 13th June	60
5.3 Terms of Engagement Meeting.....	64
5.4 Engaging with the Terms.....	67
5.5 Engaging the Terms of Engagement: Distance and Intimacy.....	70
5.6 Conclusion.....	72
CHAPTER 6: PROBLEMATISING THE REPRESENTATION OF AFRICA THROUGH A PROJECTION OF AFRICA.....	74
6.1 Introduction	74
6.2 Projecting, Mapping and Engaging Africa on the Baxter Floor	75
6.3 Logo and Colours.....	78
6.4 Video: Problematizing through stating what Africa is Not	82

6.5 Photographs.....	84
6.6 Re-imaging Africa as a Collective Process	87
6.7 Conclusions	89
CHAPTER 7: CONCLUSION.....	93
7.1 Projects as Projections	93
<i>Projection in theory</i>	93
7.2 Projections of Africa and Negotiations of an African Identity from within the University of Cape Town	95
POSTSCRIPT	100
BIBLIOGRAPHY	102

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank my supervisor, Professor Carolyn Hamilton, for the practical, dedicated and critical way in which you supervised me. Thank you for reining me in, for being excited over my ideas, encouraging me to present my work whenever the opportunities arose and for exposing me to the Archive and Public Culture Research Initiative where I received incredible comments. Thank you to the many members and associates of the APC who offered comments and engaged with me and my work on different levels that all contributed to and shaped my thinking.

Thank you to the Curate Africa project leaders, Dr. Siona O'Connell and Professor Nick Shepherd, for allowing me to do research on your project. Thank you for your time and your critiques which have helped me create a dissertation and also re-evaluate anthropology, the university space and scholarship around Africa (as well as my place within all of them). I am further grateful for the contributions from people like the CityVarsity Team, Professor Bogues, Norma Derby and the individuals in the 2012 Anthropology Southern Africa (ASnA) Annual Conference panel in which I presented a paper. All of these individuals gave of their time and comments so willingly.

To friends, family and scholarly associates who kept me sane and gave feedback and encouragement where possible, thank you so much.

Finally, I am grateful to the National Research Foundation for funding my Master's Degree.

ABSTRACT

In May 2012 Curate Africa – an ongoing project centered on photography and curation in Africa - was pre-launched at the University of Cape Town (UCT) within the University's Africa Month Celebrations. The project aimed- conceptually and visually - to re-imagine, re-image and re-envision Africa from within Africa and through the lenses of Africans. While this research began as an examination of Curate Africa, the project became a heuristic device through which I began exploring how UCT, on a day-to-day basis, negotiated and continues to negotiate its African identity. In this respect, this dissertation illustrates how Curate Africa and its project leaders - who are also academics within the University - problematised the study and representation of Africa through the intentions of their project, through their individual scholarly pursuits - where they attempt to re-imagine the study of Africa(ns) and through the tight scholarly networks that they formed through their scholarly inclinations. Furthermore, this dissertation offers an historical account of the African Studies at UCT as well as an ethnographic account of how the developments and debates around the formation of the "New School" (2012) and around UCT's Afropolitan ambition unfolded within the University and affected those operating in the departments concerned.

The principle argument within this dissertation is that projects, however flexible and decolonial in intention, cannot escape being projections of the project leaders' imaginings. Furthermore, projections and ideas of Africa (Mudimbe, 1994) are shaped by perceiving Africa from particular vantage points and within particular contexts laden with histories and complex presents. Perceptions of what "Africa" means and in the case of this research what postcolonial African Studies means continue to be debated from different vantage points within UCT. By and large, this ethnography therefore articulates the scale and challenges of knowledge production centred on the continent in general but, more specifically, the complexities embedded in knowledge production that seeks to be decolonial in its very nature.

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ACC – African Centre for Cities

APC – Archive and Public Culture Research Initiative

ASNA – Anthropology Southern Africa Professional Association

CAS – Centre for African Studies

CCA – Centre for Curating the Archive

NRF – National Research Foundation

UCT – University of Cape Town

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introducing Curate Africa

In 2012, a project called Curate Africa was set up at the University of Cape Town (UCT). The pamphlets produced for the project offered the following description of the project:

Curate Africa is an online photographic exhibition curated across several themes that re-image Africa today. It takes place in the virtual space of the worldwide web, seeks to solicit images and participation from photographers using cameras and other virtual recording devices, such as mobile phones, across the continent. Curate Africa is a major project of photography and curation, encompassing the whole of Africa. It makes use of new technology to allow for new approaches as to how we think about Africa. It sets out to mark a departure from histories of representation concerned with African people, places and realities.

The rationale of the project, as offered by Curate Africa, was:

Historically, African people, places and realities were frequently constructed through an external, objectifying gaze. Visual tropes and regimes – particular ways of looking – became a way through which the West constructed and mediated an image of Africa. We stand at a point where technological advances offer the possibility of radically new kinds of practices. The spread of cell phone cameras has allowed photography to be incorporated into the practice of everyday life. Social media allows for unprecedented levels of connectivity. Curate Africa is about locating and celebrating these new visualities, not connected to the fetishization of the camera and an objectifying gaze. It is about celebrating everyday life: finding the creative force in the ordinary. It is about using the resources of the imagination to re-frame the present and re-envision the future. It is about crossing boundaries and creating new possible grounds for new forms of community. Most of all, it is a celebration about being African today. Curate Africa celebrates the local, in a context in which points of reference have so often been derived from elsewhere. We encourage photographers and

curators to reach beyond colonial and postcolonial dichotomies and narratives of development, and all of the other frames that constrain imagination.

The arguments and points raised about the historical representation of Africa within Curate Africa's rationale have been widely acknowledged and debated by numerous scholars. The fact that visual representations of Africa and Africans, especially by non-Africans, have tended to nativise, caricature, objectify, "other", exoticise and homogenise Africa has been underscored particularly in postcolonial scholarship on Africa (Downey, 2005; Mudimbe, 1994; Nuttall, 2006 *et al*). Furthermore, these representations have tended to characterise Africa as the proverbial *Heart of Darkness* and represent Africans (and African aesthetics) as primitive, tribal, a spectacle, and without elements worth celebrating (Mafeje 1998; Nuttall 2006 *et al*).

The overarching theme of the project, as stipulated by the project, was "Curate Africa: An ordinary/extraordinary repertoire of Africa". There were, however, fourteen sub-themes intended to guide both the photographs submitted as well as the curation. These sub-themes were: 'Working Lives', 'Ordinary Heroes', 'African Cities', 'Bodies in Motion', 'Bodies in Translation', 'Greening Africa', 'A Place Called Home', 'At Play', 'Roots and Routes', 'Nature/Culture', 'Ordinary Spaces', 'Ritual and Worship', 'Mapping the Imagination: Thinking Through Space' as well as 'Mirroring the Self'.

Curate Africa was conceived by Dr Siona O'Connell and led by two project leaders, O'Connell and Professor Nick Shepherd. The two project leaders are¹ academics based at UCT – over and above being affiliated with the project. The University of Cape Town is a tertiary institution located at the tip of the African continent, in South Africa. The project was "pre-launched"² through the University on the 25th May 2012, on Africa Day. The pre-launch formed part of UCT's core *Africa Month Celebrations* of 2012: a month-long, University-wide programme that ran in May 2012 - thus expanding the usual day-long Africa Day programme that UCT had previously hosted. The Africa Month Celebrations formed part of the University's efforts to become and showcase that it is an *Afropolitan* university, i.e. a university that aspires to embrace its African identity and play a significant role on the continent.

¹ While Curate Africa is described in past tense, those descriptions that remained unchanged at the time of submitting the dissertation (such as the project leaders being academics at UCT) are written in present tense to indicate that continuity.

² "Pre-launch" was the name given to the event by the project.

In preparation for the pre-launch a logo for the project, a virtual gallery blueprint and a video describing Curate Africa and explaining its aims were created by a team from City Varsity under the direction of Curate Africa. City Varsity is the “School of Media and Creative Arts” with campuses both in Cape Town and Johannesburg. The CityVarsity Team, as I have chosen to call them, was from the “Film, Television and Multimedia School” section of the Cape Town campus and comprised four members: Ravon, Brandon, Pierre and Rhyder. In addition to the CityVarsity Team’s work, a website (www.curateafrica.org) as well as Twitter and Facebook accounts were created for Curate Africa and opened by one of Curate Africa’s partners, McNulty Consulting. Also, pamphlets that contained a succinct version of the information found on the website and video were made.

Over and above the project’s rationale, Curate Africa additionally stated (on its website and pamphlets), that it aimed to constitute new kinds of partnerships between photographers, scholars, galleries, institutional partners, design professionals, arts activists and critics etc. While the project intended to involve multiple partnerships, it was nonetheless a university- and more especially UCT-based project strongly shaped by academic and UCT concerns. It aimed to partner with academic institutions in several African cities, including Cape Town, Ibadan, Addis Ababa, Kigali, Port Louis and Cairo. These academic institutions were described as “area specialists” responsible for heading the project in their respective countries. The project further asserted that it intended to “position UCT as the leading African academic institution in interdisciplinary scholarship on knowledge production of Africa”. What’s more, some of the members on the advisory board of the project as well as some of the project’s partners are located within UCT.

The project had six officially-noted project advisory board members during the course of my ethnographic research and before the publically-presented version of the project underwent some significant changes in February 2013.³ The six members were Professor Anthony Bogues (Brown University), Professor Elizabeth Giorgis (Addis Ababa University), Professor Pippa Skotnes (Michaelis School of Art and Centre for Curating the Archive, UCT), Benny Gool (Oryx Media), Fabian Saptouw (Michaelis School of Fine Arts, UCT) and Mike van Graan (Arterial Network).

Curate Africa also had five official partners. Three of the partners, the African Centre for Cities (ACC), Centre for Curating the Archives (CCA), and the Centre for African Studies (CAS) are situated within UCT. The African Centre for Cities is a multi-disciplinary and multi-genre initiative located within the Engineering and Built Environment faculty – although its presence extends into the public sphere

³ The changes undergone by the project will be touched on in the postscript.

through collaborations with various non-academic initiatives such as the multifaceted, pan-African initiative, Chimurenga.⁴ The ACC aims to highlight the importance of cities (especially in Africa), explore sustainable urban developments that are in tune with the conditions within which cities are located and explore ways to make cities sustainable for future generations.⁵ CCA and CAS were centres within which the project leaders are based as academics. They will be discussed in detail further on within the dissertation.

The fourth partner of the project was McNulty Consulting. McNulty Consulting is a digital heritage consultancy which aims to “help cultural institutions like museums, libraries and archives to extend their reach by creating digital platforms that are tailored to achieving their goals.”⁶ The consultancy focuses on community-oriented projects, Web 2.0 technologies and open-source software in an African context.

The last partner was Arterial Network. Arterial Network was headed by Mike van Graan who was also one of the project advisors for Curate Africa. Arterial Network is an Africa-wide network of organisations, individuals, companies, institutions and donors within the continent’s creative and cultural sectors.⁷ The Network is administered from Cape Town but at the time of the fieldwork it was attempting to decentralise its operations by setting up regional secretariats across the continent. The aim of the Network is to establish a dynamic and sustainable “African creative civil society sector engaged in qualitative practice in the arts in their own right, as well as in a manner that contributes to development, to human rights and democracy, and to the eradication of poverty on the African continent.”⁸ Through Arterial Network’s network of over one hundred artists and cultural organisations in Africa, Curate Africa aimed to publicize itself and reach its goal of collecting 30 000 images of Africa taken by the “ordinary person”.⁹

1.2 Research Focus

1.2.1 BACKGROUND TO THE RESEARCH QUESTION

As is common and often likely in anthropological research, the research question that I proposed changed significantly while conducting my research. The change of the question alone is not of as

⁴ See *African Cities Reader* (<http://www.africancitiesreader.org.za> for more information on ACC and Chimurenga’s project.

⁵ ACC: <http://africancentreforcities.net/> (accessed 11 July 2012).

⁶ McNulty Consulting website: <http://www.mcnulty.co.za/about/> (accessed on 30th October 2012)

⁷ Arterial Network website: <http://www.arterialnetwork.org/about/vision> (accessed: 30 October 2012)

⁸ Ibid

⁹ Extracted from the Curate Africa pamphlet.

much importance the factors that precipitated the changes: the terms of engagement - stipulated by my research participants - that necessitated that I redirect the focus of my research.

Since the project was in its conceptual phase, I initially proposed to do research on the conceptualisation and launching of Curate Africa. My primary research question was “What are the ideas of ‘Africa’ and ‘curation’ against and within which, Curate Africa is working?”. The auxiliary questions were: “What range of meanings are embedded within these concepts of ‘Africa’ and ‘curate’?”, “What do the project leaders understand to be the significance of curating the continent of Africa photographically?” and “What does it mean to curate the continent from within the University of Cape Town and from South Africa?”. The assumption that guided my asking of these questions was that the ideas of “Africa” and “curation” within Curate Africa, as well as the project’s location in an institution like UCT would shape the kinds of partnerships the project would seek to establish and (re)negotiate and the activities which it would undertake. Moreover, the initial research questions carried with them the assumption that I would be able to see the conceptualisation of the project; that I would be present in meetings to hear the project leaders conceptualise and brainstorm and therefore witness the concepts of “Africa” and “curation” unfolding. I hoped, and assumed, I could produce an ethnography that explored and showed how conceptually-challenging and politically-charged concepts such as “Africa” and “curation” would be handled in a practical project established by academics from within UCT.

However, the explicit terms of my research imposed on me by the project leaders in a “terms of engagement” meeting of 13th June 2012 - involving the two project leaders and me - necessitated a change in research question and focus. At the meeting, the two project leaders stipulated that I could not conduct my research in meetings and other private spaces where I imagined the conceptualising and brainstorming of the project would take place. This meeting led to a change in my research focus, and raised issues for my ethical considerations. The meeting, the concerns raised therein and ethical consequences are all discussed in greater detail in Chapter Five.

From that point onwards, I began making note of the manner in which my research was being overtly, warily and meticulously negotiated. The caution and precision with which my research was negotiated foregrounded the fact that the academics-come-project-leaders and I occupied a shared space. We were very distinctly citizens of the same society: a sameness in terms of the geographical and intellectual spaces of UCT, the academy in general as well as the larger geographical spaces, South Africa and Africa. However, what was also highlighted was the manner in which our close

proximity - together with the inherent and inherited politics, history and entanglements between anthropology, the Centre for African Studies and UCT's engagements with Africa - became the reason for the carefully-constructed informed consent.

Therefore, my research, especially my participant-observation, became centred on the encounters with the project leaders where the terms of engagement were being negotiated. The primary focus of my research centred on the manner in which the academics-come-project-leaders of Curate Africa negotiated my research - seemingly informed by their relationships with, and perceptions of, anthropology and the academy vis-à-vis the study and representation of Africa(ns). Their reservations about my methodology led to a focus on the methodology becoming central to the "fieldwork" itself rather than being a taken-for-granted as the way of proceeding.

The change in research focus made my research both thrilling and challenging. Researching the negotiations of the conditions of research asked and allowed me to reflect seriously upon seemingly basic elements of my anthropological training such as informed consent, immersion, and speaking as a novice anthropologist about highly-empowered participants. Furthermore, through my research I interrogated notions of "anthropology at home" and studying Africa from within my own discipline. My participants themselves also asked my research to be an exercise in questioning seemingly straightforward terms such as "gate-keeping". Thus, the necessitated change in research focus allowed me to make issues such as informed consent, anthropological discourse and methodology my objects of study.

1.2.2 RESEARCH QUESTION

Curate Africa aspired to be an intervention in envisioning Africa differently. It was a project which proposed to re-imagine and re-image contemporary, everyday, and local African people, places and realities through photography and curation. The project also aimed to locate and celebrate new visualities from *within* Africa. In order to achieve its objectives of envisioning Africa differently, Curate Africa set out to mark a departure from histories of representation concerned with African people, places and realities. These histories of representation were those which upheld an "objectifying gaze", those that perpetuated an image of a divided Africa, and those representations constructed and mediated from outside of Africa.¹⁰ Furthermore, Curate Africa emphasized - both

¹⁰ Once again, these terms and ideas were extracted from Curate Africa's own description of itself: the website, video and pamphlets.

explicitly and implicitly - the significant role to be played by African academic institutions in achieving its objectives.

These descriptions, the selected objectives of Curate Africa as well as our negotiations around the terms of engagement all framed my research.

On the one hand, this dissertation investigates how Curate Africa problematised the study and representation of Africa particularly when it was still in its conceptual phase between May 2012 and December 2012, firstly, in the way it publically projected and initiated itself and, secondly, through its engagement with an anthropological research project centred on it. In interrogating the latter, this dissertation explores the challenges of using social anthropology to investigate a project whose theoretical groundings and modes of enquiry are rooted within contemporary African Studies. In examining both of these aspects, particularly the manner in which Curate Africa initiated itself, I consequently explore what I have chosen to call the “pre-curatorial” activities involved in setting up the project.

On the other hand, this dissertation explores some of the complexities involved in engaging and studying Africa from within the University of Cape Town, particular in light of the intra-institutional dynamics between Social Anthropology and the Centre for African Studies. Researching Curate Africa, in this respect, is a significant heuristic device and springboard from which this dissertation explores the University’s day-to-day negotiations and engagements with postcolonial knowledge production on Africa.

1.3 Research Methods

My research chiefly took place within the second half of 2012 from May onwards. As with any ethnography a selection of methods were used within this study, including participant-observation. That said, it is important to note that although my research started out as an exercise in ethnography, as it progressed, I continued with the ethnographic work but also began to use it as a heuristic device to enable me to think critically about the context of knowledge production in which I was operating and already participating. Thus, this dissertation is not presented as a conventional ethnography, but as an extended essay that uses an ethnographic project to explore aspects of citizen anthropology and to reflect on some of the challenges of postcolonial knowledge production in Africa.

With regards to participant-observation as a method within my research, it is vital to reiterate that participant-observation, as I had envisioned it, was actively contested by the project leaders and the contestation became part of the substance of the research itself. Thus, the few instances of participant-observation and thick description that explicitly centred on Curate Africa are complemented by the other ethnographic moments relayed as contextualising descriptions, i.e. Africa Month and CAS Saga descriptions in Chapter Three, as well as those moments offered as a member of the university society, i.e. Chapter Four and Five. I deal with this matter, in its fullest complexity, in the body of the dissertation.

The most discernible instances of participant-observation explicitly connected to research on Curate Africa included my participation in the mapping experience (discussed in detail in Chapter Six), attending some of the Africa Month Celebrations 2012 and helping one of the main organisers of the 2012 Africa Month Celebrations to file the documents and photographs taken during the Africa Month Celebrations. The “core events” within these celebrations – which took place on the 24th and 25th of May 2012 – were significant for this research especially because Curate Africa was pre-launched as part of the core events. Participant-observation here included various, informal chats during and after the events with people who had also attended.

Since the space in which my research took place was the university - where attending and engaging in seminars, talks, workshops and conferences are forms of active participation in the university culture and allow for observation - my participant-observation extended into these spaces. I attended and participated in various seminars in which the project leaders, associates of the project or people/subjects of interest were involved. The August 2012 seminar series run by Professor Anthony Bogues (Curate Africa Advisory Board member and visiting, honorary professor at CAS at UCT from Brown University); the *Factory Seconds* seminar (20th September 2012) in which O’Connell was a panel discussant and Shepherd the moderator; and the Alumni talk about UCT’s elitism given by Vice Chancellor Max Price were but some of the seminars I attended. These served as spaces where I was further exposed to the academic works and ideas of the project leaders and project affiliates.

With the intentions of enriching my research, I also participated (as a presenter, discussant and observer) in the Archive and Public Culture (APC) Workshop in July 2012 as well as the Anthropology of Southern Africa (ASNA) Annual Conference 2012. As a registered Master’s student and under the supervision of Professor Carolyn Hamilton, it was also compulsory for me to attend the APC

workshops.¹¹ In the workshop and conference, I presented my preliminary research findings and received feedback within the time allocated and in line with the differing yet customary practices of preparation, presentation and discussion. Furthermore, I asked for and received permission from participants at these events to use the feedback and succeeding discussions within my own research in the similar manner that one would ethically ask for informed consent from an “informant”. I was therefore fully immersed as a participant as well as an observer within the APC workshop and the ASNA Conference. These two occasions of participant-observation in particular become ethnographic moments. Similarly, the seminars and talks also served as ethnographic, participant-observation moments. In fact, within the workshop, conference and seminars, my roles as a Master’s student and an ethnographer coincided almost completely within these instances. This conflation constituted the core challenge of my research.

Perusing the Curate Africa website, analysing the Curate Africa Video, joining Twitter in order to follow the project’s public interactions also formed part of my research. By perusing the website, I was exposed and had constant access to the publically-presented versions of Curate Africa. Daniel Miller (2011), amongst other ethnographers such as graduate student, Adone Kitching (2011), has argued that and demonstrated how virtual, social networking media such as Facebook have become valid spaces for ethnographic research. The argument made by Miller, and supported by Kitching, is that social networking mediums such as Facebook (and I add, Twitter), are spaces where (and through which) people establish various networks (Kitching, 2011: 12). Furthermore, by attentively engaging with the content on the website, video and Twitter I was interpolated as an audience member.

Despite being an embedded participant in all these ways as well as being a very active participant within the university society, I felt like what Ulf Hannerz (2006) calls an “anthropologist by appointment”; a term he adopted from Tanya Luhrmann (1996).¹² This primarily occurred where the project leaders - in direct relation to Curate Africa - were concerned. The term “anthropology by appointment” (and “appointment anthropology”) has been primarily used to describe the anthropological method of “studying-up” or “side-ways” and used also by those who only have limited, timed access to their research participants. Most of the time I spent with the people affiliated with the project was scheduled and timed. I had a total of three meetings where at least one of the project leaders was present as well as a brief meeting with Professor Bogues (August

¹¹ APC Workshop Guidelines: <http://www.apc.uct.ac.za/programme/research-workshop/>

¹² See: Luhrmann, Tanya. 1996. *The good Parsi: the fate of a colonial elite in a postcolonial society*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press.

2012). I conducted a recorded interview with the CityVarsity Team and an unrecorded (participant's wishes) interview with one of the organisers of the African Month Celebrations. Furthermore, in line with my "anthropology by appointment" status, much of the communication between my various research participants (including but not exclusive to the project leaders) and me took place over email.

In relation to a condition that I use that which was "publically-accessible", I consequentially pondered over the question: Is the researcher compelled to write participants into a dissertation as one experiences them (for instance, in person I refer to the project leaders as Nick and Siona), in the way research participants request (should they request) or in a way that indicates respect, formality and/or distance? I was compelled to constantly be mindful of the fact that Shepherd and O'Connell were highly independent participants who are very capable of speaking for themselves. Therefore, in an attempt to use the "publically-accessible" and publically-presented personas of my participants as well as an attempt to underscore how academics (especially as authors) are respectfully addressed within the academic space (using their surnames), I have referred to Dr Siona O'Connell and Professor Nick Shepherd by their surnames throughout the dissertation. This approach is also intended to indicate that the participants in this project are independent and powerful within the academic space, to imply the distance that existed between us despite the close proximity, over and above signifying the common practice of address within our shared "school culture" (Guillory, 1993).

1.4 Ethics

Both the research and dissertation attempt to deal with the complex intra-institutional dynamics between Social Anthropology and the Centre for African Studies as well as the complexities in engaging Africa from within the University of Cape Town in the most mindful and sensitive way possible. I attempt to adhere to the 2005 Anthropology Southern Africa (ASNA) Principles of Conduct – which are also endorsed by UCT.¹³ Central to the ethical guidelines is the consideration and protection of the well-being of one's research participants as far as possible. In the case of this research in particular, given that this dissertation is produced about and within the academic space – where the project leaders are employed - the protection of my participants' well-being includes both their personal as well as professional well-being.

¹³ On the UCT website is a section that gives postgraduate students tips on "navigating the thesis". Under this section is a segment on "ethics and plagiarism" where Social Anthropology's Ethical Guidelines are recommended for all Humanities students studying "human subjects". See: <http://www.humanities.uct.ac.za/hum/postgraduate/studies/navigatingthesis/plagiarism>

The concerns raised and parameters set by the project leaders also provided me with ethical issues to reflect upon and adhere to. The specific concerns raised within the meeting are discussed in detail later in the dissertation and therefore there is also a delay in discussing some of the ethical considerations and consequences of the terms stipulated.

Although within anthropology, using pseudonyms to ensure the anonymity of research participants, is a common practice, I have not used them in this dissertation. This is so for at least two reasons. The first reason is that even in the writing of my research proposal, which I tried to anonymise, it was incredibly difficult to write about the details of the project without revealing the institution and project that I was writing about. This dissertation contains details that are necessary for contextualising the research and details that are quite particular to UCT, to the institution's Centre for African Studies as well as its department of Social Anthropology. For this reason, anonymity would have been a counterproductive exercise. That said, there are one or two instances where I have intentionally not specified the participant of whom I speak because it seemed necessary to do so.

The second reason I have not opted to use pseudonyms is because of the insistence (and therefore permission) from Curate Africa to use that which is publically-accessible. This has also meant that I have not actually been privy to much confidential material about the project. Furthermore, the project is within the public domain and so too are works and names of the people involved with Curate Africa.

1.5 Outline of Argument

In order to examine how Curate Africa problematises the study and representations of Africa as well as explore some of the complexities involved in engaging Africa from within UCT, I have provided five chapters which explore different aspects of these interrogations.

Chapter 2 is a literary exploration of three bodies of literature and theory that also serve as the analytical foundations of this dissertation. The first body of literature explored – literature centred on the anthropological theorising of the university - highlights how universities are complex spaces occupied by multi-positioned and equally multifaceted people. As a theoretical underpinning, this body of literature is essential since the research is based within UCT and serves as a springboard for

the discussions on positionalities. The second theoretical underpinning is based on literary examinations and critiques of simplistic understandings of “anthropology at home”. Using these critiques, I advocate the use of the term “citizen anthropology” (Cheater 1987) – which fittingly captures the complexities and multiple overlaps, networks and interests within this research. Thirdly, I discuss the concept of curation. This discussion sets the tone for a later assertion about the “pre-curatorial” activities involved in setting up Curate Africa.

Chapter 3 provides the background into the establishment of African Studies at UCT as well as the intricate and complex relationship between African Studies and Social Anthropology within the university. Furthermore, this chapter explores UCT’s general engagement with the study of Africa and is thus central to the entire dissertation. Within this chapter, I discuss the “Mamdani Affair” within the Centre for African Studies (1996-1998), the “CAS Saga” in the establishment of the “New School” (into which CAS and Social Anthropology were incorporated in 2012) as well as UCT’s Afropolitan Vision. This chapter uses both literature and ethnographic data to illuminate various intricacies.

Chapter 4 is the positionalities chapter of the dissertation and its foremost objective is to situate both myself and the project within the research. Here, I give more insight into the multiplex academic positionings of the project leaders, Bogues and myself. Their senior status and my novice positioning within my own research are underscored. The tight networks and overlaps amongst members of Curate Africa, and our mutual intellectual interests are further underscored. In order to demonstrate these overlaps and networks, the scholarship of the project leaders and Bogues is briefly discussed. I demonstrate how members of Curate Africa had begun problematising particular scholarly engagements and representations of Africa and how they had begun re-envisioning the study of Africa even before the project was conceptualised.

Chapter 5 elaborates on the “terms of engagement”: the stipulations concerning my research. The chief objective of this chapter is to show how Curate Africa problematises the study and representation of Africa(ns) through its engagement with my anthropological research centred on it. The primary argument is that Curate Africa’s attempts to re-imagine the representation of Africa(ns) and depart from histories of objectifying representations informed how the project leaders engaged with me. The project refused to endorse what they perceived as an orthodox, “fly on the wall” anthropological study, it critiqued my desire to avoid a kind of participation I perceived as shaping the very parts of the project I wished to study, and it subsequently demanded that I only use

“publically-accessible” personas of the project and its members. In so doing, the project therefore demonstrated and negotiated the kinds of representation they rejected and upheld where the study of Africa(ns) is concerned. Their negotiation with me can be construed as an extension of the project’s aims and project leaders’ scholarship.

Chapter 6 speaks directly to the question of how Curate Africa problematised the study and representation of Africa through its self-representation and presentation. In the first instance, Curate Africa problematised the representation of Africa(ns) through its presentation of itself as a project intending to be an “intervention of envisioning Africa”. Curate Africa attempted to mark a departure from certain histories of representation through its logo, the colours it specifically chose to reject and use for the project, its themes and its call for a collective re-imagining of Africa from within Africa. This chapter argues that Curate Africa is nonetheless, and inevitably, the projection of the project leaders’ ideas of what Africa is and is not. Moreover, Curate Africa’s preparation for its pre-launch and the processes undertaken for the project to initiate itself into the public realm were, I argue, “pre-curatorial” processes that will inform future actions of the project. Thus, while the project leaders were deeply concerned not to replicate authoritative representations of Africa, seeking to put that power in the hands of others and make the process of representation a collective one, they inevitably set the terms of how this would happen. Pre-Curation, I suggest, is an act of positioning that is itself powerful and significant.

Lastly, within the Conclusion I elaborate on the idea of “projects as projections” and argue that inevitably all projections - or ideas of Africa (Mudimbe, 1994) – shape and confine the approach of studying and engaging Africa. How Africa is perceived is shaped from the perceiver’s vantage point. I also reflect and provide concluding thoughts on how this research has been both an interrogation of how Curate Africa attempts to depart from particular histories and contemporary representations of Africa but also how the University of Cape Town (as an institution and through its disciplines, centres and other constituencies) has negotiated and continues to negotiate its African identity on a day-to-day basis.

CHAPTER 2: LITERARY AND ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK

By and large, there are three theoretical frameworks guiding the analysis of my research. The first is the idea of the university as a complex society which plays host to a variety of “amorphous” research, intellectual and social networks and groupings both within the university space but also beyond it (Price in Nhlapo & Garuba, 2012 and Becher & Trowler, 2001: 90-91). The second theoretical underpinning of this dissertation, quite closely tied to the first, is the concept of a “citizen anthropologist” as introduced by Angela Cheater (1987) and supported by Heike Becker, Emile Boonzaier and Joy Owen (2005). This term, as will be argued shortly, seems to grasp more competently the complexities involved in research conducted in a space shared (both physical and intellectual) by both the researcher and those or that which is being researched. For this research especially, I will suggest, the idea of citizen anthropology is more suitable description than concepts such as “auto-ethnography”, “studying sideways” or “anthropology at home”. The third underpinning of this dissertation is the idea that the role of a curator, even with its nuances, is inevitably an authoritative one. The pervasive idea of “curator as author” is therefore upheld here.

2.1 The University

Anthropological studies focused on higher education institutions have used varying metaphors and theories to explain the composition of these institutions as well as the social organisation of the people who occupy these spaces. For the most part, the exploration of how academics organise themselves, socialise and act within the academic space has been centred on their disciplinary affiliations. Angela Brew (2008), notes that “anthropological metaphors used to explore academic disciplines have become enshrined within the discourse of higher education and the idea that disciplines are tribes occupying distinct territories has become part of everyday academic discourse particularly since the publication in 1989 of Tony Becher’s influential book *Academic Tribes and Territories*” (Brew, 2008: 424).

Becher’s metaphor may have been useful and influential in how anthropologists began researching and speaking of their academic institutions. However, as universities became increasingly interdisciplinary and affiliation moved between and beyond disciplines, the metaphor met much criticism. The emphasis on fixed disciplinary identities of academics and disciplines failed to capture, inter alia, the multiple, overlapping networks that existed as well as the external influences that played a role in the running and functioning of higher education institutions. In her article

“Disciplinary and interdisciplinary affiliations of experienced researchers”, Brew (2008) reflects on research she carried out with senior academics centred on how they perceived their own identities within higher education spaces. Through this research, Brew questioned both the anthropological metaphors as well as the general understanding of disciplinary identities as firm and fixed.

Within the revised 2001 version of *Academic Tribes and Territories*, Becher together with Paul Trowler, emphasise the amorphous nature of the social groupings and networks established within and beyond the university (Becher and Trowler, 2001: 90-91). These networks, as acknowledged by the authors, intertwine within the university and between universities but also reach into and integrate people and institutions outside the academy (ibid). Trowler (2008) sees the university as having multiple open, natural systems of social culture in operation which intertwine and affect each other. Furthermore, he notes that there are broader social contexts that link to and affect the university (Trowler, 2008). One model developed to explore the relationship between the university and its broader social contexts, is the “triple helix” model. According to David Cooper, the term “triple helix” was coined by Etzkowitz and his colleagues to describe research relations in the context of knowledge-based societies (Cooper, 2011: 11). The “broader context” within this model includes the state and industry. Cooper (2011: 10-12) introduced a fourth helix. He argues that civil society should be seen as the fourth helix that affects and interlinks with universities and therefore the state and industry too.

Throughout my research, and in reading literature where anthropologists have attempted to speak of the university, it became increasingly clear that one cannot simply speak of “the university” as a coherent, seamless entity. Moreover, it became clear that universities are multi-layered, complex spaces inhabited by equally multi-faceted and multi-positioned people. Furthermore, it seems to go without saying (although much shall be said on the matter within this dissertation) that university spaces are drenched in complex, nuanced and sensitive politics and relationships. As the Vice Chancellor of the University of Cape Town, Max Price, notes in his foreword to *African Studies the Post-Colonial University*, “Universities always are, and always have been, complex institutions, with many purposes, interests and constituencies that do not seamlessly align” (Price, 2012: iv). It is upon the understanding that the university fosters multiple links and plays host to many differing networks, purposes, individuals, interests and constituencies that this dissertation should be understood especially in instances that UCT, CAS or Social Anthropology are mentioned as seemingly uniform, coherent entities.

2.2 “Citizen Anthropology”

Studies that have been carried out within physical or intellectual spaces shared by the anthropological researcher and those whom she researches have often been deemed “anthropology at home”, “auto-ethnography” or other terms such as “native anthropology”. Marilyn Strathern (1987) defines “auto-ethnography” or “auto-anthropology” as anthropology carried out in the social context which produces it (Strathern in Onyango-Ouma, 2006: 259). Definitions of these terms, to varying degrees, connote familiarity and insiderness on the researcher’s part. Furthermore, as Kate Weston’s argues, concepts such as “home” and “native” are homogenising terms which neglect the varying types of nativity produced by different power relations and take for granted the complexities of home (Weston, 1997: 167).

Anthropologists like Cheater (1987), Kirin Narayan (1993), Kath Weston (1997), Becker, Boonzaier & Owen (2005), Hannerz (2006) and Washington Onyango-Ouma (2006) have used their research experiences (as supposed “insiders” within their own fields and/or research focuses) to show that “anthropology at home” is seldom – if ever – simple. Narayan (1993) asserts that there are degrees of “insiderness”. She argues that binarised categories of positionality - such as insider/outsider, observer/observed – should not be fixed nor understood and used inflexibly. Instead, she asks that each anthropologist (at home or elsewhere) be viewed as possessing “shifting identifications amid a field of interpenetrating communities and power relations” (Narayan, 1993: 671). Similarly, Onyango-Ouma (2006) argues for a flexible conception of home (Oyango-Ouma, 2006: 252). Furthermore, he argues that there are multiplex identities that exist in what is thought to be “home” for anthropologists. Anthropologists’ main task, he argues, should be to examine the ways we are situated in relation to the people we study while keeping in mind that relationships are complex and ever-shifting in different settings (Oyango-Ouma, 2006: 259).

In September 2012, at the Anthropology Southern Africa (ASNA) Annual Conference 2012, the fact that rigid dichotomies between insiderness and outsiderness, native and non-native anthropologists or anthropology and auto-anthropology, tend to not be useful in the (southern) African context was made clear. There were at least three rationales for the inapplicability of a staunch dichotomy. Firstly, it was repeatedly highlighted within the conference that many (southern) African anthropologists do ethnography in spaces considered “home”. In her address in the opening plenary of the conference, Shannon Morreira pointed to there being a rising trend of anthropologists doing anthropology in close proximity. She states: “there is an increasing tendency to do fieldwork close to home, and to acknowledge and even appreciate the ways in which the field and the anthropologist's

daily life can merge together and overlap” (Morreira, 2012: 102).¹⁴ Still with reference to the conference, the historian of anthropology, Andrew Bank, asserted that anthropologists like Monica Wilson were also engaging in anthropology “at home”.

A second point that was made in opposition to fixed dichotomies between anthropology at home and elsewhere (or insiderness and outsidersness) was raised yet again by Morreira in the opening plenary. Morreira asserted that anthropology, particularly on the continent, can be understood more as a state of mind than a locatable, geographical space. In her words: “in African anthropology, most of the time the field is not something we enter and leave but rather a state of mind and a place we continually inhabit... Our disciplinary future, then, would seem likely to be one in which 'home' and 'field' are increasingly entangled” (Morreira, 2012: 103). She used contemporary research on social media and transnationality as some of her examples.

The third rationale raised at the conference with regards to the dichotomy of home and elsewhere, was that the stark contrasts undermine the multiple complexities of identities locatable in “local settings”. In the panel discussion in which I presented my preliminary findings, a few examples and critiques were given to illustrate the many complexities within anthropology conducted “at home”. One critique was that other African scholars within South Africa tend to be considered as doing “anthropology at home” when they do anthropology in their countries of birth although this is not necessarily the case for South Africa scholars doing anthropology in South Africa. On the other hand, Elaine Salo argued that there are problematic assumptions inscribed in notions such as “auto” in phrases like “auto-ethnography”. She argued that even these terms, and not just the consequential research or writing that comes from adopting them, require interrogation. In the discussion that followed Salo pointed out that the identities of the research and researched are often essentialised and homogenised when stark dichotomies are applied and this was a cause for concern.

All of the above seem to be important although long-standing and wide-spread critiques. For instance, in the introduction of *African Anthropologies* (2006), Mwenda Ntarangwi, David Mills and Mustafa Babiker, argue that much of anthropology that has emerged amongst, especially black, African anthropologists from the 1960s to date has been what is considered anthropology at home. That is, much of anthropology conducted has been done amongst the researcher’s “own”; be it the researcher’s own country, own local societies or any other domain which renders the research subject or participants familiar. Furthermore, anthropology conducted at home in Africa dates

¹⁴ Extracted from the subsequent publication of the address, see Morreira 2012 in bibliography.

further back to the 1930s where the likes of Jomo Kenyetta, Kofi Busia and Nnamdi Azikwe, who were amongst the first trained African anthropologists, conducted research amongst and wrote about their own countries and ethnic societies (Ntarangwi, Mills and Babiker, 2006: 9). Despite the long-standing and wide-spread acknowledgement of the shortcomings of the dichotomies it seems that the raising of critique has not adequately ensured the revision of terms (and connotations) such as “anthropology at home”. Narayan’s article “How native is the ‘native’ anthropologist?” was published in 1993, a decade ago, yet the challenge to rethink these concepts was still being made by the many anthropologists present at the ASNA 2012 Conference.

Apposite concepts are therefore more valuable than another critique of these terms. One such term is Cheater’s 1987 term “citizen anthropologist”. Cheater’s definition begins from an understanding that the researcher and the people researched share citizenship (Cheater, 1987). Cheater places emphasis on anthropologists in so-called Third World countries as well as on “intellectual citizenship” over and above citizenship in the more formal, governmental, political sense, although, she does not exclude the latter (Cheater, 1987: 165). Grounding Cheater’s conception is the understanding that anthropology has changed from Malinowskian times and intentions where a visiting anthropologist was a spokesman and broker of “his people” and he constructed his people’s social reality largely from accepting his respondents’ versions of local social reality (ibid: 166 & 170). Cheater acknowledges that although separation of anthropological professionalism and citizenship underlay and sustained early professional anthropology, the reality from the 1980s when she wrote the article, is that some anthropologists are not “visiting” (Cheater, 1987: 164-165). Furthermore, for the anthropologist whose research is conducted where she works, teaches and lives, the traditionally-separable idea of the self and the other become entangled as home, the workplace and the field converge. Therefore, citizen anthropologists need to think carefully about their conceptions of subjectivity, objectivity, the self, the other as well as conflicting values and their constructions of their own social realities (Cheater, 1987: 167-168). Highlighted within Cheater’s article is how anthropology cannot escape being an account of the researcher as it is about the researched, therefore making matters of subjectivity and possibly conflicting value systems, especially prominent (ibid: 177).

Becker, Boonzaier and Owen (2005) thought the term to be useful in the southern Africa context and within their own research. They interpret Cheater’s term as describing fieldwork done by an anthropologist who shares the same geographical, historical and political space as her participants (Becker, Boonzaier & Owen, 2005: 124). The authors appreciate the ability of the term to move away

from inscribing notions of “bounded cultures” as the above-stated dichotomies usually do. In addition, they endorsed how the term speaks to the polyethnic, racially differentiated and class-structured society within which the anthropologist lives. The authors see the term as a platform that allows anthropologists “at home” to begin engaging with the ethics and power involved within their research.

Unlike terms such as “anthropology at home” and “insider” there are no implied connotations of intimacy despite the allusion to interconnectedness of the researcher and the researched. And unlike the phrase “studying sideways” – used by Hannerz (2006) - “citizen anthropologist” does not suggest that the playing field between the researcher and the researched - the citizens - is level. Cheater’s definition is particularly endorsed here because it seems the most appropriate way to speak about my relationality to Shepherd and O’Connell in particular and Curate Africa and UCT in general. Also, the emphasis of the term is on the intricate relationships *between the anthropologist and other citizens* and not an exercise of claiming citizen homogeneity or faux equality and sameness of citizen experiences within a given society (be it a country or university). This is not to say this term will be an adequate description or more suitable than “anthropologist at home” in every study. However, there seem to be striking parallels between UCT as a complex host society and countries. For instance, much like most countries, there are overarching laws/rules, policies, goals, hierarchies etc. to which academic citizens are bound by merely being academics. These rules, hierarchies, goals etc. are what contribute to making the culture of the academy, or “school culture” (Guillory, 1993). Moreover, like countries, universities also have smaller constituencies (i.e. departments, units and projects) where different goals, hierarchies etc., are set, expected and endorsed. These groupings are fluid, amorphous and extend beyond the university society itself. The parallels between a country and the society referred to throughout this dissertation – the university - seem endless and the concept of “citizen anthropology” seems to lend itself to many other societies implicated within the research.

2.3 Curation

“Curation” is not a term which solely exists in the domain of Fine Arts where artists exhibit collected works and objects (be it their own or those collected by someone else) or in museums where someone has overseen the display and has also taken on the responsibility of being a custodian for collections. These kinds of spaces (art galleries, art-exhibition spaces and museums) may be central spaces where “curation” has featured most but these are certainly not the only spaces where

curation takes place. During fieldwork for my Honours research in 2010, Cape Town-based poetry initiative, Badilisha Poetry saw itself as “curating” the poetry show where various Pan-African poets would perform in their exchange program.¹⁵ Again, I have heard the term used more recently to describe the process where an organiser conceptualises a performance poetry event, assembles poets together and oversees the show in which these poets perform. Similarly, the Pan-African Space Station, an online station that plays music often unheard on commercial radio, sees itself as “curating” the music which it plays.¹⁶ In fact, according to the analysis of “curatorial practices” offered by Helmut Draxler (2010), since the 1980s, the act of curation has expanded outside the traditional spaces (museums and galleries) and so too have the people who “curate” (Draxler, 2010: 5).

Notwithstanding the fact that the term “curation” seems flexible enough to be used on anything from objects to performances – Carolyn Hamilton and Pippa Skotnes (2014) note that the term has become “quotidian” – still, a distinctive thread in what is implied when the term is used remains, that is, as referring to the “organisation and preservation of collected items” (Hamilton and Skotnes, 2014: 1). But also it entails “appropriation of one kind or another, often with authoritative fiat, along with care” (ibid).

The word “curator”, comes from the Latin *curare*, which means “to [take] care”. The title was given to those within the church who “cured” and cared for souls (ibid). The *authority* to take care of souls, and at times use force in order to “cure” and care for these souls, formed part and parcel of the curator’s title within the church (Hamilton and Skotnes, 2014: 1). In another definition of the term from the Oxford English Dictionary, the sense of a curator having authority is underscored. In this definition, used from the 1600s and derived from the modern, Latin term *curator*, a curator is “a person who has charge: a manager, overseer, steward”.¹⁷ *Curare* could be translated into the “caretaker” as it was bestowed upon those who occupied civil servant positions such as in policing or sanitation (Strauss in Brown, 2014 & Hamilton and Skotnes, 2014: 1).¹⁸ This sense of the word came to be associated with those specialists who took custodianship and care of artifacts (from artworks to historic and scientific objects) collected by and stored in cultural heritage institutions such as museums, libraries, archives and even galleries. In this caring and custodial sense of the term and within these institutions, curation came to be also understood as an act of conservation and

¹⁵ Badilisha Poetry: <http://badilishapoetry.com/en/about-badilisha-africa-centre/>

¹⁶ Pan African Space Station: http://www.panafricanspacestation.org.za/?page_id=2

¹⁷ Ibid

¹⁸ Albeit work in progress, I am most appreciative of the exposure to Jessica Brown’s work here.

management. In one of the definitions offered, the Oxford English dictionary defines a curator as “the officer in charge of a museum, gallery of art, library, or the like; a keeper, custodian” and this definition was also used from the 1600s.¹⁹

When asked in passing about their meaning of the word “curation”, one of the project leaders of *Curate Africa* briefly described it as applying one’s own logic or sense to a whole range of material. This understanding gives the impression of artworks, objects, material (or even people) needing to be organised in order for them to collectively make sense. In fact Boris Groys (2008) states that artworks within exhibitions do not speak for themselves thus making the act of curating them an important one in order for some kind of speaking to be done by the curator through the exhibition (Groys, 2008: 46). Here, Groys emphasises that the idea that objects do not speak for themselves however the curator speaks through the objects curated. Massimiliano Gioni (2011), somewhat similarly to the project leader and Groys, perceives the role of the curator as an interpretative or at most an editorial one (Gioni, 2011: 18). This interpretation, according to Gioni, should take its cue from the actual artworks thus binding the curators to a kind of creative freedom that does not stray too far from the artworks themselves. Gioni makes his argument in relation to recent assertions of the act of curation in itself being a work of art. Draxler names this blur and tension between the role of artists and curators as the second crisis within curatorial practices that led to its expansion (Draxler, 2010: 5).

The idea of curation as a form of authorship and active meaning-making is also upheld within *The Exhibitionist* – a journal which offers a platform on which debates and discussion around “curatorial practice” can be hosted. For the journal, the curator is explicitly seen as an actor in the process of exhibition-making. In his overture piece to the first issue of the journal, Jens Hoffmann states that the journal upholds “the idea of the author, which applies to exhibition-making just as much as it does to filmmaking” (Hoffmann, 2010). Hoffmann continues that “[t]he application of the auteur theory to curating has been one of the most remarkable developments in [the curatorial practice] field in recent years...” (ibid). In order to get a better idea of curatorial practice in relation to “the idea of the author” or “auteur theory”, it is significant to note that the journal does not seek to concern itself with all forms of curatorial practice but, rather, as the name alludes, *The Exhibitionist* primarily concerned itself with the act of exhibition-making: “the creation of a display [sic], within particular socio-political context, based on a carefully formulated argument, presented through

¹⁹ <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/45960?redirectedFrom=curator#eid>

meticulous selection and methodological installation of artworks, related objects from the sphere of art, and objects from other areas of visual culture” (Hoffmann, 2010).

What is of special interest in this dissertation is how the act of curation demands that the curator pay close, careful attention to the objects within collections - whether in the process of taking care of them as a custodian or in process of taking cues from them as Gioni asks. Furthermore, as Hamilton and Skotnes (2014) note, also of interest here is the fact that notions of care, custodianship and collection are accompanied by the authoritative acts of organising the given objects, appropriating the objects themselves together with their meanings and speaking through the exhibition. Thus, within this dissertation the notion of “curator as author” is explored.

CHAPTER 3: BACKGROUND: ENGAGING AFRICA FROM WITHIN UCT

This chapter illuminates some of the complexities inherent in UCT's engagement with the studying of Africa. Firstly, I provide a brief historical account of the establishment of African Studies at UCT and its development from the late nineteenth century to the period just prior to the commencement of my research. The history of African Studies weighed heavily on developments concerning the Centre for African Studies (CAS) in the period of my research. African Studies' entanglement with the discipline of Social Anthropology is explored together with the very public critiques of African Studies at UCT by Mahmood Mamdani as well as the 2011 "CAS Saga" which both took place within the Centre for African Studies. Further discussed, with the intentions of illuminating UCT's engagement with Africa, is UCT's Afropolitan Vision and the establishment of the "New School" in 2012. In the latter part of this chapter (from the discussions around the CAS Saga to the 2012 Africa Month Celebrations and finally the establishment of the New School of 2012), I begin presenting my ethnography. While some of my accounts of the events are retrospective, i.e. before my MA research began, and the result of my being a participant with the university, other events such as the Africa Month Celebrations formed part of my research. Nonetheless, the events and historical account provided within this chapter are meant to provide context for the kinds of politics underlying the study of Africa within the university, as well as provide an essential basis from which to understand Curate Africa and the details of the project provided in Chapter Six.

3.1 A Brief History of the Establishment of African Studies at UCT

African Studies within the School of Bantu Life and Languages

Lungisile Ntsebeza notes that "[t]he roots of African Studies at UCT go much deeper than the establishment of the Centre for African Studies in the mid-1970s. These can be traced as far back as the 19th century when missionaries such as WA Norton were keen to have a Chair of "Bantu" Philology established in the Cape" (Ntsebeza, 2012: 2). After much lobbying from Norton, the School of African Life and Languages was finally established in 1920 (Phillips, 1993: 22). The two chairs of the School were Bantu Comparative Philology (headed by Norton) and Social Anthropology which

was headed by Alfred Radcliffe-Brown who was also appointed head of the School (Phillips, 1993: 22 and Ntsebeza, 2012: 4). Norton's Chair was, however, disestablished in 1923.²⁰

Howard Phillips notes that Radcliffe's research was in fact geared towards demonstrating the practical utility of the School – with its focus on African life – to policy-makers and administrators (Phillip, 1993: 24). In light of Robert Gordon's research on early social anthropology in southern Africa, Ntsebeza also highlights the fact that there was complicity between Radcliffe-Brown (“and by extension anthropology”) and the colonial plus apartheid project (Gordon in Ntsebeza, 2012: 4). This is over and above Norton's initial lobbying around the study of the “indigenous African population” having the capacity to contribute to developing a weightier Native Policy.

School of African Studies

The School underwent substantial changes. Amongst other changes, in 1925, Radcliffe-Brown resigned and the School became the "School of African Studies" in 1933 (Ntsebeza, 2012 and Phillips, 1993: 25). Also, the School fostered the established of departments. The departments associated with this version of the School (1933-1974) were Social Anthropology, African Languages, Archaeology together with Native Law and Administration.

Conversely, since UCT considered itself, for the most part, an academically-autonomous, “open university” - “that admitted students on primarily academic grounds, without regard to their race, colour or creed” - its relationship with the apartheid government became fraught (Vorster and Bozzoli, 1975: 428). This was particularly so when the National Party made clear its intentions of lawfully applying racial separation within university education from the late 1940s when apartheid was formally instated. In the late 1950s, the pressures for UCT (and other South African universities) to uphold separate development (along racial lines) with regards to the administration of the university and education it delivered increased²¹.

UCT's resistance to governmental pressures together with willing participation from some academics to uphold apartheid visions affected some members of the School and therefore the School itself directly. Even with the substantial modifications the School had undergone, the main focus of the School of African Studies, according to Ntsebeza (2012) and Phillips (1993: 26-27) was “the study of

²⁰ For further information see Phillips 1993.

²¹ See: Behr and MacMillan (1966)'s “Chapter 8: University Education” for an in-depth discussion on the policies and Acts that affected universities in South Africa.

Native life". Furthermore, the aim was to "inform government and equip it with strategies of ruling 'Bantu people'" (Ntsebeza, 2012: 8). Although head of the Social Anthropology section, Isaac Schapera, did not share this view of the School - or even Bronislaw Malinowski and Radcliffe's over-determined ideas of African societies (Phillips, 1993: 271), other academics within the school such as Gerard Paul Lestrade (head of the African Languages) did so enthusiastically. Lestrade even became significant actor the national, Bantu Education syllabus-planning committee in the 1950s. Reputable scholars such as Archibald Campbell Mzoliza (AC) Jordon - who moved from Fort Hare to UCT in 1946 with the hopes of starting the process of opening UCT to black scholars – eventually resigned because within UCT, apartheid was "unbearable" (Ntsebeza, 2012: 9). In 1968, Monwabisi Archibald 'Archie' Mafeje who was appointed senior lecturer within the Department of Social Anthropology did not have his appointment confirmed, apparently because of interference from the apartheid government (Ntsebeza, 2012: 9).²²

According to Ntsebeza, the increasing pressures from the government on members of the School and on UCT's administration fed into the demise of the School in 1973 (2012: 10). The fact that departments such as African Languages and Archaeology had broken away to form independent departments, in 1967 and 1968, also weakened the School (Nick van der Merwe in Ntsebeza 2012: 10). Furthermore, the School had achieved its goal of making the UCT community aware of Africa and other departments – notably economics and historical studies - began incorporating "African" material within their courses (ibid).

Establishment of the Centre for African Studies and the "Mamdani Affair"

Despite the demise of the School of African Studies in 1973, the Centre for African Studies (CAS) was established in 1976. CAS was not based in any particular department, it did not have its own staff members and it did not offer courses of its own. Nevertheless, African Languages, Anthropology, Archaeology, African History and African Economic History were core departments associated with CAS (Ntsebeza, 2012: 11). CAS was initially governed by an elected Board of African Studies and hosted interdisciplinary and inter-institutional lectures and colloquia exploring the history of South African people in their diversity as well as 'contemporary problems and planning in education, medicine, urbanization and economics' (Ntsebeza, 2012: 12 and "Notes: Centre for African Studies, University of Cape Town", 1977: 64). Then UCT scholars and students - such as Andrew "Mugsy" Spiegel within Social Anthropology – attempted to revive African Studies as an interdisciplinary

²² This statement was given by the then Principal of UCT, Richard Luyt and Ntsebeza has extracted it from Hendricks's 2008 account of the "Mafeje Affair".

space that would instil enthusiasm for critical study and discussion around Africa with various UCT departments and courses (Ntsebeza, 2012: 11).

CAS emerged against a backdrop of significant political shifts in South Africa which affected academia. By the late 1970s, Bantu Education policies had become more stringent and had been met with intense, active resistance especially from those receiving it. Besides the 1976 marches against the introduction of Afrikaans as a medium of instruction in schools and government in general, anti-apartheid movements such as the Black Consciousness Movement had emerged and influenced both popular and academic discourses; worker education (night school) was revived by trade unions; and even educational institutes for those in exile - such as the Solomon Mahlangu Freedom College (SOMAFCO) in Tanzania were established (Kallaway, 2002: 19-22). These and other platforms began vigorously interrogating and vociferously highlighting and intellectualising black South African experiences under apartheid. The increasing number of liberated African countries from the 1960s and strengthening ideals of Pan-Africanism, Marxism, communism and socialism amongst scholars and South Africans contributed to this volatile era and pressured academics within universities to question and engage with black African experiences and knowledge production within and beyond the academy. In the late 1980s and early 1990s, CAS began “grappling with what African Studies would entail at UCT, particularly given the looming possibility of the demise of apartheid and the rule of the ANC” (Ntsebeza, 2012: 12-13). A new person who could lead the Centre in new directions and reconnect South Africa to the rest of Africa was required in dealing with these possibilities. Mahmood Mamdani was appointed in 1996 into the newly-established AC Jordon Chair within CAS and as Director of CAS in 1997.

From the beginning of his tenure, Mamdani quite publically critiqued CAS and its engagement with Africa on various levels. After a month of being appointed, he published a paper with his preliminary thoughts (and critiques) in the local journal, *Social Dynamics*. He perceived CAS as an extracurricular space where great conversations took place but also a space lacking in the real intellectual work of the university that is: teaching and researching (Mamdani, 1996: Mamdani, 1998a: 2). He expressed disappointment at the fact that although a Centre for African Studies was meant to be a space that fostered “self-examination” and allowed Africans to study themselves in a manner that would feed into their emancipatory processes, CAS did not achieve this (Mamdani, 1996: 6). Furthermore, to Mamdani, the multi-disciplinarity of CAS should have not have been limited to South Africa as it was. At the time of his appointment, he saw African Studies at UCT as being synonymous with “Bantu Studies” - as it had been since the establishment of School of Bantu Life and Languages – as well as

being synonymous with “area studies” - where “Africa” equalled the exotic other and only existed from Limpopo upwards (Mamdani, 1996: 3). To do justice to the study of Africa in a postcolonial university, Mamdani saw it necessary for CAS and the UCT to begin moving away from the limits of disciplines and embrace centres and units like CAS in a more serious, intellectual way (Mamdani, 1996). He also thought it was necessary for postcolonial intellectuals to first and foremost embark on a critical study of the history of the study of Africa, and necessarily address the ontological and epistemological question of “What is Africa?”

In his published account of the events that followed his appointment (1996-1998), Mamdani explained how his final draft of the multi-disciplinary Humanities foundation course he had been asked to design by the then Deputy Dean (Associate Professor Charles Wanamaker) was not endorsed for implementation in 1998. According to Mamdani, he put together a course, “Problematizing Africa”, that sought – through its content – to illuminate the history of Africa, even before colonialism and inclusive of slavery, as well as move away from a narrative of “South African exceptionalism” (and intellectual isolation) by making links between South Africa and the rest of the continent and including debates from equatorial Africa (Mamdani, 1998a: 3, 8 & 13). His course was vetoed by the Working Group (Digby Warren, Mugsy Spiegel, Johann Graaff) and the Deputy Dean for 1998 and instead this working team saw to the establishment of the course. Mamdani critiqued this implemented course. His main critiques of the course were that it perpetuated South African exceptionalism, its readings alluded to there being an absence of African intelligentsia and it emphasised the teaching of social science skills at the expense of content – as he claims, it produced “sub-standard content” (Mamdani, 1998a: 13-14). Moreover, within his presentation made in the CAS Gallery 22 April 1998 and published in *Social Dynamics*, Mamdani questioned whether African Studies in a postcolonial UCT was being turned into “the new home for Bantu Studies” (Mamdani, 1998b). Mamdani subsequently resigned. Nevertheless, his critiques placed the role of African Studies at UCT firmly under the spotlight.

3.2 UCT’s Afropolitanism

Introduction

From the 1980s and certainly after the “Mamdani Affair”, UCT had to think seriously about what it meant to be a university in postcolonial Africa. Under the Vice-Chancellorship of Professor Njabulo Ndebele (2000-2008), UCT began embarking on a change of its university goals and attempting to

find the meaning of being an *African* university in post-apartheid South Africa and post-colonial Africa. Within the transformation report titled “*University in Africa*”, the then Deputy Vice-Chancellor, Martin Hall, noted the following words from VC Ndebele:

“New institutional identities are emerging and are being asserted in the reconfigured higher education environment in South Africa. We must respond with confidence to these changes. The critical question for us to ask is whether our emergent transformative character can be given adequate expression by the current vision and mission and the received legacy of institutional symbols. UCT’s institutional history is a formidable legacy. New symbolic expressions of that legacy can only deepen its significance further” (Ndebele in “*Living Transformation*”, October 2005 quoted by Hall 2006).

By 2010, the re-visioning of UCT’s mission and institutional identity had taken place and was incorporated into the University’s mission statement and strategic goals. UCT’s overall mission transformed into an ambition to become a “premier academic meeting point between South Africa, the rest of Africa and the world” that is committed, through innovative research and scholarship, to grapple with the key issues of our natural and social worlds”.²³ One of the six strategic goals developed was: “Internationalising UCT via an African niche”.²⁴ This strategic goal is in fact the collapsing of UCT’s previous policy on internationalisation and the University’s recent adoption of an Afropolitan vision. The special issue of the *Monday Paper* – an issue titled *Afropolitanism at UCT*²⁵, illuminated how the Afropolitan vision and internationalisation intersect on at least three levels (2011: 2).

Vice Chancellor Max Price has been credited with having introduced an Afropolitan vision for UCT²⁶ and giving it substantial financial support.²⁷ In explaining the term “Afropolitanism” in his June 2012 alumni talk, “Can UCT be an Elite University without being Elitist?” VC Price stated that the “afro” relates to the African continent while the “politan” alludes to a cosmopolitanism that does not

²³A full version of UCT’s mission statement can be found on the university’s website, <http://www.uct.ac.za/about/intro/> (25 January 2013 at 09:30am)

²⁴ *Afropolitanism at UCT*: http://www.uct.ac.za/downloads/news.uct.ac.za/monpaper/mp30_08.pdf

²⁵ The issue appeared at a time when the debates around the future of the Centre for African Studies - which was under threat of closure - were at their peak.

²⁶ One of these accreditations can be found in the acknowledgements of the *African Studies in the Post-Colonial University*.

²⁷ In 2012, “Afropolitanism and Internationalisation” were in fact funded by the “Vice Chancellor’s Strategic Fund” together with 38 other projects (According to the *Monday Paper*, Vol. 31(9), 04 June-22 July 2012).

exoticise or primitivise Africa. The Afropolitan vision is driven by Senior Deputy Vice Chancellor of UCT Thandabantu Nhlapo, who has therefore assumed responsibility for internationalising UCT and, more specifically, for making UCT an Afropolitan University.

When Afropolitanism was introduced at UCT (2010) I was an Honours student within the Department of Social Anthropology. In the coursework components of both my Honours and subsequent Master's years, I also took electives within CAS. Thus, while I only actively commenced research towards my MA in May 2012, I was exposed to, interested in and at times privy to many conversations and critiques around Afropolitanism at UCT and African Studies in African universities. From hereon I draw from my observations and experiences as a student in the immediately preceding period of my research as well as my ethnographic research.

Within "Afropolitanism at UCT" - which was dedicated to developing the Afropolitan vision - DVC Nhlapo stated that his task is to "persuade" the UCT community to be comfortable with the chosen Afropolitan approach. In this special edition of the *Monday Paper*, DVC Nhlapo described the Afropolitan vision as "UCT's aspiration to embrace more meaningfully and more visibly [its] African identity and to play a significant continental role as one of Africa's leading institutions". DVC Nhlapo's wording alludes to the UCT community - "us at UCT" as he specifically puts it - needing persuasion in order to endorse the Afropolitanism ideal and/or the Afropolitan vision driven by DVC Nhlapo - together with the International Academic Programmes Office (IAPO) and other people involved in defining Afropolitanism on the broader, institutional level. The careful wording also gestures to a perception about UCT not being completely comfortable with its position as an African institution.

Notwithstanding the basic definitions of Afropolitanism that have been offered by those managing and representing UCT, the details and intricacies of Afropolitanism are rather complex. On one level, the complexities arise from the fact that UCT is a university and from the understandings of universities as multi-layered, complex spaces. On the other hand, there are complexities in defining and speaking of an Afropolitan University because there are differing ideas of the role of the university in general and a university located on the African continent in particular. Both VC Price and DVC Nhlapo have repeatedly and explicitly foregrounded how complex the matter is. In the foreword to *African Studies in the Post-Colonial University* (2012), VC Price stated that what an Afropolitan University "should entail is a matter of debate as it should be." On the other hand, DVC Nhlapo stated in *Afropolitanism at UCT* that it is necessary to weave the various activities and

intentions from around the University that are already reflecting the Afropolitan ideal (Nhlapo, 2011). These already-existing initiatives, according to DVC Nhlapo, have to be woven into a “coherent Afropolitan tapestry underpinned by a flexible policy framework...”. VC Price’s acknowledgements of the contentious nature of Afropolitanism within the University as well as DVC Nhlapo’s objectives to recognise and weave the various Afropolitan-esque initiatives together, allude to the complex nature of the ideal and the on-going negotiations in defining Africanness from within the university. Nevertheless, these differences in opinions, within UCT, were especially highlighted in 2011 when debates around the disestablishment and future of the Centre for African Studies (CAS) were at their peak.

The CAS Saga and Debates around Afropolitanism

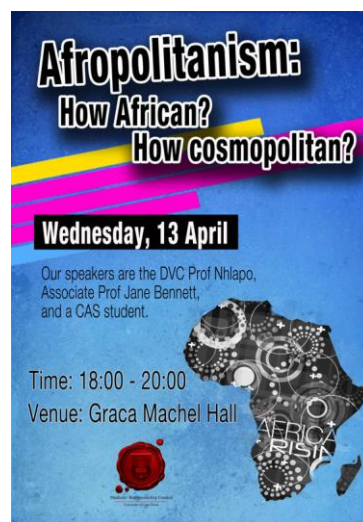
The relationship between South African universities and sister institutions across Africa has been topical for much of the past decade. At the University of Cape Town the matter has recently been thrown into sharp relief by the debates surrounding the Centre for African Studies and the proposal to form a new school that would provide a different platform for the study of Africa. A question that has been asked often is whether these debates have implications for, or may be able to draw from, UCT’s declared goal to position itself as an Afropolitan university. (Nhlapo 2011, 1)²⁸

In 2009, just as UCT was formally preparing to implement its Afropolitan strategy, discussions around the possible disestablishment of CAS began. Ntsebeza states that between Mamdani’s tenure and 2009, CAS had “gradually deteriorated” (Ntsebeza, 2012: 15). Also, he points out that this move to disestablish CAS was seen by some academics as a rather contradictory move given the VC Price’s commitment to Afropolitanism. In 2010, following a series of discussions within which Ntsebeza was involved (first as a committee member, then a mediator for the 2011 talks), it was tentatively agreed upon that CAS would be disestablished but a New School of Critical Enquiry in Africa - which initially only included CAS, Social Anthropology and the African and Gender Studies Institute (AGI) - would be established. The process of implementation of the New School collapsed in 2010 and by the beginning of 2011 (February) members involved were ready to attempt to pick up discussions. However, students had also become involved; mainly protesting against the disestablishment of CAS. Comments and stances varied and were presented on various platforms

²⁸ *Afropolitanism at UCT.*

from a Facebook page, to formal and informal discussions around the New School at the University to national newspapers such as the *Mail and Guardian*. Many discussions within courses in CAS (where I was taking an elective), featured this issue of the disestablishment of CAS. In fact, one of the essay questions within “Problematizing the Study of Africa” asked us to engage with the CAS Saga, Afropolitanism as well as the Mamdani Affair.

From the beginning of 2011 onwards and unlike the way the university usually handles many of its decision-making processes, students became involved in the discussions around the possibilities of the New School, the future of CAS and what it should mean for UCT to be African University in general. “A collective of students, alumni and global supporters against the ‘disestablishment’ of the Centre for African Studies at the University of Cape Town”²⁹ formed “Concerned CAS Students”. This group existed on publically-accessible social networks such as Facebook, and anyone (those within UCT and beyond) who was in support of CAS staying open or just generally interested in the developments of the debates and discussions could ask to be added to the Concerned CAS students mailing list. The Concerned CAS Students mobilised the student body through events such as the discussion about Afropolitanism featuring DVC Nhlapo (13 April 2011), to asking *Varsity* - the university student-run newspaper - to report on the issue, to hosting discussions between students within the departments in question.



(Poster included in an email invitation circulated and eventually sent to me from the student-run Social Anthropology email, SOCANTH POSTGRAD)

²⁹ Self-description presented on the emails they circulated.

What was at stake for those who formed part of Concerned CAS students (and those who were against the closing of CAS) was the fact that the Centre's disestablishment would mean the collapse of a vital space for critical thought on Africa, being African and the study of Africa at UCT. Few students who were doing courses in CAS were actually majoring African Studies, however, many of the students expressed the view that CAS provided a kind of critical enquiry that their disciplines – from media to social anthropology – failed to offer. UCT was criticised for failing to instil a sufficiently African perspective within most of its courses and departments, particularly within the Faculty of Humanities.³⁰ Therefore, disestablishing CAS was viewed as the eradication of a vital and rare space for thinking through Africa and its study from UCT.

On the 25th May 2011, the annual Africa Day Panel discussion took place and was centred on African Studies within postcolonial universities in general as well as the question of the future of CAS at UCT. The panel discussion held at UCT's Graduate Humanities Building - which I attended - was titled "African Studies in the Post-Colonial University". It featured CAS and English Associate Professor (UCT), Harry Garuba; Professor in Sociology and holder of NRF Chair in Land Reform and Democracy in South Africa (UCT), Lungisile Ntsebeza; Associate Professor in the Community Development Programme at the University of Kwa-Zulu Natal, Pearl Sithole; Director of the United Nations African Institute for Economic Development and Planning, Abebayo Olukoshi; and Professor in the Department of Political and International Studies at Rhodes University, Leonhard Praeg. Ntsebeza provided the history of African Studies at UCT (cited above) and Olukoshi, whose paper traced practice of African Studies beyond UCT, ended his discussion by calling for African Studies to be rethought and renewed within postcolonial university contexts (including but not exclusive to UCT). Garuba highlighted the disavowals of many narratives within the establishment and consolidation of disciplines such as African Studies. The silences, he argued, have been in favour of and characteristic of the production of the conventional, normative narratives of histories and genealogies of African Studies. In fact, the idea of disavowed narratives also featured heavily in the CAS course, "Problematizing the Study of Africa", which Garuba convened and co-taught. Sithole's discussion

³⁰ In an email sent through Concerned CAS Students (01 June 2011), Menan du Plessis sent the response she originally posted on the *Mail and Guardian* comments section under Leslie London's article on CAS and the New School (posted 13th May 2011). Central to her argument was: "It seems to some of us that any radical structural changes to the university should be motivated in the first place by academic considerations, and in the second by a commitment to turn UCT into a great African university. It may be part of the trouble that the university has not yet initiated the serious conversations so direly needed across the campus and throughout every sector of the university community - concerning the specific implications of Africanization at the level of individual departments. These should really have been held long before the New School was even mooted - so as to inform proposals for the latter: and it would have been a graceful gesture on the part of the university's management if it had invited the Centre for African Studies to lead us in such discussions."

was centred on the disjunctures between different systems of knowledge production. She argued that disciplinary and methodological parameters maintained the hierarchies and tensions between different knowledge systems. The perpetuated, conventional social science analytical paradigms, she continued, failed to capture the complexity of social reality. Sithole began thinking about what it might mean to produce distinctively African scholarship. A thread within the discussions (later published as papers) was the impression that in fact UCT and many universities on the continent were not satisfactorily African. Also, the impression that UCT, despite its historical identification as a “liberal” university, had not transformed enough to complement the postcolonial African context in which it was located was expressed by panellists and some audience members.

The discussions and debates around what it means for UCT to not merely be a university located in Africa but an African university continued at a very energetic level throughout 2011. Discussions spilled into 2012 where the panel papers were published into a book launched at the 2012 panel discussion, where the Africa Day celebrations were expanded into a month and where the New School was launched during Africa month.

In previous years, including 2011, UCT institutionally celebrated Africa Day – the day which commemorates the formation of the Organisation of African Unity (25 May 1963) – by hosting a themed panel discussion followed by a cocktail function which was held in the Leslie Social Science foyer where a few stalls with various academic works centred on Africa stood unmanned but open to perusal. As I came to learn during my research, there was little or no buy-in by many departments within UCT for Africa Day celebrations. Before 2012, those departments who chose to celebrate the day, did so on their own terms and outside the bigger institutional day-long program. In 2012, however, Africa Day commemoration was expanded into African Month Celebrations and DVC Nhlapo together with the Africa Month Committee, attempted to weave the activities of various departments into a single program and encourage more departmental, staff and student participation.

Activities on the program that took place in May included, amongst others, a soccer tournament comprised of teams made mainly of students, and representing the four main regions in Africa; an Africa-themed fashion show within the Law faculty where students, staff and even the families members of staff participated; a student fair where country-oriented societies sold national food and other goods: concerts by the Music School and Health Sciences Faculty; and various talks and lectures that dealt with, for example, social media in Africa (Prof Nyamnjoh); new archaeological

ways of thinking about Mapunbugwe and Great Zimbabwe (Dr. Chirikure), Derivatives in Africa (Dr Holman) and politics in Africa (talk by Minister Naledi Pandor as well as Dr Matlou from the African Institute of South Africa).

There were also core events to the Africa Month Celebrations which took place on Thursday the 24th and Friday the 25th of May 2012 at the Baxter Theatre. The Baxter Theatre Centre was the performance arts space located at the bottom of UCT's main campus. (Although the Baxter was established by UCT, the Baxter was quite independent in operation and open to the public.) On both days in the foyer of the Baxter Theatre, different departments and centres within the university exhibited the works they thought (and the Africa Month Committee thought) fitted the Africa theme. On Thursday the 24th of May 2012, the core events began in one of the theatre with a panel discussion titled "African Culture, human rights and constitutions", followed shortly by a book launch of *African Studies in the Post-Colonial University*. Thereafter, a cocktail function was hosted in the foyer. The cocktail function included food and wine, a speech by the DVC Nhlapo, a poem by academic and artist Pitika Ntuli (who was also one of the 2012 panelists and described as an "all-round communicator" by DVC Nhlapo), the announcements (by DVC Nhlapo) of the best dressed people (who were dressed to the Africa theme) as well as the winners of the "My Africa" photographic competition. There was also a band hired by UCT briefly to play live music and for the rest of the event a playlist including songs such as Vicki Sampson's "My African Dream" played.

DVC Nhlapo was dressed in a collarless black shirt with orange finishing, a waist-coat adorned with beads (which he'd put on after the panel discussion) and isiqhaza (traditional, round, colourful Zulu earrings) which he had worn to previous Africa Day cocktail functions. Whereas the Vice Chancellor usually gave the welcoming speech at the cocktail functions, his absence qualified DVC Nhlapo to do the job. Within his speech, DVC Nhlapo noted that the decision to host an Africa *Month* has proven "its worth" especially because it became an "outlet for African Exuberance³¹" and it "provided the space for people's creativity to unfold". This creativity unfolded in the faculties, the student area, SRC, IAPO and departments. In explaining the expansion of Africa Day commemoration into African Month Celebrations he stated:

³¹ The performing arts' campus, Hiddingh, had their "Exuberance Project" incorporated into the Africa Month Program. This project was a multi-media and multi-faceted project (including a workshop, exhibition and performances) exploring what it means to speak of, celebrate and showcase exuberance in Africa through outputs.

“it was so that we could finally make the link between the things we enjoy doing - the dressing up, the food, the fabrics, and the poetry and the culture and the and the dance - it gives the space to link it with the scholarly and academic project. So when people ask you what is this Afropolitan Vision, the truth of the matter is the Afropolitan Vision is about inserting an African perspective into everything that we do. And the reason we have done Africa Month this way is: one) to say ‘this is the kind of unfolding of creativity that we are capable of’, but two) it’s okay to do it. I think in the past there has perhaps been a worry that it’s not okay. It’s okay. It’s okay to do it; we don’t have to look over our shoulder, across the flats or across the wine country at competitors and rivals. Let them do what they do. But what we do is to say it is okay to do Africa-identification in the way that we do it.”

3.4 The School of African and Gender Studies, Anthropology and Linguistics

Although the New School was not launched as part of UCT’s Africa Month Program, it was launched in the same month and a year after the CAS Saga had erupted. The School was officially launched on 21 May 2012 at an event which I attended at 5pm in the CAS Gallery. The shorthand “New School” no longer stood for “The New School for Critical Enquiry in Africa” but *The School of African and Gender Studies, Anthropology and Linguistics*. Besides explicitly indicating that the Centre for African Studies (CAS), African Gender Institute (AGI), Linguistics, and the Department of Social Anthropology fell under the School, this new name *seemed* to reflect the power contentions within the New School, the inability of the four constituencies to find a single shared identity. The new name also seemed to carry some of the concerns expressed within the discussions, particularly concerns of the CAS space and identity being eradicated from UCT. The departments became sections within the school. Professor Jane Bennett, who was the head of AGI, became the Head of School. Professor Ntsebeza also moved into the School with his NRF chair.

At the launch, previous heads of departments, staff members and students from all four sections were present. There were other students and staff members, from departments such as Historical Studies who were there to witness the launch, eat the finger foods, drink the wine, and listen to the band which opened the event as well as speeches by Professor Bennett, a linguistic student who was involved in the New School discussions as well as the keynote address by Professor Ndebele. Within his address, Professor Ndebele – who is also a Senior Research Fellow at the same Archive and Public Culture Research Initiative of which I am affiliated - reflected upon the importance of the New School but also on the contemporary moment in South Africa in general. He referred to this moment

as “the second transition”: where he said “deep-reflection” was occurring, the future and past confronting each other and citizens beginning to ask critical questions.

The launching of the New School was *not* part of UCT’s broader Africa Month Celebrations despite the fact that the New School was arguably to be a school that would innovatively and necessarily pursue the rigorous study of Africa; despite the public life of the debates around the formation of the New School and the possible disestablishment of CAS; and despite the fact that the debates and discussions around the formation of the New School, were, in the previous year, fuelled and featured within the 2011 Africa Month Panel Discussion. It therefore seemed appropriate that the launch of the New School be one of the programme’s most central features alongside the panel discussion, the launching of the book *African Studies in the Post-Colonial University* and pre-launching of Curate Africa. Although this seemed like a peculiar *exclusion* to me, I was informed by one of the people who were central to developing the Africa Month programme that the apparent exclusion was due to a lack of confirmation from the New School about their inclusion within the Africa Month programme.

Even with the establishment of the New School in 2012, the questions about how the critical study of Africa was to happen within UCT had not quite been answered. In fact, Ntsebeza argued that “a serious debate and discussion about what we understand and what we mean by African Studies at UCT has yet to happen” (Ntsebeza, 2012: 2). He argued this despite having been the mediator of the 2011 talks when debates around African Studies were intense and having helped to see to the formation of the School.

The perception that UCT still has a very long way to go before it can claim to be an African university, despite its past identity as a liberal, “open-university”, is pervasive. In fact, this perception holds for most universities in Africa but is especially high-pitched at UCT because of the continuous claim of UCT being Africa’s top university. In his article, ‘A relevant education for African development’, Francis Nyamnjoh (2004) chiefly argues that higher education institutions in Africa continue to import often irrelevant “Western” academic epistemologies and credentialisms. He argues that the manner in which they (African universities) uphold the likes of Harvard, using them as benchmarks of academic excellence as well as attempting to imitate them ensures the irrelevance of the education within postcolonial African contexts. Brenda Schmahmann, too, notes that the “Oxbridge” model of higher education still has much influence on some South African universities (Schmahmann, 2009: 17). Amongst others, Nyamnjoh has argued that in uncritically importing epistemologies and

academic practices, African alternatives and epistemologies - the silent narratives Garuba raised in the panel - continued to be marginalised (Nyamnjoh, 2004: 9). Similarly, Sithole in the panel discussion argued that the perpetuation of “tradition” within universities marginalised other forms of knowing that were vital within the postcolonial African context. To demonstrate the extent of scepticism around UCT’s transformation into an African university, Sithole quipped, at the launch, that the launch of the book featuring hers and other panelists’ critiques about the limitations of postcolonial universities (UCT in particular), showed that there was “hope” for the Western Cape and UCT after all.³²

3.5 Summary

What is extremely vital to note in the above account is how Social Anthropology and the Centre for African Studies are intricately interwoven. These two constituencies within the University of Cape Town have a complicated and long-standing history.³³ The two constituencies practically emerged at the same time within the University – through the School of Bantu Life and Languages and School of African Studies – at a time when African Studies was developed as area studies and was somewhat complicit in the development of “native policy”. However, even then, what African Studies should entail was debated. Further entanglements between Social Anthropology and CAS occurred through individuals; for instance Mugsy Spiegel’s (Social Anthropology) who both fought for the revival of an interdisciplinary African Studies at UCT in the late 1970s and formed part of the Working Group that taught a foundational course critiqued by Mamdani (1998) for its inability to sufficiently redefine the study of Africa within a postcolonial university context. Currently, Social Anthropology and CAS are two of the four sections within the New School (School of African and Gender Studies, Anthropology and Linguistics) which was launched in 2012 despite significant reservations about the New School’s ability to serve as a space that deals critically and differently with the study of Africa and amidst great debates about UCT’s African identity (and lack thereof). In fact, another important issue raised within this section centred on the questioning of whether UCT is relevant, reflective and complementary to the postcolonial African context in which it is located as well as the widespread opinion – both within and outside the university – that it is not.

³² See Volume edited by Garuba and Nhlapo (2012) for panellists’ papers.

³³ The historical links between Social Anthropology and African Studies are far more intricate than the scope of this dissertation could hold and the limited literature on the links between the two indicates that perhaps more work could be done to note histories of disciplines within Universities, similar to the works of Ntsebeza and Phillips on whom I have relied heavily for my historical account.

This section, first and foremost, attempted to historicise and contextualise UCT's engagement with the study of Africa(ns). In so doing, the imbroglio and debates which engulf UCT when questions of engaging Africa(ns) arise were illuminated. I also offer an ethnographic account of how the swirl of developments and debates around the formation of the New School and around UCT's Afropolitan ambition affected the day-to-day experience of a student operating in the departments concerned, and in deed others on campus who were aware of debates and surrounding events. The history of African Studies at UCT, the debates at different periods of African Studies' development as well as the contemporary attempts to decolonise knowledge production to suit the postcolonial African context all affect Curate Africa. Curate Africa emerged from within and against many of these histories, debates and university dynamics.

CHAPTER 4: POSITIONALITIES AND POWER RELATIONS IN THE UNIVERSITY “HOME” - “FIELD”

4.1 Introduction

After I presented two differing papers centred on preliminary contemplations concerning my research, some members of the Archive and Public Culture Research Initiative (APC) and the panel discussion in the Anthropology Southern Africa (ASNA) 2012 conference alerted me to the fact that it was unclear whether I was talking about doing research on the Curate Africa project, the project leaders or on academics at UCT. This invaluable feedback - made most explicit in subsequent private conversations – together with the advice to be more explicit about my positionality - as well as that of O’Connell and Shepherd, highlighted just how multiplex the university and people who occupy it are. Reflecting upon and inscribing this feedback and advice into my research meant constantly being mindful of this fact and to also not take terms such as “academics” for granted. The feedback further accentuated the many ways in which the project leaders and I were entwined through several networks as well as the power relations that existed between us; namely, my junior position within the university and within my research as a novice researcher.

Oyango-Ouma (2006), in his paper, ‘Practicing anthropology at home: challenges and ethical dilemmas’, allocates a section to state explicitly the different identities he occupied within his “local setting” and field almost in bullet-point form. It is in light of Oyango-Ouma’s clear naming of his different identities and in response to the feedback and advice from the APC Workshop and ASNA Conference - that this section of the dissertation was conceived. He further argues that anthropologists’ main task should be to examine the ways we are situated in relation to the people we study while keeping in mind that relationships are complex and ever-shifting in different settings (Oyango-Ouma, 2006: 259). This part of the dissertation will therefore be an exploration of some of the readily identifiable (and describable) positions I occupy in relation to the project leaders within our various overlapping networks and intellectual affiliations. This explicit stating of the different identities also serves as a means to make the reading of this dissertation easier and to reflect on my positionality as is expected in ethnographic texts. Simultaneously, the spelling out of our intersecting yet different positionalities within the university is meant to illustratively problematise simplistic understandings of notions such as “insider” “anthropology at home”, and “studying sideways”. Since the previous chapter already provided insight into the interconnections (and history) between my discipline, Social Anthropology, and CAS, this chapter will continue with background contextual information on the project leaders and descriptions of their works, the project’s key advisory board

member, Professor Bogue and the relevant research constituencies in which we are affiliated – CCA and APC. Thereafter, the overlaps, interconnections and power relations will be discussed.

PROFESSOR NICK SHEPHERD acquired his Bachelor Degree, Honours and his Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) - all in Archaeology at the University of Cape Town. His PhD (1998) was titled “Archaeology and post-Colonialism in South Africa” and he was supervised by Professor Martin Hall. What should be noted from the previous chapter is that Shepherd was a PhD student supervised by Hall - who had been implicated in Mamdani’s critique because he (Hall) was involved in the drafting of the substitute Foundation course (Ntsebeza, 2012: 14).

Shepherd is the section head of the Centre for African Studies within the School of African and Gender Studies, Anthropology and Linguistics and an Associate Professor in African Studies and Archaeology. Within CAS, he convenes the Honours and Master’s Programmes in Heritage and Public Culture and has done so for several years. He has convened, taught and co-taught other courses within CAS – some of which date back to 2000. These include “Race, Culture and Identity in Africa”, “Public Culture in Africa” and “Problematising the Study of Africa”. Although Shepherd’s academic career (as a student and subsequently academic profession) is closely tied to and shaped within UCT, his academic positions and endeavours are not limited to UCT. Shepherd has held Visiting Associate Professor positions at the University of Basel in 2009 and Brown University (2008) and from 2004 to 2005 he was a Mandela Fellow at the W.E.B Du Bois Institute at Harvard University.³⁴

In addition, Shepherd is a member of Executive Committee of the World Archaeological Congress and a founding editor of the journal *Archaeologies: Journal of the World Archaeologies Congress*. His publications centre on “the politics of archaeology in Africa, on the invention of South African prehistory, on the use of “native” labour in archaeology, and on issues of science, culture and identity in South African archaeology post-1994”.³⁵ In 2002, Shepherd won first prize in an international essay competition that advocated for a post-colonial archaeology.³⁶ Notions of rethinking and restructuring disciplines and knowledge production within archaeology in particular, is a thread in Shepherd’s work. On the self-authored biography on the APC website, Shepherd stipulated that “colonial epistemologies and decolonial knowledges in archaeology” is one of the

³⁴ Primarily extracted from Shepherd’s extensive CV which could be accessed through the CAS website: <http://www.africanstudies.uct.ac.za/default.php?pageName=shepherd.php> (accessed: 07 November 2012 at 10:38am).

³⁵ Ibid

³⁶ He was lauded by Martin Hall who recognised Shepherd’s work as “among the best in his generation” and Shepherd as “a credit to UCT”. CAS website in the description of Shepherd: <http://www.africanstudies.uct.ac.za/default.php?pageName=shepherd.php>. Besides being a significant figure trained in archaeology, and director of CAS from 1963 and Deputy Vice Chancellor of UCT 2002-2008, Hall was President of the World Archaeology Congress (1999) of which Shepherd is now closely linked.

projects on which he is working.³⁷ Many of Shepherd's publications indicate his intellectual interest in rethinking knowledge production within archaeology and (re)evaluating its methodologies and impact in post-colonial contexts, including universities. To see this intellectual inclination, one need only look at titles of his papers, such as "What future for studying the past?; heading south, looking north; why we need a post-colonial archaeology" (2002); "The Politics of Archaeology in Africa" (2002); "Archaeology Dreaming: Post-apartheid urban imaginaries and the bones of the Prestwich Street dead" (2007) and "'When the hand that holds the trowel is black': disciplinary practices of self-representation and the issue of "native" labour in archaeology" (2003).

DR SIONA O'CONNELL acquired her undergraduate degree in Fine Arts, her Master's in African Studies (2008) and was awarded a PhD in Visual Studies (2012) at UCT. Her Master's and PhD were supervised by Shepherd. Her PhD was centred on the extraordinary qualities of ordinary family photographs - particularly within the District Six context – and how these issues can help one think about issues of identity.³⁸ O'Connell was awarded a Trilateral Reconnections Project (TRP) Fellowship at Brown University in 2010, as part of her PhD. She is also a Brown International Advanced Research Institutes (BIARI) alumnus.

O'Connell was a lecturer in the Centre for African Studies (CAS) while she was undertaking her PhD. In 2011, she convened a first-year course titled "Africa: Culture, Identity and Globalisation" within CAS. The course, aimed at non-Humanities students, was designed to "introduce and develop more complex understandings of culture, identity and the challenges of globalisation that face societies in contemporary Africa" to students who would pursue careers such as Engineering or preparing themselves for a "life of professional practice" - as the course description put it³⁹. In February 2012, O'Connell joined the Centre for Curating the Archive (CCA) at the Michaelis School of Fine Arts (UCT) and currently holds the position of a "senior curator" and curator of photography in particular. Through her multi-media work, i.e. photography, dissertations, panel discussions, curation and exhibition as well as documentary, she engages with the photograph as an archive. She explores the place of the ordinary within the archive and ways to reconceptualise and deal with the history and people who had been oppressed and traumatised in the past. According to the blurb on

³⁷ Nick Shepherd on APC website: <http://www.apc.uct.ac.za/researchers/professor-nick-shepherd/>

³⁸ "In the Dark Room" on the Archival Platform website: http://www.archivalplatform.org/blog/entry/in_the_darkroom/#channel=f3c78dcee71c4cc&origin=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.archivalplatform.org&channel_path=%2Fblog%2Fentry%2Fin_the_darkroom%2F%3Ffb_xd_fragm ent%23xd_sig%3Df3739f96bb906e%26 (accessed 09 November 2012 at 8:06pm).

³⁹ CAS1001S course outline: <https://www.google.co.za/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=2&cad=rja&ved=0CDAQFjAB&url=http%3A%2F%2Fweb.uct.ac.za%2Fdepts%2Fcas%2Fdownloads%2FCAS1001S%2520Course%2520outline%25202011.docx&ei=TugeUq3DEoqBhAeZmYHwBQ&usg=AFQjCNHUPmmoG1MmEtukCnL1Aub51Xrq5Q&sig2=ixpad4ZEaPKCDShrAk9wAA&bvm=bv.51495398,d.d2k>

the CCA website⁴⁰, O’Connell’s work seeks to “shift frames from aesthetics to restorative justice to open up questions around representation, freedom, trauma, and memory in the aftermath of oppression”.⁴¹

O’Connell presented one of her projects, *Spring Queen: The Staging of the Glittering Proletariat*, as an exhibition (which was installed in the CAS Gallery from July to October 2012 then moved to the District Six Museum) as well as a documentary which featured interviews and material from research with women who worked in a textile factory and hosted an annual beauty pageant called “Spring Queen”. O’Connell was part of a panel discussion titled *Factory Seconds* which I attended as part of my research. Within this panel discussion, she described the pageants as having “flashes of freedom” while Shepherd, who was the chair of the discussion, highlighted how the “play” can also be subversive. Through *Spring Queen*, O’Connell sought to engage with the seemingly ordinariness of the factory workers’ lives, and rethink the various politics, for instance racial and corporeal politics, involved in this seemingly playful and largely aesthetic activity. These ideas are important to keep in mind throughout this dissertation for they point to the kinds of ideas and research that drive Curate Africa. Also vital to note, is the fact that O’Connell was not simply an academic, she was an artist (curator and photographer too).

CENTRE FOR CURATING THE ARCHIVES (CCA) in which O’Connell is based - is located at Hiddingh; a campus in the central business district (CBD) of Cape Town where UCT’s Michaelis School of Fine Arts is situated. This campus is geographically detached from the main (Upper, Middle and Lower Campuses) where the majority of UCT’s academic staff and students are based and operate. At the time of this research, CCA was directed by Professor Pippa Skotnes who is also a professor in Fine Arts. The CCA consists of researchers, staff members and associates who are also artists. Many of the members of CCA are actually staff members, professors and lecturers, within Fine Arts. CCA works with many kinds of collections and archival materials – found and created.⁴² Its members explore and critique these archival collections and material, they critically engage with concepts such as “archive” and “curation” and also exhibit, curate and publish around these critiques and collections. According to its website, CCA actively aims to work with “many different kinds of collections, developing curatorship as a creative site of knowledge.” Their projects, publications and courses aim, through practice, “to open up novel combinations of the historically-separated domains of the creative arts and the truth-claiming discourses of history and the social and natural sciences.” In fact, with regards to working across separated domains, some Fine Arts students are jointly

⁴⁰ CCA website <http://www.cca.uct.ac.za> (Accessed: 08 February 2013 at 22: 15)

⁴¹ *ibid*

⁴² CCA website: <http://www.cca.uct.ac.za/about/>

supervised by Professor Skotnes and Professor Hamilton (my supervisor, based in Social Anthropology) and are associates of Professor Hamilton's Archive and Public Culture Research Initiative, where I too was an associate.

ARCHIVE AND PUBLIC CULTURE RESEARCH INITIATIVE (APC) is a project linked to an interdisciplinary NRF Chair housed within Social Anthropology. As its name indicates, the APC is highly invested in interrogating the meanings, forms and work of archives and the relation between archives and public culture. Furthermore, the APC is also established as an intellectual space where critical questions about history, memory, identity and the public sphere in South Africa can be engaged.⁴³ Professor Carolyn Hamilton, who holds this NRF Chair, is also my supervisor as well as the supervisor and co-supervisor of several other postgraduate students. She co-supervises students primarily-registered within Social Anthropology, co-supervises a number of Fine Arts as well as students in other departments such as Music School, African Studies, and English. In fact, Grant McNulty from Curate Africa's partner, McNulty Consulting, was also a completing PhD (Social Anthropology) student supervised by Professor Hamilton at the time of my research. (As entanglements would have it, I told McNulty about Curate Africa after my initial meeting with O'Connell and thereafter, he and O'Connell connected.) Another Master's' student co-supervised by Professor Hamilton happened to be a fellow ex-CAS student and was co-supervised by Shepherd. Shepherd, in turn, is loosely associated to the APC as an "Associate Research Fellow".

4.2 Overlaps

Intersections between Shepherd, O'Connell and Bagues

The Centre for African Studies and Africana Studies at Brown University are key spaces in which some of the academic work and interests of O'Connell, Shepherd and project advisory board member, Bagues, germinate and thrive. Their work overlaps in various ways and together they form a tight network. By the time Curate Africa was established, the three of them had already begun the task of attempting to re-envision Africa(ns) and the study of Africa(ns) – on the continent and beyond – in several ways. This is done through their scholarship but also through outputs such as small projects and curation – to which O'Connell and Bagues are inclined.

⁴³ APC website: <http://www.apc.uct.ac.za/about/>

There are several events, workshops and projects in which they have been involved together, however, the August 2012 Bogues lecture series and the 2011 *thinking Africa differently* workshop are particularly noteworthy. (I was present at the workshop as a curious participant interested in the work of CAS, while I attended the Bogues lecture as part of my research.) Furthermore, Shepherd and Bogues have co-supervised and/or mentored several CAS students together, including O'Connell. The Trilateral Reconnections Project (TRP) Fellowship which O'Connell was awarded is in fact a project co-founded by Shepherd and Bogues, through their respective departments - CAS at UCT and African Studies at Brown - as well as in collaboration with the Centre for Caribbean Thought at the University of West Indies.

PROFESSOR ANTHONY BOGUES who is the Lyn Crost Professor of Social Sciences and Critical Theory in the department of Africana Studies, Director of the Centre for the Study of Slavery and Justice at Brown University has also been an Honorary Professor in CAS since 2007.⁴⁴ During my research, Bogues was also a visiting scholar at the Rhode Island School of Design and a Visiting Professor of the Humanities at Addis Ababa University in Ethiopia (one of the academic institutions which were partners with Curate Africa). Alongside his academic titles, he is a writer and curator.

From 31 July to 22 August 2012, the seminar series, *The Public Lectures by Professor Anthony Bogues*, took place in Cape Town. The official program – circulated via emails which I received from both O'Connell and CAS – consisted of four lectures. Professor Bogues gave an additional seminar at CAS and also participated in the Curate Africa Workshop. The public lectures were organised by O'Connell through the Michaelis School of Fine Art, CAS, CCA and the Centre for Humanities Research at University of the Western Cape (UWC). The APC logo was placed at the bottom of the invitation poster too. Shepherd played an integral role and was thanked at the beginning of each lecture for helping make the series possible. On the invitation poster and within the seminars, it was noted that Bogues' four major projects in progress were: “a political/philosophical project on questions of the human, freedom, human emancipation and the black intellectual tradition”; co-curating an exhibition on Haitian Art; “editing a series of monographs on the history of Haitian art” as well as completing an intellectual biography of political activist and social theorist CLR James and the Caribbean intellectual tradition.

⁴⁴ A succinct version of the academic biography of Bogues can be found on the Africana Studies section of the Brown university website: http://brown.edu/Departments/Africana_Studies/people/bogues_anthony.html (accessed 03 October 2013)

Underlying all four lectures was Bogues' suggestion that the western archive – the body of knowledge that has dominated in the past 500 years – had possibly been exhausted. Bogues argued for alternative archives to be sourced and alternative histories to be foregrounded - both of which he saw as pivotal in the rethinking of Africa, freedom (beyond political emancipation), and even the conception/imagining of the “human” from within Africa. Through the series and his projects, Bogues relayed that he was attempting to figure out “ways of thinking of the human condition” in relation to his belief that Africa and the African Diaspora had become important sites where questions about the human condition were emerging and could be explored in light of the rest of humanity.

His first lecture, “The Arts of the Imagination: freedom and story of Haitian Art”, was hosted on the evening of the 31st July in the ISANG Annex Gallery alongside Haitian artist, Edouard Duval Carrie. What Professor Bogues introduced as a “scaffolding of narrative” around Haitian Art, was a discussion about how Haitian Art narrates a certain kind of history and how its contents and conditions around the art could perhaps be understood as a re-possession of a disavowed history that is not mainstream History (academic field). Similarly, his last public lecture, “Art and Historiography: reframing Museums and Curation”, was centred on Haitian Art and its impact on previous framing of the Haitian Revolution (1791-1803). The last lecture was hosted on UCT's Hiddingh Campus at lunchtime on 22 August 2012 and, similar to the first, it was attended primarily by UCT art students. Apart from the pervasive argument about the necessity of different archives, he raised two other essential points about curation and anthropology. On curation, he argued that curation allows for a pause and space to acknowledge artworks and the self (positionality and the human) while simultaneously illuminating things often neglected. On anthropology, he asserted that the ethnographic gaze of the museum has a relationship to the reading of African Art. He argued that Haitian Art debunked the idea of African art or art produced by Africans being naïve, without thought or primitive. In fact, the Haitian Art produced after the revolution - by ordinary Haitians such as fishermen and carpenters - gave voice to and accounted for history and ordinary people's thinking about their society. Haitian Art also asked for anthropology to be an anthropology that truly accounted for human *experiences*.

Bogues' second lecture, “Black Intellectuals, Critical Theory, Archives and Freedom” took place on 08 August in the CAS seminar room while the third, “The black radical tradition and the politics of the human: musings on a radical politics of our times”, was hosted at the UWC. Within the second and third lectures he explored the works and trends of black intellectuals; the academic

space which limits academic radicalism as well as the politics of the human and ideas of freedom versus emancipation.⁴⁵

The workshop, *Thinking Africa and The Diaspora Differently: Theories, Practices, Imaginaries*, took place 13-15 December 2011 and was hosted by the Centre for African Studies. The workshop formed part of a collaborative project between a range of partners including CAS, Chimurenga, the Africana Studies Department (Brown University), the Centre for Caribbean Thought (University of West Indies) and the Faculty of Humanities at Addis Ababa University. Shepherd and Bogues were key in organising the workshop. Participants ranged from scholars (including Bogues, O'Connell and Shepherd) to activists to artists who were already thinking about and doing work that addressed the challenges and questions posed by the workshop. The workshop was premised on the assertion that there existed a "crisis in the general history of thought and knowledge production". The central challenge posed through the workshop was that of breaking away from conventional academic and disciplinary frameworks and ways of working in order "to think, practice, perform and imagine Africa in new ways". Underlying the many questions the workshop intended to explore, was the assertion that a critical inquiry of this sort and debate on knowledge, the disciplines and the university were overdue particularly in the "contexts of the aftermath and afterlives of colonialism/apartheid". This summary of the workshop was extracted from the program of the workshop that I had kept after attending some parts of the workshop.

On the first day of the workshop, on the panel 'Histories of the impossible/epistemically excluded archives', Professor Bogues presented a paper titled "Writing a history of the impossible: the Haitian Revolution, Africa and the reframing the African diaspora". Shepherd presented "Undisciplining Archaeology" within the panel 'Disciplinary entrapments – undisciplining "African Studies"' and O'Connell presented "Whispers in the darkroom, towards a theory of oppression through the family album of Roger Street, district six" within the panel 'Film, Photography and the archive of the ordinary'.

The workshop bore much resemblance to Curate Africa and comprised the work of the three project members in numerous ways. In the first instance, O'Connell, Bogues and Shepherd

⁴⁵ Bogues argued that scholars and black radicals should look at the Western archive in relation to histories, time and location and thus within specific context. He explored the works of "black radicals" such as Cabral (on colonialism as a negation of history), Fanon (as a theorist of freedom and the human) and Angela Davies (on the conditions of freedom). Through his exploration of black intellectuals' theories of freedom and emancipation, Bogues asserted that social scientists' task was to look out for what he called freedom practices – that which I interpreted to equate to O'Connell's "flashes of freedom". He further argued that the university was a difficult space to work within because it was a space primarily concerned with production of knowledge not humans per se.

cooperatively shaped and participated within it. Secondly, both the workshop and project began from the understanding that the current and historical ways in which Africa and Africans (including the African diaspora) have been theorised, conceptualised and imagined are problematic. Furthermore, both were attempts to find new ways of engaging with Africa as well as highlighting the alternative ways of seeing and engaging that already existing. The themes within the workshop, the titles of the panel discussions and the papers presented by the project members, coincided with many of the concerns within the project. Ideas of finding and exploring new ways of knowing, the use of the imagination, dealing with history and archives, and exploring the ordinary, popular culture as well as subjectivity were all notions found within Curate Africa too. In addition, the workshop and project themes were fundamental in the academic works of Bogues, O'Connell and Shepherd.⁴⁶

My overlaps and interconnections with Curate Africa

I took an elective, "Problematizing the Study of Africa", which is the course offered in CAS; convened by Garuba and co-taught by Shepherd. Within his section, 'Disciplinary knowledge and the study of Africa', Shepherd focused particularly on the epistemic foundations of archaeology, the idea of "undisciplining" oneself as well as the epistemic conflicts that have been involved in UCT's African Studies debates. Within the course we were asked to not only think about our own disciplinary disciplining but also the politics and complexities of knowledge production. Besides reading four of Shepherd's texts that critiqued and explored the production of archaeological texts as well as JM Coetzee's *Writing White* to gain perspective on the making of South African pre-history, we engaged with the Mamdani Affair and two of Mamdani's 1998 papers published in *Social Dynamics* and cited within the previous chapter. In addition, we discussed the CAS Saga and ideas of UCT's Afropolitanism.

Having taken this elective, I was an ex-student of Shepherd, as was O'Connell. The fact that I had chosen this elective outside of my own discipline (in a degree that is not interdisciplinary) foregrounds my personal interests in the academic work offered in CAS. Furthermore, my choice of elective, "Problematizing the Study of Africa", further foregrounds my intellectual interests in the

⁴⁶ Bogues' paper focused on the disavowal of the Haitian Revolution within mainstream history - as did his seminar series and curatorial work - and the *reframing* of Africa and the Africa Diaspora. Similarly, O'Connell's discussion placed emphasis the oppressive quality of the archive within ordinary. Her work on *Spring Queen*, conversely spoke to the liberating and identity-making qualities within the seemingly ordinary acts. Shepherd's work on "undisciplining archaeology" was a thinking through of ways that archaeological and disciplinary knowledges are constructed and ways in which they can be deconstructed and restricted in order for new ways of knowing to highlighted and generated.

study of Africa beyond this Master's research. In fact, I have drawn heavily on the literature and conversations within the course and have applied some of these within my anthropological work (including this dissertation). My understandings of the debates around the "African University", my general grasp of the history of scholars from varying social science disciplines studying Africa and, more specifically, the history of UCT with regards to African Studies has certainly been shaped by my encounter with Shepherd's teachings and CAS. In quite a substantive way, it is this engagement with CAS and Shepherd that led to my interest in Curate Africa since the ending of the coursework component of my Master's degree (2011) left me wondering about the capacity for academic debates and theories to move beyond seminars. Curate Africa therefore became of great interest to me because it seemed like an example of those valuable steps that academics are able to take in order to move discussions and theories into the spaces occupied by those they "study" and debate about. Thus CAS, including the work of Shepherd, was a space – both in the physical and intellectual sense – where my intellectual interests overlapped with those of the project leaders and Bogues. Additionally, the study of Africa(ns) and thinking through what such studies may look like within and beyond disciplines was also an intellectual thread between us.

CAS was the narrow space which tied us while UCT was one of the broader ones. Even though O'Connell was principally based at a different campus (Hiddingh Campus) while Shepherd and I were on Upper Campus, these were part of UCT in Cape Town and there was traffic between the two campuses, i.e. our "terms of engagement" meeting (more of that later), the seminar by and meeting with Bogues were on Hiddingh while O'Connell's exhibition, her panel discussion (*Factory Seconds*) and other Bogues seminars were on Upper Campus. Moreover, although I was only a Master's student, all three of us had acquired all our degrees from UCT within the Humanities Faculty. Given the fact that UCT is an academic institution, we were also bonded together within academia - as a cultural field (Guillory 1993).

In 2012, Shepherd and I became part of the same New School but, also, the complex histories of our respective disciplines, namely Social Anthropology and CAS, formed part of that association. Shepherd and I are also associated with the APC, although he is more loosely associated and had not been at any of the workshops I attended, including the one where I received feedback on my preliminary research on Curate Africa. My association with the APC indirectly reinforced my link to O'Connell since Skotnes, Director of the Centre for Curating the Archive within which O'Connell was based - worked closely with my supervisor, Professor Hamilton, on co-supervision endeavours and

other intellectual projects centred on matters such as curation, art and archives. In fact, Skotnes is also a research fellow within the APC.

4.3 Power Relations: Seniority of the Project Leaders

Despite the various ties between us, however, simply describing this research as “anthropology at home”, “auto-ethnography” Strathern (1987) or “studying horizontally” (Hannerz 2006) seems an inadequate description for the many ways O’Connell and Shepherd were senior to me, even within my own research. Within academia, they had higher qualifications, held more esteemed academic positions and had more academic experience than I did. They had more cultural capital which therefore made them senior to me. Both O’Connell and Shepherd had acquired their PhDs and had even been awarded fellowships and research positions within other academic institutions. O’Connell and Shepherd both held formal academic positions – O’Connell as a senior curator in the CCA and Shepherd as the head of the African Studies section as well as an Associate Professor. Both of them had lecturing experience and had convened courses. I, on the other hand, had only tutored, mentored and occupied the role of a research assistant within social anthropology. Therefore, my status, within academia in general and UCT in particular, was undoubtedly ranked lower than the statuses of the Shepherd and O’Connell (my supposed participants).

Bogues, O’Connell and Shepherd had also all established, facilitated and participated in various other weighty intellectual projects such as, inter alia, the TRP, “thinking Africa and the diaspora differently”, the Bogues seminar series and O’Connell’s *Spring Queen*. Moreover, Shepherd and O’Connell were the founders and project leaders of Curate Africa while Bogues was their project advisor. Their seniority therefore extended into their roles as project leaders since as project leaders and advisors they applied their academic *expertise*. On the other hand, as it will be demonstrated in the succeeding chapter, as project leaders Shepherd and O’Connell had the authority to determine with whom they wanted to associate Curate Africa and to what extent. Furthermore, they could stipulate the terms under which they were willing to engagement with such a person/institution. Therefore, as a researcher hoping to do research on their project, I had less bargaining power about how I could engage with Curate Africa than they had.

It was through this sharing of the same geographical and intellectual spaces yet occupying a relatively low status within these spaces that I also cannot call this “studying horizontally/sideways” (Hannerz 2006). The playing field was certainly not even. Ulf Hannerz notes that the positions

occupied by anthropologists in the field (whether “at home” or elsewhere) are seldom, if ever, clear-cut. Despite the widely-acknowledged tendency for power relations between the anthropological researcher and the people she researches to be complex, sometimes inverted and subverted (within even the most orthodox-seeming, far-away fields), the possibilities of there being complicated power relations within research deemed “anthropology at home” tends to be undermined or disregarded. That is to say, the idea that the anthropologist “at home” is on an equal playing (researching) field tends to be assumed, taken for granted or overstated (Weston 1997, Narayan 1993). Similarly, Becker, Boonzaier and Owen (2005) assert that most of the literature on “anthropology at home” is uncritical and assumes that anthropologists engage in more equal and intersubjective relationships (*ibid*). They further argue that despite the vast literature on the field and an increase in literature and research “at home”, there remains an absence of literature on the positionality of anthropologists who reside in and share long-term commitment to the same society as their “subjects”. The authors assert that what is missing are “reflections on ethics and power in the field ‘at home’” (Becker *et al*, 2005: 123).

There is another element to the research that problematizes the connotations associated with being “at home”. This element is closely linked to the power relations described above as well as the politics within our shared academic space. The notions of comfort and intimacy (with subject matter and participants) that are associated with being “at home” and striven for by anthropologists who immerse themselves, are problematized. Terms such as “anthropology at home” overemphasise ideas of closeness. These terms, therefore, fail to capture the distancing, complications and outsider-qualities accompanying and caused by the project leaders and I sharing geographical and intellectual spaces. Much of this distancing and the complications will be explored in detail in the next chapter. However, a brief discussion on the matter is necessary to warrant the above assertion.

I may have shared geographical and intellectual spaces with the project leaders but this certainly did not make me an insider or even an immersed participant-observer within Curate Africa. In fact, participant-observation and therefore immersion within Curate Africa collapsed somewhat. Initially, when my research began, I seemed to be gaining insight into the project through participation (although my participation in the university continued). I helped map Africa on the Baxter floor with two Curate Africa employees and I was privy to the draft and final versions of the video and pamphlet that were eventually showcased at the pre-launch and made public over the internet. In fact, together with advisory board members, Skotnes and Bagues, I was asked to comment on these draft versions. I also became part of O’Connell’s mailing list for events such as Bagues’ seminar

series and attended the seminars for research purposes. Furthermore, I gained access to people associated with the project whom I could interview through the project leaders (i.e. the CityVarsity Team and Professor Bogues). And I was in close proximity with Grant McNulty from McNulty Consulting. However, despite these overwhelming markers of close proximity to the project leaders and Curate Africa, I was determinedly distanced (and distant) from Curate Africa. The “terms of engagement” meeting – to be discussed in the succeeding chapter - brought the distance between Curate Africa and me into sharp relief and it was itself an act of marking the parameters of my research.

4.4 Complex Citizenship

In light of the project leaders’ abilities to distance me from the project, despite our multiple forms of interconnectedness, it seems that Narayan (1993) may be correct in asserting that there are “degrees of insiderness”. Consequently, it seems that Oyango-Ouma’s call for the concept of home to be interrogated is also appropriate. In the discussions of my preliminary findings in the APC workshop, the phrases “insider-outsider” and “outsider-insider” were offered as ways to begin thinking about this positionality. In September 2012, at the ASNA 2012 Conference, participants emphasised the fact that strong dichotomies between insiderness and outsidership, native anthropologists and non-native anthropologists tend not to be useful in the (South) African context.

It is in light of the inadequacy of terms such as “anthropology at home”, both in illuminating the complexities of the notion of home as well as scholarship conducted in spaces where one is an inhabitant or at least participant, that I adopt the term “citizen anthropologist” within this dissertation. As Becker, Boonzaier and Owen (2005) made apparent, citizen anthropology, unlike notions such as “anthropology at home”, allows for an exploration of the different positionalities, responsibilities, power relations, expectations and inscribed ethics to be explored. Furthermore, the term does not assume an even playing field between the participants and researchers, nor does it assume that either can occupy single positionalities, i.e. participant and researcher, at any given time. It is in the context of such allowances that this dissertation needs to be further understood and engaged. These very power relations, expectations and cross-cutting positionalities within the university space have come out quite strongly within my research.

4.5 Summary

The multiple ties between Curate Africa, its project leaders and I explored within this chapter underscored a sharing of geographical space as well as intellectual interests. They underscored how even the title “academic” required unpacking in order for the various positionalities to be demonstrated and how our intellectual affiliations and interests intersected and overlapped in various ways. These overlaps, however, did not mean that the project leaders and I possessed the same cultural capital within the academic space. Within the academic space and within my own research I was a novice researcher who occupied a junior level to the project members in multiple ways. The last noteworthy matter highlighted within this chapter was how our intersecting networks simultaneously brought us into close proximity but also allowed for distancing between myself and the project. I will expand on this matter in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 5: THE TERMS OF ENGAGING...ME

5.1 Introduction

In this chapter I primarily argue that the project leaders' ideas around engaging with Africa differently, particularly within scholarship, informed how they engaged with me. I argue that the way the project leaders meticulously negotiated my research, made clear their rejection of the kind of anthropological gaze their project aimed to work against. Likewise, the project leaders' (and Bogues') intimate knowledge of and experiences with anthropology together with their perceptions of the discipline's general relationship and engagement with Africa(ns) informed how they negotiated the parameters of my research. Curate Africa's attempts to imagine *against* objectifying and conventional ways of engaging Africa and constructing African subjectivity through scholarship were imprinted in their engagements with me as an anthropological researcher.

From the beginning of our conversations about my research in April 2012, the project leaders accepted that I was an anthropology student at Master's level at UCT and that my research entailed fieldwork and participant-observation. However, their explicit consent to my doing research on Curate Africa – as offered within the terms of engagement meeting called for by the project leaders - came with carefully constructed (and informed) "terms of engagement". These terms rejected the idea of me being a "fly on the wall" and demanded participation that critiqued my communicated desire to maintain a distance from the conceptualising of the project. These terms also rejected the idea of my research turning them, the project leaders, into informants when they themselves were empowered, qualified and experienced researchers. In rejecting and avoiding being turned into informants or my subjects of study, the project leaders explicitly stipulated that I would not be privy to their intimate and private spaces of Curate Africa nor themselves. In my research I was only to use those parts of the project and the project leaders that are "publically-accessible". Thus, despite the permission, they refused to endorse what they saw as an anthropological study that could potentially turn them into subjects of an ethnographic gaze.

5.2 Negotiation of Terms of Engagement before the meeting of the 13th June

The conversations around our terms of engagement began in my initial encounters with Curate Africa (in person and via email). I contacted O'Connell via email after vaguely hearing about Curate

Africa through my supervisor. Even before my initial meeting with O'Connell on 12 April 2012 in her office at Hiddings, she expressed the view that there were several opportunities to theorise the project. In that first meeting, she and I discussed the possibility of me doing my research on Curate Africa. She explained, with much enthusiasm, that Curate Africa was a project still being conceptualised. During the meeting, O'Connell gave me a confidential draft document explaining and summarising Curate Africa. The contents within this document served as the draft from which the website, video and pamphlets were shaped. Feeling like this was *the* project, I left O'Connell's office hopeful and infected with her excitement. It is with this enthusiasm that I read some of the document in the short ride back to Upper Campus - where *my* academic life was based.

After discussing what little I knew about the project with my supervisor, I sent O'Connell an email initiating a conversation around what I called the "terms and conditions" of my research⁴⁷. In this email, I expressed that "I cannot come into the project with the intention of helping [them] shape it". I expressed how this would require me to "observe more than I participate". What I asked for was permission to do research on the "start-up" of the project i.e. looking at how the virtual gallery was to be created and exploring the networks that were to be established in order to make the calls for photographs possible around the continent. Furthermore, taking my cue from O'Connell's mention of there being various schools of thought within the project, I mentioned that my research would explore these too. This would essentially make Curate Africa my "object of study".

I had made explicit mention of observation taking preference over participation – the kind of conceptualising participation they envisioned - because in my discussion with O'Connell, the extent to which the project was in its infancy was made clear and she mentioned how I could be a part of it by contributing to its conceptual development. O'Connell's vision of my research immediately asked me to reflect upon the complexity that would arise from being so conceptually entangled with the very project whose concepts I was hoping to study. I felt that to purposefully entangle myself conceptually in conceptualising the project would potentially complicate the process of deciphering and reflecting upon my own positionality and ideas especially within the analysis of ethnographic data. Therefore, I started out seeking to do as classical and orthodox an ethnography as possible. I imagined classical and orthodox in a Malinowskian sense: where I was to try to ascertain what my "objects of study" did and why. Of course, in the case of this research, this would require, firstly an attempt to defamiliarise myself with the university and my "informants". This process of defamiliarising myself with the space I myself inhabited in itself made my research stray from the

⁴⁷ Email sent to O'Connell 18th April 2012

classical and orthodox from the beginning. Secondly, as I quickly discovered after commencing my research, "immersion" in the lives of those involved with Curate Africa and the activities of Curate Africa was not quite possible in the classical sense. Moreover, there were no routinized Curate Africa activities in which to immerse myself.

In response to my email initiating the terms and conditions of our engagement, O'Connell invited me to a meeting, 25 April 2012, where the project leaders had planned to meet with my fellow student Grant McNulty with whom they were trying to work and eventually partnered. In this meeting, the four of us - the two project leaders, McNulty and me - sat around the wooden table in the middle of Shepherd's office. The meeting started with a very brief discussion about my intentions for research. I reiterated (as I had mentioned in a preceding email) my intentions to study the project in its start-up phase and look at some of the ideas that were guiding and shaping the project. The project leaders also reiterated that they were in their conceptual phase. It was during this discussion that Shepherd first asked me to problematise "observation". The project leaders mentioned that I could possibly do research on literature around topics such as "visual regimes". I do not believe I responded to this suggestion, although in my head, I wondered whether this could be considered contributing conceptually to their project, a position I that I had resisted.

Shortly after the brief exchange around the possibilities of me doing research on Curate Africa, the discussion turned to the logistics of Curate Africa. For the rest of the meeting, I sat quietly jotting down notes as they, the project leaders and McNulty, spoke about and thought through matters such as their possible partners, including UCT; the logo and the virtual gallery; how the project was to be an exercise in rethinking the role of the archivist and dwelled on how to incentivise the submission of photographs. I sat quietly writing - as if taking minutes to a meeting that did not involve me personally nor need my input (even if I had been able to make sense of everything quickly enough to formulate an opinion). McNulty, on the other hand, had much to offer in the conversations around social media and the website: his area of expertise. As they spoke and exchanged ideas, all I could offer was my out-of-my-depth silence and note-taking. In that meeting, my status as a novice researcher was underscored as well as the fact I had little knowledge of the project and therefore could not contribute to discussion. Near the end of the meeting, Shepherd made mention of how weird and creepy it was for me to have sat there, in silence saying nothing.

Between these initial encounters with the project leaders and the official "terms of engagement" meeting on the 13th of June, the negotiation of our "terms of engagement" continued to be hinted

at. For instance, in one email exchange, I offered to write the minutes to meetings. I made the offer because I imagined I would eventually need to transcribe the (taped) meetings but also so that I did not feel as if I contributed nothing at all. Despite the uncertainty of how we were to engage, I was given permission by the project leaders and Social Anthropology department to do my research on Curate Africa.

While some of mentions about the way we were going to interact were exchanged directly between the project leaders and myself, mostly via emails, some of these ideas were discussed with and through my supervisor too. For instance: One morning, only a few days after the project had been pre-launched and I consequently had requested a debriefing of the event from the project leaders, I walked through the door that led me to the lobby space where my supervisor's office was located. I walked in with my earphones plugged into my ears expecting to find the usual: a slightly ajar supervisor's door that let me know that she was present and our meeting could begin soon. Instead I found Shepherd sitting on the old chair, closest to the door. His presence on the seat kept the door wide-open. I vacated the lobby space as soon as my supervisor and I had agreed to meet later.⁴⁸ When I spoke to my supervisor at our meeting later on in the day, she pointed out that Shepherd had, again, questioned my role and pushed for me to participate. According to the feedback given by my supervisor, the project leaders felt that more participation was surely necessary especially at the level of studying I was in.

My supervisor therefore became an indirect form of engagement between the project leaders and I. She – the key person who officially⁴⁹ plays the role of guiding a student in her research and is therefore, usually, instrumental in shaping the research - became another channel through which my research was being negotiated by the project leaders. Furthermore, or rather perhaps, this communication to me through my supervisor was also, more broadly, a communication with my discipline (social anthropology) about its methodologies.

⁴⁸ Seeing my supervisor sitting in front of Shepherd, in the chair she usually sits in when I am in meeting with her - reminded me just how much Shepherd and I shared the same geographical and intellectual spaces. The fact that they sat as co-supervisors to another Master's student who sat in the corner of the office, and whom I had previously attended African Studies classes with, drew my attention to just how entangled me and my "object of study" and "participants" were. They were not sitting as my supervisor and my ex-lecturer-come-research-participant but as independently-affiliated academics occupying different positions within the university space.

⁴⁹ Documents such as the Memorandum of Understanding as well as the requirement that a supervisor approves of a dissertation before it is handed in, are but some of the things that make this role official.

5.3 Terms of Engagement Meeting

On the 13th June 2012, the project leaders and I had a formal “Terms of Engagement” meeting in O’Connell’s office. The proposal for such a meeting was made by Shepherd in response to me asking whether a video recording had been made of the pre-launch and if I could begin setting up interviews/chats with them in order to discuss how, according to them, the pre-launch had gone⁵⁰. Also, in this email was a request to talk to the project leaders to find out how the project began. This meeting was to be our second official meeting together - with both project leaders and me present - and it was the first one formally set-up to discuss how we planned to engage with each other. Retrospectively, this meeting was actually about what shape of my research the project leaders could and could not allow to take place.

For the meeting, I went equipped with a voice recorder and the notes that I had written the night before⁵¹ - both of which I ended up not using. I arrived a little early to find O’Connell in her office. When Shepherd arrived, a little after 10:30, he and O’Connell had a quick catch-up and then attention was directed to the matter at hand: our “terms of engagement”.

Shepherd, who sat back comfortably in his chair with his foot crossed over his knee, led the discussion. Shepherd began by professing that he had opted for this meeting to be his response to my request for one-on-one interviews because when my request came, he was trying to imagine a way that we could engage. After much contemplation, he realised that the only way he saw himself comfortable with letting my research happen is if my research explored the “public Nick”⁵² and, consequently, the “public Siona” and “public” aspects of Curate Africa. This meant - as I understood it⁵³ - that they had granted me permission to use any publicly-accessible material regarding themselves and the project. According to these terms, I did not have access to meetings or private discussions where confidential matters and personal feelings were aired, freely. However, I could record and use interviews as well as the workshop⁵⁴ that was to be held in August and attended by the partners and stakeholders of Curate Africa (including Bogues). In these spaces, they agreed, I

⁵⁰ Email sent to both project leaders on the 31st May 2012.

⁵¹ These notes were meant to help me navigate my way through the meeting. In these notes, I reiterated that my research was about exploring concepts of “curate” and “Africa”. I listed the methods I planned on using, my ethical considerations, my personal interests in doing this research, my requests and the question: “What can I do for you?”

⁵² He referred to himself as Nick hence the switch in address.

⁵³ The following day I sent the project leaders a summary of my understandings of the terms as per my supervisor’s advice and there were no objections to this understanding.

⁵⁴ This offer was later revoked based on the discomfort caused by my “fly on the wall” method.

would be free to "do ethnography". Beyond these specifically specified activities (and spaces), the project leaders said that it was also my ethical prerogative to distinguish "private" from "public".

A few reasons for their insistence on my research using only their "public" personas were offered during the course of the meeting. These reasons were later added upon in the few times when the project leaders and I crossed paths in the university as well as in a meeting I had requested with Bogues on 22 August 2012. In this brief meeting conducted in his temporary office in the basement of the Old Medical Building on Hiddingh Campus, I explicitly asked about the reasons my presence was not welcome at the workshop - a decision to which he contributed. (Also, discussed in this meeting was his own engagement with doing ethnography, him pointing out that perhaps Curate Africa in its conceptual state did not lend itself to participant-observation as well as his conception of "fields of enquiry" - which he preferred to stringent disciplinary modes of enquiry⁵⁵.)

There were two overarching reasons for their (including Bogues) insistence. The first was that meetings and private discussions were meant to be spaces where the project leaders were "trying things out" or "thinking things through". My presence would hinder them because they would constantly know that I was there, taking note of their discussions and thought processes with the intention of analysing them. Knowledge of my presence would, as Bogues added in our meeting, hinder them from discussing and even disagreeing freely. Shepherd expressed his discomfort with the tendency for researchers - not just anthropologists - to think they have the right to take information from people and then leave when they are satisfied. He likened this way of doing research to "plunder".

The second overarching point was that since I had no stake in the project and essentially nothing more to offer than my silence and note-taking, I assumed the position of a "fly on the wall". Bogues later described my position as one where I saw the project with "God's eye" because of there was no space for me to participate. The project leaders explicitly noted that my presence in meetings was not only disconcerting, "unnatural" and inconveniencing, it was also not valuable. They pointed out that having me in meetings was time-consuming because instead of just dealing with what needed to be dealt with during meetings, they would spend time attending to me and my work. O'Connell also pointed out that most of the time they spoke over the phone anyway so I would not be privy to many of their "meetings" and conversations. Thus even my exclusion in this sense would not

⁵⁵ In anticipation of his visit I had begun engaging with his work. One of his papers, co-authored with Geri Augusto, was centred on the idea that the likes of African Studies must be "fields of enquiry" and not disciplines with disciplinary pitfalls, and protocols that drive questions (Bogues and Augusto, 2004).

necessarily be a conscious decision but a matter of resolving matters as they reared their heads and as efficiently as possible.

Throughout the meeting the project leaders asked whether I understood the terms being stipulated and whether I was okay with them. I kept saying that I did understand. Also, disagreeing was not a favourable option because I was not eager to start looking for another research project⁵⁶. Closer to the end of the meeting, Shepherd said he was worried that these terms of engagement might leave the ethnographic part of my research a bit too thin. I appreciated that concern, for it had been mine too. Shepherd and O'Connell both highlighted how these terms of engagement were important for my write-up. This was said almost as a way of comforting me. The suggestion was accompanied by O'Connell, telling me that there would be a Workshop around August and this would be a great space for me to do ethnography. She added that Bogues would be in the country for a month before the Workshop and it would be vital to follow and speak to him.

When the meeting was officially concluded, I said my “thank you”, picked up the notepad I had not even glanced at since the meeting began and I left Shepherd and O'Connell to the discussion that began as I closed the door behind me. I made my way to one of the benches in the Company Gardens – the city-park close to Hiddingh Campus - to write all I could remember in my A6 hardcover notebook. I pondered over the conversation. Many striking points had been raised. Amidst these was Shepherd's expressed discomfort at the idea of being “Informant X” within my project. He spoke of him and O'Connell being “past” being informants. Also, he stated that had I been in CAS, inserting myself in the research would have been something that happens from the beginning and at the forefront of my research. This insertion would go “beyond reflexivity”.

There was much to deliberate upon for the project leaders had not just dealt with my immediate research but they questioned –and asked me to question - anthropological methods through my project. How does one write about people without constructing them “informants” or participants? What does it mean to present “public” parts of Curate Africa and its project leaders? How do I separate the “public” from the “private” when I share the same University and intellectual spaces with the project leaders? These were but some of the questions that kept surfacing through my research.

⁵⁶ The fact that I was already in the middle of my second year of Master's and it had taken me more than a year to consolidate a research topic placed me under time pressure. Besides the pressure to complete my Master's degree in the expected time of two years, there was also the fear that as suitable a research topic would not be easy to find.

5.4 Engaging with the Terms

When I sat on the bench in Company Gardens scribbling down all I could remember about the terms of engagement, these terms of engagement did not seem like they had many implications. I thought that the forthcoming Workshop, the interviews as well as Bogues' seminar series would suffice in giving me insight into Curate Africa. Even if only just. It when I began explaining the terms to my supervisor – and she kept asking me to elaborate on what things like “public” entailed - that the implications began making themselves known. Also, the use of the “public” personas of the project leaders and the project itself, seemed relatively easy to understand until I began questioning where the public and private ends if I inhabit the same academic space as my participants. Firstly, I had past encounters with Shepherd in CAS as well as the initial encounters with the project leaders (including my first meeting with O'Connell and the meeting of the 25th April) to fall back on. Would it be unethical to use one's own memory (before the terms of engagement were stipulated)? Although distinct details within the initial meetings, the details of the draft document upon which the website and video were based and details of the draft videos and pamphlets could not form part of the dissertation, they could not go without mention either.

Secondly, the distinction between private and public became increasingly difficult to make the more I mentioned doing my research on the project to people who knew the project leaders. Naturally, there were conversations around the idea of curating Africa as well as the project leaders themselves. There were also pieces of information and opinions offered about both the project and the project leaders. Besides not being able to attend meetings and the workshop, one of the most trying implications of this term of engagement was having people like McNulty in incredibly close proximity but not being able to use simply any parts of our discussions that he was privy to as a project partner. One tactic that I found to deal with this term was to use resources such as the internet (websites and social media in particular) and formal interviews with the likes of the CityVarsity Team to corroborate any information used. Searching for ways to corroborate private pieces of information with publically-accessible information seemed the conniving option taken by the researcher whose gate-keeper denied her access. Thus in one sense, I knew exactly what it meant to distinguish the private from the public. However, in another sense, because the project leaders and I were in such close proximity (geographically and intellectually speaking) for the duration of my research, it proved to be quite difficult to make this distinction clearly. Furthermore, some of the much appreciated pieces of information helped contextualise the project and its leaders - even if most of the context had to be omitted for the sake of ethical obligations to the project leaders.

What was at first a second tactic became more than a tactic. This was my decision to use the material surrounding my interaction with Curate Africa as my “data”. In *this* aspect of Curate Africa, I was very much a participant observer, though in an unusual way especially since I was a participant who was not taking a role in conceptualising their project. The “terms of engagement” thus became the substance of my ethnography.

Anthropological Terms

The phrase “terms of engagement” was first used by Shepherd in his proposal of the meeting. He preferred “terms of engagement” as opposed to the term “gate-keeping” that I had habitually used to refer to the meeting in a later discussion. In the terms of engagement meeting, in addition to expressing that he did not wish to be “difficult”, Shepherd made mention of the fact that what he was doing was the opposite of “gate-keeping”. He qualified this assertion by stating that in fact what he was doing was encouraging me to be a participant.

Over and above being a critique of my methodology and illustration of how knowledgeable the project leaders were of anthropology, its vocabulary and concepts, Shepherd’s preferred choice of words highlighted just how laden some of the terms we effortlessly use to discuss and theorise research can be. The term “gate-keeping” carries somewhat unpleasant connotations relating to power and exclusivity. It conjures up images of the person paid to be posted at a closed gate mercilessly and lawfully prohibiting the entry of the researcher (supplicant). This gate-keeper is seen as a powerful barrier. On the other side of the guarded gate, “gate-keeping” also paints the picture of a hopeful, vulnerable and perhaps even noble researcher who is not entitled to access or a hospitable welcome. Conversely, “terms of engagement” is contractual-sounding. Indeed, the phrase is in fact used in business to refer to contractual agreements and the rules to which someone must agree to before they can be employed⁵⁷ or “the rules that people or organizations must follow when they deal with each other” (Cambridge Online Dictionaries). However, the phrase alludes to there being possible negotiations, mutual understanding, and agreeability from both parties. Furthermore, both parties in question are vested in the engagement thus the term creates the idea that the agreement is mutually beneficial and not as confrontational and tense as “gate-keeping” or similar phrase, “rules of engagement”. “Gate-keeping” does not imply mutuality nor allude to

⁵⁷ Financial Times Lexicon <http://markets.ft.com/research/Lexicon/Term?term=terms-of-engagement> and Cambridge online Dictionary <http://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/business-english/terms-of-engagement> (both accessed 12 February 2013 at 16:53)

possibilities of negotiation. Instead, the researcher is constructed as the party on the losing end; the party that now has to either connive her way past the gate-keeper to get her much-needed research or, alternatively, find another more hospitable space to gather data. In his discussion about stereotypical, theoretical metonyms within anthropological theory, Appadurai describes “gatekeeping concepts” as concepts that “seem to limit anthropological theorizing about the place in question, and that define the quintessential and dominant questions of interest in the region” (Appadurai, 1986: 357). Within his definition and general discussion, what is emphasised is about anthropological theory not being hospitable to (therefore not allowing in) particular narratives and ways of theorizing places such as Africa. It is this emphasis on the connotation of denial of access and inhospitality to which I wish to draw attention.

Of course, the above is something of a caricature of the term “gate-keeping”. The fact that I was not allowed into meetings, that I was only allowed to use the “public” parts of the project and that the project leaders kept me at arms’ length stands whether I refer to process as “gate-keeping” or “terms of engagement”. Furthermore, the “terms of engagement” meeting was more a stipulation of the conditions under which my research could take place rather than a mutual discussion about how we (the project leaders and I) saw our future engagements. Thus, one may argue that “terms of engagement” was merely a different shade of “gate-keeping” in this instance. To an extent this was true. However, the point of the differentiation is to underscore how terms such as “gate-keeping” invoke sympathy for the supplicant-researcher and her cause.

Shepherd’s critique of the term “gate-keeping” highlighted how simple it is to lean on inherited anthropological terms uncritically – at times even when reflexivity is striven for. In fact, several anthropologists agree that anthropological terminology requires re-thinking. Anthropologist and head of the Social Anthropology section at UCT, Francis Nyamnjoh (2012), asserts that concepts such as “tribe” still hold much currency in anthropology (Nyamnjoh, 2012: 83). MacGaffey (1995) illustrated this point by exploring the external construction of the Kongo identity where a local one did not exist. In her comments to Nyamnjoh’s assertion, Kharnita Mohamed added that anthropological terminology, amongst other things, requires rigorous and careful genealogical tracing and historicizing (Mohamed in Nyamnjoh, 2012: 83). Along similar lines, Weston rejects the homogenising quality of phrases such as “native anthropology” asserting that the phrase neglects the varying types of nativity produced by different power relations (Weston, 1997: 167). Thus, the re-evaluation of the terms an anthropologist uses even within her own research are problematised both by Shepherd as well as other anthropologists.

5.5 Engaging the Terms of Engagement: Distance and Intimacy

My approach to Curate Africa, i.e. attempting to keep a distance, was motivated by a desire to witness and explore how academics whose scholarly perspectives I was acquainted, moved the vigorous and critical CAS discussions about Africa outside the classroom. Nevertheless, the manner in which *I approached* the project to begin with – not wanting to be too entangled lest it gets too complicated for me to separate my ideas of “curation” and “Africa” from theirs – was *my* part of the negotiation. *I chose* to approach the negotiations at a distance. Narayan (1993) fittingly insists that even distance is a stance and a cognitive-emotional orientation (Narayan in Oyango-Ouma, 2006: 259). Heicke Becker notes that a “non-involvement stance” can undermine critical ideas about power within the field as well as a researcher’s commitment to the idea of a theoretically and methodologically dialogical anthropology (Becker in Becker, Boonzaier and Owen, 2005: 131). Becker in fact makes this point after recalling her account of her own experiences as a novice researcher in Namibia. She recalled that upon commencement of her research, she resolved to keep a “respectful distance” firstly because she had been taught to observe and learn from her informants – rather than impose herself - but also, with her background in activism, she was wary of influencing the very “post-colonial trajectories of gender activism” in newly-independent Namibia that she was supposed to be studying (Becker in Becker, Boonzaier and Owen, 2005: 130-1). Becker’s own account indicates that my initial approach to Curate Africa may have been theoretically outdated (i.e. desires to keep a distance to study *their* conceptions) but it was certainly not exceptional in approaches to anthropological research. I suspect that many other examples beyond Becker’s exist.

Within the project leaders’ rejection of the idea of me taking on the position of a “fly on the wall” or assuming “God’s eye” was the rejection of a researcher who *seemed* merely to observe, to not be invested in the project and who could not meaningfully contribute to the creation of the project. By extension, the idea that objectivity – an unbiased, detached position – exists was rejected. This latter point was explicitly made by Bogues. It is in light of explicitly rejecting that he suggested that perhaps Curate Africa, in its conceptual phase, did not lend itself to ethnographic research nor did it have a space for *me* to participate at the point when the conversation took place. This suggestion was made after he expressed the idea that ethnography, for him, was primarily about participation.

Of course these ideas about objectivity in social science being a myth are well-known to and theoretically endorsed by me. Besides the engagements with anthropological discourses and texts about positionality, reflexivity and ethnographies as partial truths (Clifford and Marcus, 1986), the work of scholars such as Prah (2010) and Mudimbe (1994), amongst others, particularly concerned

with knowledge production and scholarship centred on Africa, continue to highlight the delusions of objectivity within (social) sciences.

Still, even though I was not in pursuit of objectivity, in choosing to “observe more than I participate” and thus keeping a distance that would avoid my ideas entangling with those of the project leaders and thus hinder my understanding and analysis of my data, I perpetuated the logic of distance translating into better objectivity. The irony of wanting to keep this distance was that I wanted to do so yet still base my research on insights largely attained from the project leaders’ most intimate spaces: their meetings. This irony underscores a second idea of subjects of study (within research) that was rejected by the project leaders. The project leaders rejected the idea that researchers have the *right* to their participants’ private, intimate spaces.

Anthropology is in fact constructed around the idea of a researcher coming back to the academy with insights gained from the intimate spaces shared with her participants. Hannerz (2006), in his speculation around the reasons anthropologists “studying up” or “sideways” tend to be viewed with suspicion, suggests that it may be because these anthropologists are seen as missing out on some of the personal experiences that are assumed to arise out of “immersion”. These “anthropologists by appointment”, he speculates, tend to have limited opportunities to participate and observe fruitfully even where total access is granted and therefore they fail to face up to whatever kinds of tangible and intangible hardships assumed to go hand in hand with experiences of immersion. The speculation made by Hannerz is very telling about the assumption that ethnography requires and involves a somewhat temporary intimacy. Temporary intimacy is striven for from the beginning and insights are expected to be borne from this intimacy. Joy Owen notes that the “anthropological enterprise” compels us to engage with participants in a manner that elicits trust as well as personal information (Owen in Becker, Boonzaier and Owen, 2006: 124).

Conversely, despite striving for intimacy, and even when it is gained, a distance from one’s participants or object of study is required lest the researcher supposedly “goes native” and is unable to analyse critically the insights gained from the intimacy. In my initial research question, I too assumed that once the project leaders had allowed me to do research on the project, I would be privy to some of their private conversations that cannot be accessed by the general “public”. Instead, the project leaders’ intimate knowledge of and relationship with anthropology became the basis for them to formulate their carefully constructed terms of engagement which ensured that I was kept (and that I kept myself) at a distance from the project. This distance became a safe one for

them. I make this claim with the project leaders' explanation of meetings being a safe space to "try things out" and "think things through" in mind.

5.6 Conclusion

The terms of engagement had yet another implication especially for my understanding of anthropological research. Although, I have demonstrated that I played a significant role in the initial negotiations of our engagement (and have made these interactions central to this dissertation), I do not believe that the project leaders or Bogues would believe me to have meaningfully contributed to or participated in Curate Africa or even in research thereof. Of course, Lyn Schumaker notes, in her tracing of "archetypical experiences" of anthropologists such as Gluckman, Malinowski and Firth, that the meaning of the ethnographic "experiences *in the field*, however, is different from their meaning in the university setting" (Schumaker, 2001: 41)⁵⁸. Given that in this instance "the field" is also "the university", I would like to alter Schumaker's statement somewhat, and say that the ethnographic experiences – especially those experiences used by the ethnographer to authenticate his/her knowledge, as pointed to by Schumaker – differ in meaning during the ethnographic research and during data analysis and construction of write-ups. Notwithstanding Schumaker's point, my own conceived participation and therefore research begins and ends with the negotiations.

Given the above critiques and centrality of negotiations within my research, I began wondering whether ethnographic research, as an anthropological method, is designed and equipped for an application in situations where people and social interactions do not form part of a routinized culture. Curate Africa in its conceptual phase and as Hannerz asserts, "studying up" and "sideways" generally do not offer spaces for common notions of immersion. What was telling was that Shepherd and Bogues, who were very familiar with anthropology – Bogues had used it and both of them, through their scholarship, critiqued its limitations - suggested that had I continued with same questions, my ethnographic data would have been too thin.

The point about "thin" ethnography raised by Shepherd and Bogues demonstrates how firm a grasp on anthropological method and discourse Curate Africa had. The project leaders were able to relay

⁵⁸ Schumaker's book, *Africanizing Anthropology*, delves into the work, politics, methods and personalities of key southern and central African anthropological figures of the then Rhodes-Livingstone Institute spanning from the Max Gluckman to the many "indigenous anthropologists" and research assistants such as Muchona who were key in shaping the discipline in southern African (2001: 13)

our terms of engagement using pervasive critiques of anthropology and anthropological methods and also using the anthropological vocabulary. The manner in which the project leaders ensured my distance from the project accentuated their knowledge of anthropology. This determined distancing also highlighted their discomfort with the discipline and the complex history of ties that existed between African Studies and anthropology (within UCT but also as disciplines beyond UCT). It was therefore due to this intricate knowledge of my disciplinary home and in my disciplinary language, that they made sure I was to a significant extent kept at arms' length from the inside workings of Curate Africa and they resisted being potentially turned into subjects of an ethnographic gaze: the very thing Curate Africa aimed to work against in the representation of Africa and Africans, themselves included.

CHAPTER 6: PROBLEMATISING THE REPRESENTATION OF AFRICA THROUGH A PROJECTION OF AFRICA

6.1 Introduction

The primary goal of this chapter is to explore if and how Curate Africa problematised the representation of Africa through its self-representation and presentation. In examining Curate Africa – even if only the publically-accessible aspects such as the website - what became apparent to me was that the clarity of Curate Africa’s version of Africa lay primarily in the project’s assertions of what Africa was *not*. Curate Africa critiqued particular representations of Africa(ns) through its presentation of itself as a project intending to be an “intervention of envisioning Africa”⁵⁹ and in its deliberate attempts to mark a departure from certain histories of representation. Thus, what Africa was not, for the project, were clearest, best understood and most appreciable when seen and understood against the backdrop of particular, historical ways of imagining and representing Africa. Even while the project was being conceptualised – before calls for photographs could even be made - Curate Africa had already attempted to both mark a departure from those histories of representation and re-image its idea of Africa through its logo, the colours it specifically chose to reject and use for the project, and photographs used on the website, its themes and its call for a collective re-imagining of Africa from within Africa.

Curate Africa’s self-representation was exemplified in its preparation for its “pre-launch” on Friday the 25th May 2012. As the term “pre-launch” alludes, the occasion was Curate Africa’s official debut and although little activity took place publically in the few months that followed the pre-launch, the project initiated itself through this pre-launch. As afore-mentioned, this pre-launch formed part of UCT’s Africa Month Celebrations for 2012.

Ahead of the pre-launch, the CityVaristy Team were commissioned to design the Curate Africa logo, to create a Curate Africa video which was comprised of a three-dimensional Africa fly-through and a tutorial as well as to conceptualise a virtual gallery blueprint. At the pre-launch, the Curate Africa video and virtual gallery were projected onto the overhead suspended behind the stage from which the project leaders and DVC Nhlapo stood introducing and pre-launching the project. Both the video

⁵⁹ This was one of the project outputs stipulated on Curate Africa’s pamphlets as well as the website (accessed: 02 November 2012).

and the virtual gallery were projected from a laptop that was being handled by one of the CityVarsity Team members from the middle of the Baxter foyer. The project leaders also had a few black T-shirts with the Curate Africa logo printed on it. The T-shirts were worn by those closely affiliated with the project and present at the pre-launch, including Grant McNulty who had created the Curate Africa website as well as a Twitter and Facebook account for Curate Africa. There were also pamphlets - that contained a succinct version of the information found on the website and video - made in preparation of the pre-launch. The pamphlets were placed on the few tables positioned near the back of the Baxter foyer. Alongside them were the pamphlets of Curate Africa's partner, African Centre for Cities (ACC): while one set of pamphlets one was a synopsis of the ACC, the other contained information on a journal, *Counter-Currents*, published by the ACC in association with Jacanda Media. At the pre-launch, the ACC also had a representative present who spoke of the partnership between the ACC and Curate Africa which was primarily centred on Curate Africa's sub-theme "African Cities".

Two nights before the pre-launch, the project leaders also asked two of their employees to map an outline of Africa onto the Baxter foyer. I joined the two employees in mapping the outline of Africa. It is with this mapping exercise - that which stood as one of the most orthodox ethnographic moments in my research - that I will begin discussing Curate Africa's self-presentation and its problematising of the representation of Africa.

6.2 Projecting, Mapping and Engaging Africa on the Baxter Floor

At approximately 21:15 on the 23rd of May 2012, a Wednesday evening, I arrived at the Baxter Theatre to join two of Curate Africa's employees in their projecting and mapping of Africa onto the Baxter floor. This was to be my first and most classic form of participant-observation for my research. The Baxter was well-lit and the audience members who were still in the venue were making their way out. There were a few security guards stationed at different parts of the theatre. One of the Curate Africa employees was standing on the balcony of the 2nd floor with her boyfriend and both of them were looking down at me as I walked in and toward them. When I reached the two of them and we began formally introducing ourselves to each other, I realised that I knew the Curate Africa employee from a CAS course I had previously taken. The second Curate Africa employee arrived shortly with the scissors he had gone to fetch at home. He was accompanied by the two men who were hired to project the image of outline of Africa on the Baxter floor.

We all went to the balcony located on the upmost floor from where the outline of Africa was to be projected onto the main foyer floor from one of the employees' laptops. Some of the lights had to be turned off by the security guards in order for the projection to be clearly visible. We explored the different directions that Africa could face as well as the optimum positioning of the outline. Since the image on the laptop could only be magnified to a certain degree, the size could not be toyed with. The maximum, projectable size of the outline was used but there was a sense among us that it may have been better had the image itself been bigger so that the ribs of Africa would not have to rest on the uneven stairs located in the foyer.

As part of our attempt to position the projection of Africa perfectly, we took turns moving from the top balcony to different levels and sides of the main foyer so as to see the projection from different perspectives. Eventually, the position was decided upon by the six of us. The bottom tip of the continent (Cape Town) faced the Table Mountain, therefore the middle and upper campuses of UCT. The rest of Africa expanded towards Main Road, which was also the rest of Cape Town as well as the rest of Africa. The projection mirrored the actual geography of the continent. The middle of Africa was projected on the stairs and Madagascar was located close to the wall right below us. One rationale for this position that emerged when we were still discussing and deciding was that, similar to the way in which Curate Africa is a project that begins from the tip of the continent and seeks to reach the rest of the continent, a person entering the Baxter Theatre from the entrance closest to the university could imagine him/herself walking from the tip of the continent towards the rest of Africa.

As the two men projected the outline of Africa on the foyer floor, the four of us –the two employees, the boyfriend to one of the employees and me – chalked the outline onto the floor. In conversation, the two men pointed out that projecting images on theatre floors was not part of their formal job-description; they in fact sold projectors. However, occasionally a task like this one was asked of them. After the easily-erasable outline was chalked, the projector men left and we began the task of using thick, white tape to consolidate the chalk outline. The two employees began the task by taping Madagascar onto the floor. As one employee taped the other used a blade to fine-tune the tape and get the contours of the island right as far as possible. We then all moved onto the main continent. The employee with the blade officially became “the shaper” – tidying up the thick, hard-to-handle, white tape that the three of us would use to consolidate the chalk against the brown Baxter floor.



Mapping of Africa on the Baxter Floor

(Photograph taken from upmost level from where the outline was projected)

When most of the continent's shape had been taped, we had to decide how to paste the one thousand small white stickers that read "Curate Africa" and had Curate Africa's icon on them (the combination of the two is actually the Curate Africa logo which will be discussed shortly). We discussed whether the stickers should alternate between being stuck along the length of the tape and across it or whether all of the stickers should be stuck uniformly. Eventually, as per the advice of the boyfriend (a commerce student) who did calculations about how best utilize all the stickers efficiently, the stickers were stuck lengthwise on the tape, with "Curate Africa" readable from the outside of Africa. During the process of sticking we briefly spoke about the merits of having the name of the project readable from the outside as opposed to the inside of Africa. It was the idea of *who* is being asked to curate Africa that was at the heart of this discussion- although it did not actually alter the direction of the stickers. The boyfriend pointed out that since the term was facing outwards, it could be read from all directions. However, even when the discussion had ended, I still thought that the directions asked for Africa to be curated from outside of Africa not within and this stood in contrast with the project's aims.

By 00:40 we were concluding the mapping exercise, picking up scrap pieces of tape, “the shaper” was doing her last bit of shaping and we looked at the finished product from the upper levels of Baxter where the outline of continent was best visible. “The shaper”, who is actually Mauritian, completed the task by sticking a patch of white tape on the floor to symbolised Mauritius and the surrounding islands. She used the blade to shape Mauritius according to her memory of the shape - as she was taught in school. A few minutes later, the security guard who had been kind enough to switch off some lights when the projection was on the floor, walkie-talkied one of the other security guards to switch off the rest of the lights as we walked out of Baxter from the only opened entrance.

The outline of Africa remained on the Baxter Floor throughout the core events of UCT’s Africa Month, including the pre-launch. Despite our rationales about how best to tape Africa to the floor, many people at the pre-launch as well as at the cocktail function after the panel discussion, the previous day, did not really notice more than white random tape on the Baxter floor nor did they know that the white tape was the outline of Africa. In fact, at the cocktail function, tables were places within Africa, obscuring the outline. After the pre-launch of Curate Africa, on the other hand, I had to take two people up to the upmost balcony in order for them to clearly see the outline of Africa (after I pointed out to them that the tape was in fact in the shape of Africa). One of these people was in fact a potential translator for Curate Africa who was to translate the website from English to Swahili.

6.3 Logo and Colours

The tasks of set out for the CityVarsity Team, were divided amongst its members, although they brainstormed together and assisted each other. I conducted a somewhat informal interview with the CityVarsity Team on the 27th June 2012 where we spoke about the brief given to them by Curate Africa. While Ravon, was responsible for designing the logo, Brandon designed the video - comprising of the 3D fly-through of Africa and the demo/tutorial about the project - and Pierre designed a draft of the virtual gallery that was conceptualised as a space where forthcoming exhibitions could be showcased online. Rhyder, who is also a lecturer at City Varsity, oversaw the entire process for the CityVarsity Team and jokingly deemed himself the “whip-cracker”.

It is ironic that although the project leaders requested that Africa be projected onto the main foyer on the Baxter floor, in their brief to the CityVarsity Team, they were insistent on the idea that their logo *cannot* have the outline of Africa in it. The logo included an icon as well as the words “Curate

Africa”. The icon was in a hexagon shape and looked like a shattering camera eye. The hexagon had a line at the bottom which linked to the bottom of the C for “CURATE”. The word “CURATE” was in bold turquoise and written in capital letters compared to “africa”, next to it, written in small letters and in a lighter turquoise.

The dominant colour of the logo was turquoise. The turquoise on the icon of the logo was in different shades and the only other colours were red and yellow. There were six blocks above “africa”. The first three blocks were coloured in shades of turquoise while the other three blocks were indigo, red and mustard-yellow. The pamphlet and the T-shirts - made in preparation of the pre-launch and displayed at the pre-launch - had a black background which made all of these colours stand out. The website on the other hand, had a white background, however, these colours were still striking against the white.



Curate Africa Logo

(Image extracted from the website)

Curate Africa had insisted that colours like “browns” typically associated with Africa were *not* be used. The brief to the CityVarsity Team was that the logo had to have bright colours and that the Team had to present an Africa that was “modern” and not “tribal”⁶⁰. This instruction of the colours was to be applied, and was applied, across all the mediums created by the CityVarsity Team that represent Curate Africa.

Conversely, a different approach was taken by UCT’s Africa Month Committee for the logo and the colours used to represent the Africa Month celebrations. The logo for Africa Month had the outline of Africa almost entirely enclosed by a circle, the words “celebrating Africa Month” and a yellow (tinted with orange) structure that looks either like half a crescent-moon. The outline of Africa had openings where Somalia and where Tunisia would usually be on a map representing the countries.

⁶⁰ The adjectives in quotations were given by the CityVarsity Team in their expansion of the brief.

As is the case with many of the logos of projects that orientate themselves around Africa, and as rejected by Curate Africa, the outline of the main “African” continent was used in the Africa Month logo, however, the islands, like Mauritius, were not included in the outlining of Africa. The outline of Africa for the Africa Month logo was a somewhat dark green colour. For the words “celebrating Africa Month”, “Celebrating” was written in black, “Africa” was written in green and “Month” was written in red. Also, inside the enclosing circle, next to the outline of Africa was “@ UCT” which was written in black too. Therefore the colours for the Africa Month logo were green, yellow-orange, black and red.



Celebrating Africa Month Logo

(Image extracted from a photograph I took of an Africa Month banner)

In conversation with one of the main planners of the Africa Month Programme, she said that even before the logo was finalised, a logo dominated by yellow and green was met with some opposition.

Those within the Africa Month Committee who picked and approved green and yellow as the dominant colours for the Africa Month logo were not, however, willing to change the colours despite the criticism. Many concerns and criticism received by the Africa Month Committee after the Africa Month celebrations were raised via email to the DVC and committee. Through the emails people complained that the colours associated UCT - an autonomous research institution - too closely to the ruling party, the African National Congress (ANC). The colours of the ANC being green, yellow and black. The member of the planning committee with whom I spoke, explained that her argument against this claim was that yellow and green were *Pan-African* colours and therefore valid for celebrating Africa Month.

As seen in both instances, choices of visual self-representations and presentations of projects in matters such as their logos and colours are not all arbitrary. For Curate Africa and the Africa Month Committee, both were highly political choices. Furthermore, the choices made also pointed to the work Curate Africa and the Africa Month Committee perceived themselves and their projects to be doing. However, what was apparent was that the self-representing and celebrating of Africa began from differing vantage points.

UCT's overall approach to the logo and its colours gave the impression that UCT (as an institution) was learning how to characterise and own its Africanness – but not without contestation. Indeed, there were signs that UCT was still trying to make the point that it is “okay” to be African and celebrate Africa. In fact, on the 24th of May 2012, at the cocktail function in the Baxter Theatre foyer, DVC Nhlapo explained that Africa Day was expanded into “Africa Month” in order to say it is “okay” to celebrate Africa for a month (as well as to effectively showcase the scholarship on Africa). Furthermore, the Africa Month Committee, through the logo and colours chosen, were asserting UCT's Africanness. These assertions offered by DVC Nhlapo indicated that Afropolitanism had been set against arguments of it *not* being okay for UCT to celebrate Africa or its Africanness. Furthermore, as mentioned at the beginning of this dissertation, DVC Nhlapo was also still embarking on a mission to persuade UCT to be comfortable with Afropolitanism.⁶¹ Conversely, Curate Africa's point of departure was not from the argument that it is “okay” to celebrate Africa and embrace Africanness. Curate Africa's very deliberate logo and colour choices were active steps in the project geared towards thinking beyond the usual, visual self-representations of projects centred on Africa but also Africa itself. Moreover, the choices were part of the project's attempts to “re-frame” and “re-envision” the celebration of Africa – departing both from the histories of

⁶¹ *Afropolitanism at UCT*, (2011).

representation as well as the present, conventional representations of Africa. Essentially, the project attempted to differentiate itself from many other projects engaging with Africa(ns).

6.4 Video: Problematising through stating what Africa is Not

It is in the Curate Africa video⁶² where one gets a more overt sense of what the project leaders imagined to be the “external, objectifying gaze” against which their project was created. Although the video was created by the CityVarsity Team and they indicated that they received a lot of creative leeway in the creation of the video and logo, they also indicated that they had a brief with some specifications. There was a sustained insistence that the typical “browns” not be used and instead a bright, modern Africa be reflected. Other specifications for the video were that it had to begin by signifying Africa as separated; the borders in the 3D fly-through and the signage (not the specific signposts eventually used but some sort of signage) were requested as signifiers of Africa’s national divisions. At the end of the video, and after Curate Africa’s intervention, there had to be an eradication of these divisions.

There are two parts to the Curate Africa video: a “3D fly-through” across Africa and a “tutorial”/“demo”⁶³ with a voiceover explaining what Curate Africa was. The fourteen-second long fly-through across a three-dimensional Africa began with each country separated by borders made of little black particles. The fly-through, i.e. the panning of what could be a camera or satellite above Africa, began from Morocco. Morocco had a green and white road-sign written “Col: 1884”. Across the image of the continent, there were fifteen other countries with road-signs indicating the year they were colonized, respectively. The flag of each country was painted onto the surface of Africa and could be seen as the camera/satellite panned from Morocco toward the south of Africa. A few seconds later, the fly-through ended with the little black particles that demarcated one country from another flying off the surface of the continent as the flags simultaneously disappeared. The last image one saw in this fly-through was a completely borderless Africa accompanied by the logo of Curate Africa, including the words “CURATE africa”.

The second part of the Curate Africa video was a tutorial/demo explaining Curate Africa. Throughout the entire tutorial/demo, there was the voice, with a distinctive “twang” - of what sounded like a black, middle-class young woman introducing Curate Africa. She does so in English. The voiceover complemented the visuals: various scenes that looked like pictures that had been created from

⁶² The video can be found on YouTube as well as on the Curate Africa website (under “What is Curate Africa”). It was shown at the pre-launch.

⁶³ Terms used by the CityVarsity Team.

cutting out images from turquoise paper and sticking them within a Polaroid frame and onto a yellow-mustard background. The style of the video, as explained by the CityVarsity Team, was “Infographics”. Infographics is a style where information is given through easy-to-grasp visuals and, as Rhyder illuminated, it has become quite a common style particularly in documentaries.

At the beginning of the tutorial/demo, emphasis was placed on Africa being colonised and divided. Moreover, the emphasis was on *the world* perceiving Africa as colonised and divided. After showing an image of a divided Africa with the word “COLONIZED” written on post-its posted all over the continent, the voiceover asked “What is your Africa that you want the world to know?”. When she asked this question, all the post-its disappeared and once again Africa was empty and open to a different imagining - as it was at the end of the fly-through. The last words spoken by the voiceover were: “Be part of imagining, imaging and knowing Africa differently”. As she said these words, a cut out of the logo was placed against the mustard-yellow background. The mustard-yellow background turned black (with the logo remaining) and the words “Imagining. Imaging. Knowing.” appeared below the logo.

The description I have given of the video is a truncated version of the 1:46 minute-long video. There was a lot more information offered and details of animated scenes have not been discussed. What I wish to draw attention to is the imagining of Africa against which Curate Africa is working. The idea that Africa has been imagined and constructed from *outside of Africa* was brought to the fore through the video. Furthermore, this external imagining of Africa was one that was closely linked to the continent’s colonial history through the video. This colonial history was invoked through the road-signs showing the given country’s year of colonisation as well as through the post-its, planted across the continent, which read “COLONIZED”. Consequently, according to the video, the continent’s divisions were also tied to this colonial history and external imagining of Africa. The separations – indicated by flags, borders and the road-signs – disappeared when Africa was liberated from a construction centred on its colonial history and when the viewer was asked to re-imagine Africa.

Curate Africa therefore presented itself as a project working against externally-constructed representations and perceptions of Africa as well as a facilitator in the reimagining of a new Africa. At the end of the fly-through and in the tutorial, after past constructions were wiped away, Africa was presented as a visually clean canvas onto which the photographs and by extension, imaginings of Africa from “ordinary” Africans could be constructed anew through the project.

6.5 Photographs

There were three images that were posted onto the Curate Africa website just before the pre-launching of the project. The first image was a black and white aerial view of a city posted as part of the pre-launch invitation. The second image was titled “Dairy Beach” and the third, “Bicycle, Zanzibar”. Unlike the image posted as part of the invitation, the other two photographs were posted with textual explanations of the photographs themselves.

The black and white image of a city that accompanied the pre-launch invitation is actually a popular aerial view of the Johannesburg City Centre with the iconic round, residential building - Ponte City Apartments and Hillbrow Tower - featuring in the background. There have been a number of renditions of this image of the city specifically taken from the Carlton Centre - the tallest building on the continent that allows a panoramic view of the Johannesburg CBD. One need only Google “aerial view of Johannesburg” to see similar images including those by photographers, Fraser Hall and Richard l'Anson, who have even older renditions⁶⁴ of the similar image. (See Image below)



(Image extracted from the Curate Africa website)

Unless one recalls Curate Africa’s partnership to ACC (African Centre for Cities), it may be somewhat hard to understand why this image in particular was chosen especially as an accompaniment of the pre-launch invitation. The difficulty in understanding arises because the pre-launch was in Cape Town not Johannesburg and the project’s instructions to photographers and curators, on the

⁶⁴ These older renditions are signalled by the Ponte City Apartments being crowned by the Coca-Cola name and trademark colours as opposed to the more recent Vodacom one which is visible in the Curate Africa rendition.

pamphlets and websites, was that they “be playful” and “be surprising”, over and above the more attempt for Curate Africa to locate and celebrate *new* visualities. The reproduction of this image seems a reproduction of “ways of seeing” and so too does the detached, aerial view that reflects a city without “working lives” nor a different way of “thinking through space”⁶⁵.

Unlike the image of the city, “Dairy Beach” seemed as if it spoke directly to the project’s intentions of collecting surprising, playful and somewhat unconventional ways of seeing and visually representing Africa. Also, this image could easily have fallen under their “thinking through space” and “ordinary spaces” sub-themes. “Dairy Beach” was a photograph of different coloured and somewhat bony cows resting on white beach sands. There was also a small boat floating on the blue ocean behind the cows. On the website, if one clicked on the photograph, one was directed to a content page with the same photograph and a caption. The text below the photograph was the same text that could be read off the homepage under the post titled “Dairy Beach”. It read: “A herd of cows sunning themselves on the beach in Tanzania”.



Dairy Beach

(Image extracted from the Curate Africa website)

The last photograph was titled “Bicycle, Zanzibar”. It was a photograph of a red, aged bicycle. The bicycle had the words “allure” near the pedals and a black basket in the front. There was an orange-

⁶⁵ The phrases used in inverted commas are all sub-themes of the project.

red bicycle lock interlinking the bicycle to the big, old white-painted, wooden door with the rust of the nails colouring the white.. The white door against which the bicycle stood was attached to a white wall and the floor, a stoep, was red and unpolished. The red of the bicycle and unpolished stoep stood out against the white in the background and the big, black tyres and black basket. Below the photograph (also on the in the snippet on the homepage), were two sentences shedding light on the image. The text read: “On a recent trip to Zanzibar I noticed these really cool bicycles being used all over the island. They reminded me, in style, of bicycles used in Holland”.



Bicycle, Zanzibar

(Image extracted from the Curate Africa website)

A brief note about the archiving of these images on the website seems necessary. The texts under the last two photographs summed up what could be seen in each image. The descriptive texts were clear about the countries where the photographs were taken. Furthermore, on the content pages on which both the images and descriptive texts appeared, below the texts were boxes with tag-icons and the word “featured” next to the tag. While in “Dairy Beach”, “Tanzania” was written next to the word “featured”, “Bicycle, Zanzibar” had “Tanzania, Zanzibar”. The images were therefore archived (tagged) according to national categories. Furthermore, by adding “Tanzania” to the tagging for “Bicycle, Zanzibar”, prevailing imaginings of nation-states and their power relations were upheld, i.e. the fact that Zanzibar is only semi-autonomous with the rest of its autonomy being in the hands of Tanzania was illuminated. Another feature of Curate Africa underscored by the project’s photographs and their archiving was the fact that Curate Africa was a project whose conception of

Africa expands the main African continent. African Islands such as Zanzibar (and Mauritius) were included in the projects' conceptions of Africa.

6.6 Re-imagining Africa as a Collective Process

A key characteristic of Curate Africa was that it stressed the re-imagining of Africa as a collective process, and one which was as inclusive as possible for Africans. It aimed to encourage and incentivise others ("ordinary photographers" Africa-wide) to re-imagine and re-image Africa too. Curate Africa presented itself as a *means* and a partner for new visualities to be located, celebrated and curated as opposed to being the principle re-imaginer, re-imager, and curator of Africa(ns). This characteristic of the project was therefore an explicit problematizing of the manner in which the continent has been historically externally constructed and imagined. Furthermore, the project's stress on a collective re-imagining by and for Africans also problematized the manner in which the defining of Africa and Africanness has mostly been a project carried out by and for very small groups of people, be they fifteenth-century travellers, nineteenth to twentieth-century missionaries, twentieth-century ethnologists, anthropologists and other scientists or even twenty-first century media and scholars on the continent. Even when some of these imaginings were constructed from inside Africa, the definitions which circulated widely have almost always been done by rather exclusive groups of people for people who are not necessarily the African population.

The project sought to have multiple parties re-image Africa and to connect these differing parties through the Curate Africa. First and foremost, the project intended to be accessible to as many people as possible. It imagined that it would work closely with partner, *Arterial Network*, to disseminate widely its call for photographic submissions around the continent through the networks and connections already possessed by Arterial Network⁶⁶. The African islands surrounding Africa, often neglected when Africa is invoked, were considered (and included by the Curate Africa employee on the Baxter floor as well as on the website through the inclusion of Zanzibar). And, the project's ties to Professor Bogue included the African diaspora in the re-framing of Africa and Africanness. The project also aimed to translate its webpage from English into Swahili, French, Portuguese and Arabic - the dominant lingua francas on the continent.⁶⁷

Curate Africa also perceived technological advancements such as social media and cellphone cameras, available to and used by many "ordinary" people in Africa, as tools which allowed for the

⁶⁶ Information primarily from the website and pamphlet.

⁶⁷ Besides the website and pamphlet, this information was offered by the project leaders as well as the one translator I met and spoke to on the afternoon of the pre-launch.

project to be interactive and for photographs of the local and everyday to be captured and submitted. In fact, to this end, McNulty Consulting was commissioned to create a website that could as easily be viewed on cellphones as on computers. McNulty Consulting created a website that had a mobile view capacity making it adaptable even on small screens and easy to navigate. Besides the fact that during my examination of the website, the website adjusted to the size of the screen on the computer which I would use, its aesthetic and (easy) functional ability also remained when I viewed it on my own phone.

Furthermore, with regards to interactive aspect of the project, McNulty Consulting linked the Twitter and Facebook feeds to the website. There was little activity on both social media platforms from the time the project was pre-launched to February 2013 when the project decided to implement itself in stages, starting from the university⁶⁸. The little activity on Twitter consisted mainly of Curate Africa (administered by McNulty Consulting) retweeting others' posts that had some relevance to the project as well as the project posting their video, an article about the "seven ways mobile phones have changed lives in Africa" with Nigeria as a case study, and two links connected to photographer, Peter DiCampo⁶⁹. The Facebook page, had slightly more activity as Curate Africa shared four photographs including the outline of African on the Baxter Floor; a WikiAfrica public photo competition on monuments; articles about photographers, Hassan Hajjaj, and Aida Muluneh; and a link from South Africa History Online (SAHO) about the South African exhibition "The Rise and Fall of Apartheid: Photography and the Bureaucracy of Everyday Life" featuring over 70 photographers from South Africa and curated by Okwui Enwezor and Rory Bestor through the International Centre of Photography [ICP]⁷⁰. Although Curate Africa shared all of these, there was little public interaction with the project at this stage. On Facebook by the end of 2012, the Curate Africa page received two "likes", one from SAHO and the other from Archival Platform, an archival branch of the APC whose post Curate Africa had retweeted on Twitter too.

In light of Curate Africa attempting to have Africa(ns) re-imagined from various people, Curate Africa also, asserted its intentions to partner with and be the meeting point for various collectives from

⁶⁸ Discussed in the Postscript.

⁶⁹ The first link, posted on the 17th September 2013 and on the 18th September on Facebook was a link to the Tumblr account (image centred blog) "Everyday Life" which was conceived by DiCampo and Austin Merrill but has grown to comprise of other members, journalists and photographers, who seek to show "Everyday Africa" on the blog but also in media in general (<http://everydayafrica.tumblr.com/#me>). The second post was a link to *The New York Times* review, "Picturing Everyday Life in Africa" of DiCampo's photographic work on everyday Africa (See: http://lens.blogs.nytimes.com/2012/09/17/picturing-everyday-life-in-africa/?_r=0)

⁷⁰ For more information see:

http://johnedwinmason.typepad.com/john_edwin_mason_photogra/2012/09/icp-rise-fall-apartheid.html

across the continent such as photographers, NGOs, arts activists, IT professionals. The project also found the partnership between many of these different professions to scholarship as essential. In fact, Curate Africa named their partner universities, Cape Town, Ibadan, Addis Ababa, Kigali, Port Louis and Cairo, as the intended “area specialists” that would be responsible for heading the project. Amongst all these area specialists, the project aimed to “position UCT as the leading African academic institution in interdisciplinary scholarship on knowledge production of Africa”⁷¹. This latter aspiration for UCT to be the lead area specialist may have been a strategic one to have the project endorsed by the university through which it was pre-launched but the notion nevertheless coincides with the Afropolitan aim for UCT to be the leading area specialist on the African continent⁷². The aim for both Curate Africa and UCT (Afropolitan) is particularly interesting considering the previously-discussed debates about UCT lacking a sufficiently African identity and Ntsebeza’s assertion that African Studies at UCT is yet to be defined (Ntsebeza, 2012: 2). Moreover, despite the project’s emphasis on creating multiple partnerships and locating everyday Africa through the photographs and curation of many others, naming academic institutions as “area specialists” and UCT as the lead area specialist places a huge emphasis on their role in re-envisioning Africa, perpetuates the idea of scholars being the “experts” but also gives the impression that the project leaders and their disciplines (UCT), will ultimately be the ones creating the “knowledge” on Africa. Although never really forgotten throughout the research, the project’s academic-predisposition is therefore once again brought into sharp relief. Curate Africa as a project started and headed by academics, as a project which stems from their academic works and as a project which intends to root itself within academia (therefore possibly acting as a scholarly invention regarding the re-envisioning of Africa within its partner universities and UCT in particular).

6.7 Conclusions

Three key conclusions can be drawn from the above discussion. Firstly, through its self-representation and presentation, and for my research, Curate Africa problematised the representation of Africa (both historical and present). Through the project’s proclamations, preparations for its pre-launch and its initial pre-launching into the public realm, Curate Africa overtly critiqued and took a position against the externally constructed image of Africa; the supposed lack of the “everyday” within the representations of Africa (an aim that Peter DiCampo and projects such as *Everyday Africa* support); and, the divisive effects of colonialism on the continent (as emphasised in the video). The project’s overt intentions to re-image Africa today, to make use of new

⁷¹ Pamphlet.

⁷² Point first noted at VC Price’s alumni talk, “Can UCT be an elite university without being Elitist?” in June 2012.

technology, to locate and celebrate new visualities of the everyday, and allow these new visualities to be presented by Africans far and wide were ways in which the project set out to mark *its* departure from histories of representation concerned with African people, places and realities”.

Furthermore, through its choice of logos and colours alone, Curate Africa’s rejection of and deviation from what it saw as typical ways that projects centred on Africa represent themselves, can be read as an explicit problematising of current, persisting and clichéd engagements and imaginings of Africa. Likewise, what seemed to be critiqued through its choice of colours and logo as well as the brief to the CityVarsity team was the fact that Africa is perpetually represented as tribal and these perpetuations are purported through the use of go-to motifs such as the use of “browns”, Pan-African greens and yellows and the outline of the continent to represent (mainland) Africa to the exclusion of other African islands and the diaspora. Curate Africa seemed to be advocating for representations that do not reduce Africa and its representations to a set of unimaginative motifs and stereotypes and seemingly attempted to locate “new visualities” within its self-representation. A similar point is made by Harry Garuba, a lecturer within CAS, about the African diaspora needing to be more critical about what they deem African. Artefacts and narratives cannot be uncritically deemed as African or having historical ties to the continent merely because they possess seemingly “African elements” (Garuba, 2010: 248). Garuba argues that what is “African” cannot simply be reduced to a set of elements, objects and practices (ibid). Curate Africa also seemed to be asserting that reductionist representation lack the “modern”, changing and local (although nuanced and complex) qualities of Africa(ns) today. And projects centred on Africa, tended to also lack imagination about the parameters, realities and possibilities for Africa.

The second conclusion to be drawn from the above chapter is that despite Curate Africa’s attempts to encourage re-envisioning, re-imaging and new visualities, Africa is not a canvas that can be wiped clean; those histories and even perpetuated imaginings and motifs of Africa and African representation, were factors that existed as more than just backdrops and points of departure for the project. As seen in the mapping of the outline of Africa on the Baxter floor, the presentation of a popular photograph such as the black and white aerial view of Johannesburg, and the tagging of images according to countries (including the political relationship between Zanzibar and Tanzania), Curate Africa too could not completely steer clear of replicating past and present imaginings and imaging of Africa even in its self-representation.

As a project that aims to speak of Africa visually and from within Africa, Curate Africa is under pressure to uphold as many visual versions of Africa as possible and some of these include the reality of people's identities often associated with their respective countries and current socio-political constructions that may seem divisive and tribal. This may be so despite Curate Africa attempting to imagine Africa anew and depart from a divisive construction of Africa. Even with Curate Africa's intervention and despite all the small black particles (that demarcated separate countries) flying off the map, nation-states cannot simply be done away with. Thus, the country-orientated tagging of the photographs, the mapping of Africa and reproduction of a detached, typical image of Johannesburg may allude to the possibility that even in the "reimagining" and "re-envisioning" of Africa, the project is restricted. Arguably, the inability to reimagine Africa to the point of complete strangeness points to how even major changes and "interventions" exist in a continuum of sorts – having connections to the past and setting foundations for newer possibilities in the future. Thus, as Curate Africa has demonstrated, the reimaging of Africa today is in conversation (and largely in reaction) to historical imaginings of the continent, those historical imaginings needed for the efforts of Curate Africa to be most understood and appreciated.

The third overarching conclusion is that even before Curate Africa could begin its primary task of collecting and exhibiting photographs then having others curate the material, Curate Africa had already begun shaping this process of the project by setting the parameters of what Africa was not, putting in place tools to circumvent the ideas of Africa that they rejected and producing a website, social media accounts, pamphlets and even a logo that reflected the projects ideas of a re-imaged and re-imagined Africa. Thus, although Curate Africa sought to eventually have Africa curated and re-envisioned as a collective exercise, the self-presentation and representation of Curate Africa became a *projection* of Curate Africa's imaginings and ideas of Africa. These projections that guided even the conceptualising of the project were, I argue, "pre-curatorial" processes that would inevitably serve as a basis on which the forthcoming photographs, and exhibitions and even partnerships (including the curators) would be selected and curated.

Pre-curatorial Processes

Before expanding a little more on what I mean by pre-curatorial, it is important to reiterate that the understanding of curation endorsed within this dissertation is that although curation carries meanings that range from care-taking to authorship to the interpreting of curatorial material, an authoritative element is implied in the varying forms of curation (Hamilton & Skotnes, 2014). The

manner in which an exhibition is made, objects are taken care of or interpreted requires the curator to make important decisions about how the objects will be exhibited and how a narrative will be told from them, about which objects will be displayed (Hoffmann, 2010) and/or how objects will be preserved. This authoritative element of curation is especially blatant in the pervasive theory of “curator as author”.

I argue that Curate Africa was involved in pre-curatorial processes even though it was only “pre-launched” and was identified as being in its conceptual phase by the project itself. For instance, the curation of photographs was yet to come for the project, however, the choices regarding the *kinds* of photographs that would be acceptable was already somewhat steered by the pre-chosen themes and the aims of the project. By the time the pre-launch was underway, potential curators and photographers had already been instructed to be “playful”, “surprising”, “profound” and “respectful”. They had the samples provided on the Curate Africa website to further guide them. They had also already been encouraged to “reach beyond colonial and postcolonial dichotomies and narratives of development, and all of the other frames that constrain imagination”. Although the curation of the still-to-be-collected photographs was pending, the project had already resolved to choose curators based on “visibility, interest value and insight”⁷³. These curators were also imagined to be from a pool of “artists, human right activists and cultural theorists” as well as “enthusiasts”. The descriptions of these curators somewhat reflects the project leaders (and Bagues) themselves, but also the matters pertaining to their scholarship. Thus, the kinds of people and work the project imagined itself to engage with *after* its conceptualisation were already loosely anticipated - beyond their existing partners who also, in various ways, aimed to re-think engagements with aspects of Africa from archives (CCA) to the arts (Arterial Network) to cities (ACC).

It is these sorts of decisions, anticipations and imaginings - that were built into the self-presentation of Curate Africa - that I call “pre-curatorial” processes. They formed the preliminary stages of collection, curation and networking. The pre-curatorial processes do not definitively determine what *will* be collected, forthcoming curation or even the course of the partnerships themselves and the fact that Curate Africa had placed significant emphasis on the imagination means that the specific photographs and forthcoming encounters cannot be definitively pre-determined. However, the pre-curatorial processes will inevitably serve as significant foundations and guides for these activities.

⁷³ Curate Africa Pamphlet.

CHAPTER 7: CONCLUSION

7.1 Projects as Projections

The idea that projects such as Curate Africa can possibly be understood as “projections” of the project leaders’ and other project members’ own imaginings of the subject matter, even within the conceptualisation phase of a project, reared its head through my participation in the mapping experience at Baxter. The most literal way that “projection” as a theme was illuminated, was through our projection of the outline of Africa onto the Baxter floor. Some of the conditions that made this projection possible were: the lights needing to be dimmed in order for Africa to be clear, the whole of Africa could only be projectable and visible from a certain vantage point, and there were no details within the shape of Africa. These conditions seemed to speak to some of the conditions surrounding and foregrounding Curate Africa. For instance, Curate Africa was created against a backdrop of certain [visual] representations of Africa, it was initiated in contrast to what it saw as externally constructed, divisive and “objectifying” representations but also initiated in conversation with institutions and developments that have produced some of these representations (i.e. technology, UCT and anthropology). This conversation can be seen in the fact that Curate Africa was pre-launched within UCT although it carefully negotiated that relationship. Additionally, the project allowed me as an anthropologist to centre my research on the project although the project leaders carefully negotiated the extent to which I had access to the project and rejected some of the ways that anthropology has represented Africa in the past. Thus, it is against these conditions that Curate Africa can be most appreciated, understood and its value illuminated.

Projection in theory

The term “projection” has multiple connotations. The online *Oxford Dictionaries* (British & World English)⁷⁴ offers six definitions for the term. Firstly, “projection” refers to “an estimate or forecast of a future situation based on a study of present trends”. A second definition, closely linked to the mapping experience, describes “projection” as “the presentation of an image on a surface, especially a cinema screen”. The auxiliary descriptions under this second definition – especially associated with cinema - are that “projection” is “an image projected on a surface” or “the ability to make a sound heard at a distance”. The first definition is central in understanding the notion that Curate Africa as a project is a forecast and it is active in the shaping of a future imagining and representing of Africa based on the scholarly work of the project leaders as well as the past and current representations

⁷⁴ <http://oxforddictionaries.com/definition/english/projection> (accessed 20 February 2013 at 09:32am)

and imaginings of Africa. Similarly, the second and third definitions allow one to think of projects (like Curate Africa) as the project leaders' way of presenting an image of *their* Africa into the UCT space, into the public arena and into anthropology (through their interactions with me). The last two definitions of "projection" are similar to each other. "Projection" is defined as "a thing that extends outwards from something else" and "the presentation or promotion of someone or something in a particular way". Auxiliary understandings offered under the latter definition are that "projection" is "a mental image viewed as reality" and it is "the unconscious transfer of one's desires or emotions to another person".⁷⁵

Rafael Moses notes that in our daily lives, we project parts of ourselves and perceptions onto others and external objects to varying degrees. Furthermore, instead of oversimplifying projection and overstating the separation of parts of ourselves (from ourselves) onto others/other objects, Moses asserts that it is important to acknowledge that "fact" and "fantasy" exist simultaneously in our belief systems and external world. He argues that even when the external world seems to deviate from reality, it tends to contain elements of reality (Moses, 1987: 147). Projection herein is therefore understood on Moses' terms but also in line with the above definitions that describe projection as presenting an image or imagining, representing (visually or metaphorically) an image on a different surface as well as forecasting based on the present.⁷⁶ "Projection" here is therefore thought to be the "mental image" of Africa and its realities - for the project leaders - that is based on their understandings of the historical and current representations and projections of the African "reality" as well as a projection of their own imaginings within that reality. Therefore, and in line with Moses, Curate Africa's projections of Africa and scholarship on Africa interplay and entangle with historical, current, UCT's, anthropology's and CAS's conceptions of Africa.

⁷⁵ These two definitions are linked to the term as it was developed by Freud principally within the field of psychoanalysis – although he also applied it to religion and space (Sandler and Perlow, 1987: 2-3). In the term's earlier definitions, "projection" referred to the "directing or turning 'outward'" of the self. Projection was thought to be used by the self as a "defensive mechanism" particularly observable in very disturbed patients (ibid & Moses, 1987: 136). Where the self and the ego was incapable of internally dealing with fears and feelings of threat, the self would project the internal onto external objects or the external reality where the internal processes can be more readily controlled, dealt with, avoided (Sandler and Perlow, 1987: 2-3). From Freud's conception of "projection" arose two main sets of meanings for the term (Sandler and Perlow, 1987: 3). The first set of meanings was developed with the understanding and belief that "projection" is a mechanism of defence (in various ways and for a variety of debated reasons). The second set of meanings for "projection" was employed and headed by Melanie Klein. Klein and her followers described projection as a process where unpleasant aspects of experience were assigned to the external world. In both these [earlier] sets of meanings, "projection" is reactionary. Also, in both sets of meanings the term carries with it negative connotations. In later developments of the term, Rafael Moses asserts that not only is projection transient (sometimes momentary and sometimes long-term), it cannot be limited to a description of the "very disturbed" (Moses, 1987: 140).

⁷⁶ *Oxford Dictionaries*: <http://oxforddictionaries.com/definition/english/projection> (accessed 20 February 2013 at 09:32am)

7.2 Projections of Africa and Negotiations of an African Identity from within the University of Cape Town

Following the above discussion on “projects as projections”, what needs to be emphasised is the fact that beyond Curate Africa alone, perceiving and even re-imagining Africa(ns) and the study thereof *always* happens from a particular vantage point which frames one’s version of Africa in particular ways. Within the context of the University of Cape Town, it has been these differing vantage points that have guided different approaches to engaging with Africa intellectually – as an object or aspect of study. These differing vantage points, or what Mudimbe would call the “idea of Africa” and “the different levels of its perception” (Mudimbe, 1994: xv), have been part of the difficulty in producing decolonized, postcolonial knowledge on and about Africa that can be recognised as such by all those who seek significant epistemological and methodological shifts in knowledge production on and about Africa.

These differing vantages points have fuelled much of the unceasing debates on the kinds of work that universities within Africa should be doing, the kinds of work that African Studies within these universities should be striving for and achieving, the kinds of shifts that count as significant or mere “lip service” where disciplinary – in particular, anthropological - reflectivity (*vis-à-vis* Africa) is concerned (Nyamnjoh, 2012) and whether institutions such as UCT should strive to achieve significant epistemological shifts within EVERY discipline or strengthen centres such as CAS in order to advance its Afropolitan strategic goal. In Chapter 3, the chapter which traces the history of African Studies at UCT and contextualises my study, I highlight, firstly, how the approach to studying Africa and Africans has been a contested and complicated matter within UCT from the establishment of African Studies under the School of Bantu Life and Languages, later the School of African Studies. I then discuss the details surrounding Mamdani’s appointment as the first occupant of the AC Jordon Chair and Director of CAS (1996-1998). Within this discussion I highlight the critiques Mamdani raised just before he resigned from a Centre he claimed was unable to speak to the contemporary postcolonial and post-apartheid African context in which South Africa found itself in the mid-1990s (Mamdani, 1998). In 2011, when the Centre for African Studies was under threat of being disestablished, Mamdani’s critiques resurfaced but what was also pertinent at this time were the debates around what different parties thought to be UCT’s responsibilities as a university located on the African continent. At this point UCT itself had just announced its ambitions to become an Afropolitan University. These developments and debates within Chapter 3 provide the foundational understanding for the many different ideas of Africa and how Africa should be engaged, intellectually, from a University situated in Africa. Chapter 3 consequently set the foundation for

understanding and appreciating the complexities that come with any scholarly intention to do research on and speak of Africa even from within Africa. Furthermore, this chapter allows one to begin appreciating the kinds of representations, contested terrains and intricate histories against which Curate Africa is set, shaped and operates.

This dissertation has further demonstrated that the differing vantage points from which Africa is conceived and projected occur across disciplines but also within disciplines. With regards to disciplinary knowledge production centred on Africa, Mudimbe (1994) argues that despite the methodological shifts, transformations, and conversions that have taken place within technical discourses such as African anthropology and history - which pay close attention to Africa as an object and subject of study - what remains is the fact that these shifts, transformations and conversions take place within discourses predicated by criteria on how to attain “truth” about Africa and express it in scientifically credible discourses (Mudimbe, 1994: 39).

The limitations of various disciplines have been amply probed within CAS. As discussed in Chapter 4, the CAS course, “Problematizing the Study of Africa”, in which Shepherd taught, specifically dealt with disciplinary protocols, and some of the assumptions embedded within disciplinary discourses and practices. Furthermore, the course, like Shepherd’s own work, underlined some of the disciplinary limitations that have shaped colonial knowledge production but also hindered satisfactorily decolonial scholarship on and about Africa. In Chapter 5, I further engage with Shepherd’s critique of my automatic use of the term “gate-keeping” to refer to what he preferred to call our “terms of engagement”. I assert that Shepherd’s critique highlighted how simple it is for anthropologists to fall back on inherited and often highly-loaded anthropological terms, uncritically, even when the anthropologist strives for reflexivity. On the other hand, within anthropology, we continue to use some of the similarly charged terms (and their substitutes) – such as “anthropology at home” - even after the terms’ and their consequences have been discussed, debated and critiqued from within anthropology. In fact, Nyamnjoh (2012) not only argues that terms such as “tribe” still hold much currency within the discipline (discussed in Chapter 5), he uses this as one of his examples to make his point that meaningful reflexivity within Social Anthropology is yet to be achieved – especially where the anthropological study of Africa is concerned (Nyamnjoh, 2012: 15). He asserts that until reflexivity is pervasive, on-going and critical with respect to method, discourse and the sources used and valued within anthropology, reflexivity remains little more than “lip-service” (Nyamnjoh, 2012: 15). For Nyamnjoh, there remains a lacking yet necessary epistemic shift within the discipline as well as within universities in Africa that continue to reproduce the Oxbridge model

of tertiary education consequently also producing knowledge that is principally irrelevant to the broader African societies and ways of knowing (Nyamnjoh 2012, Nyamnjoh 2012b & Nyamnjoh 2004).

Thus, given disciplinary limitations one could offer a strong argument for “undisciplined”, interdisciplinary approaches when engaging with Africa and attempting to produce decolonial knowledge - as a means of circumnavigating the disciplinary limitations. One of the advantages of these “undisciplined” and interdisciplinary approaches is the ability for multiple methods (and disciplinary strengths) to be used and tailored to the research as opposed to the research being tailored to the disciplinary criteria, methods and theories. Bogue and Augusto (2004) call for Cultural Studies and African Studies to be “fields of enquiry” rather than disciplines so as to avoid the major pitfall of disciplinary protocols that drive questions and therefore systematically include and exclude particular questions (Bogue and Augusto, 2004). Although they state that the “fields of enquiry” approach is hard work, the two authors argue that it allows for research and research questions to, themselves, mandate methods and theories most suited to them, therefore opening up the space for a more ‘genuine quest for knowledge’ (Bogue and Augusto, 2004).

Notwithstanding the significant advantages of “undisciplined”, interdisciplinary approaches to studying Africa and attempting to decolonise knowledge production on and about Africa, my research has demonstrated that even “fields of study” such as African Studies have not been able to steer clear of their (individuals and collectives’) ideas of Africa framing their “undisciplinary” approaches. Furthermore, even in its varied formations of interdisciplinarity, African Studies – be it in the form of a Centre or as the focus of the different Africa-centred Schools – has endured both internal and external critiques regarding its approaches to engaging Africa. These approaches received critique from those who had different ideas of what a critical postcolonial and decolonised study of Africa should look like (both within the Centre and Schools and outside of them). Similarly, Curate Africa, in its attempts to provide a platform for a collective re-imagining, re-imagining and curating of Africa, could not completely avoid the pre-curatorial processes that came with the setting up of the project.

While Mudimbe begins by highlighting the confines of disciplinary knowledge, he continues by suggesting that a grave issue where the engagement with Africa within scholarship (from a multi-and interdisciplinary point) is concerned is “the silent and a priori choice of the truth to which a given discourse aims” (Mudimbe, 1994: 39). He points to anthropology’s fusing with other disciplines such

as economics and history from the mid-1950s in order to produce knowledge on Africa as well as African Studies (Mudimbe, 1994: 38-40). Mudimbe asserts his understanding of truth “as a derivative abstraction, as a sign and a tension” which simultaneously unites and separates conflictual objectives of systems constituted on the basis of different axioms and paradigms (Mudimbe, 1994: 39). Moreover, he argues that the matter of conflicting “truths” - in this case differing ideas of Africa and how to study and therefore represent it within an African University – requires engagement and resolving if a rigorous conceptualizing of Africa is sought within African Studies and any other multi-and/or interdisciplinary project (Mudimbe, 1994: 40).

Mudimbe’s assertions are significant for this research, firstly, because they coincide with my argument of projects as projections and projections needing to always be understood as coming of particular vantage points and with particular objectives. Mudimbe’s point about these differing vantage points – or rather “truths” – needing to be explicitly acknowledged and possibly resolved before the business of producing decolonial and rigorous scholarship – whether as a complex, multi-faceted Afropolitan University, a New School, or even as a multi-method discipline such as anthropology - seems essential for UCT in its various attempts to grapple with Africa’s postcoloniality effectively. Ntsebeza, as a mediator during discussions that led up to the establishment of the New School, argues that although no clear-cut notion of African Studies can be discerned at UCT, “it is obvious that certain individuals or groups of individuals in various positions of power have held their own conceptions of African Studies” (Ntsebeza, 2012: 16). He calls for these varying conceptions to be revealed and put on the table for debate (ibid). Likewise, VC Price argues that what Afropolitan should entail should be debatable (Price, 2012: iv). Thus, although much debate has already taken place around decolonising knowledge production on and about Africa, the huge furore that ensued within anthropology in Southern Africa after Nyamnjoh’s article; the even bigger debates – past and present - around African Studies at UCT; the intentions for Shepherd and O’Connell to have pre-launched a project such as Curate Africa; the project leaders’ own scholarly work that aims to re-imagine Africa differently...all of these instances, over and above the above-presented arguments by Mudimbe and Ntsebeza, point to the sheer complexities, on various levels, of this decolonial project within the African context.

This dissertation began with Curate Africa as its object of study. I initially attempted to explore the projects conceptions and examine the manner in which they would depart from the very historical representations of Africa and Africans from which they intended to depart. With regards to my research, Curate Africa (project leaders and Boggles) certainly problematised the manner in which

anthropologists, including myself, have and continue to conduct research and construct the experiences of those whom they research. As discussed in Chapter 5, the *Terms of Engaging...ME* chapter, Curate Africa interrogated anthropologists' sustained expectations of penetrating participants' intimate and private spaces after being granted consent (informed or not) to conduct research. The project rejected my research turning it and the project leaders into objects and subjects of study – or even “informants” and terms such as “gate-keeping” that we, anthropologists, regularly employ in research were also questioned.

While I set out to study a small project-in-the-making, which was itself concerned with questions of power and representation, Curate Africa, through my ethnographic research however, turned out to be challenging anthropology – a discipline which tends to be better equipped for the study of routinised culture. So the challenge was to deal with Curate Africa's embryonic nature. This required on-going innovative and attentive responses from me; allowing me to see ultimately that the focus on a project as embryonic and small as Curate Africa in these conditions throws light on much larger questions. One of the larger questions is whether and how anthropology is equipped to deal with the non-routinised, the emergent and those projects that explicitly challenge anthropology - its methods, its discourse and its representations of ethnographic African subjects”. The research therefore seemed to illuminate an epistemological shift in the making together with the very challenges, limits and strives that go into shaping such a shift within UCT in particular and scholarship (centred on Africa) in general. Thus, although I demonstrate how Curate Africa problematised the study and representations of Africa within my own study and through the negotiations of my research, Curate Africa actually became a heuristic device for looking at how an institution such as UCT acts and reacts in the face of the huge challenge of producing decolonised, postcolonial scholarship.

Thus, over and above, providing an ethnographic glimpse into the daily ways in which African identity and African Studies are negotiated institutionally within UCT, this dissertation highlights the ways in which various members of this complex, multi-layered society act, react and are affected by the challenge to develop, reflect and uphold an African identity through the very activity that defines a university; the production of knowledge itself. The broader focus on UCT as an institution, as opposed to just Curate Africa, has provided ethnographic insight into some of the nuanced and complex relationships, networks, power relations and tensions that exist amongst citizens of the University at any given time.

POSTSCRIPT

Since February 2013, Curate Africa made significant changes to both the direction of the project and the presentation and representation. The project is no longer in its conceptual phase. In 2013 it focused on one of its sub-themes, “Play”, and initiated what it called the “first stage of the project” within the university space: as a course with students. Through the first stage, Curate Africa’s social media activity has increased tremendously. Some of the project’s partners have also changed somewhat.

On its website, Curate Africa explained that for its students, this stage involved the sourcing and curating of images “from mainstream archives” and the web. The project stated that it was interested in both historical and contemporary images of play. It also cautioned that the colonial stereotypes of Africans have depicted Africans as “un-serious” and therefore the project would be dealing with a weighty, loaded matter. Coetzee’s text, “Idleness at the Cape” was referenced to make this point. Interestingly, Curate Africa further stated that “One of the tags we have been working with is the notion of ‘freedom through free-time’. We would argue that play is both serious and un-serious, and that its un-seriousness is a source of great possibility.” What is of interest about this statement is how much it is a resounding of the *Factory Seconds*’ panel in which O’Connell spoke of “flashes of freedom” that took place at the pageant (free-time) within the densely political and repressive work space of the factory. Also, the chair, Shepherd, revered the ability of her work to be playful.

The university students concerned - undergraduate and postgraduate students from Michaelis and Rhode Island School of Design - chose to take a course, called “Public Culture/ Imagining the World in Photographs/Curate Africa 2013” which is convened by Shepherd and O’Connell. The students were put into groups and through the groups they collected a variety of incredible photographs centred on “Play” and created digital exhibitions (accompanied by photo essays). Curate Africa has posted a video of the project leaders giving a few students instructions. The programme of the course, which is downloadable from their website, included a visit to the Spring Queen exhibition located at the District Six Museum in Cape Town, seminars around “the politics of representation”, African visualities, the “history of photography [sic] and the camera in Africa” and “curating ourselves, curating others”. Apart from attending seminars and going on class visits, the students were required to post their images on Tumblr accounts, which feed Curate Africa’s Twitter account.

Both were handled by McNulty Consulting. Furthermore, a section of the website is dedicated to a list of 12 readings for the course. This list began with John Berger's *Ways of Seeing*, included Stuart Hall's *Spectacle of the Other* and *The Work of Representation*, and other readings such as Susan Sontag's *On photography* and Alan Sekula's *The body and the Archive*.

The most significant developments in the configuration of Curate Africa's partnerships are that Arterial Network is no longer a partner. However Curate Africa has partnered with Michaelis School of Art and Rhode Island School of Design (where Bogue was a visiting scholar at the time of my research). Wiki Africa is also a new partner. Professor Elizabeth Giorgis from Addis Ababa University together with Mike van Graan from Arterial Network are no longer on the Project Advisory Board, although all the other members: Bogue, Skotnes, Benny Gool and Fabian Saptouw remain. The project has an additional project leader: Professor Bolaji Campbell from Rhode Island School of Design.

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