

Masters of Fine Art

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**Not Making Big Rocks Small: Decolonising and Queering the Archive through
Personal Narrative in the Film Essay**

University of Cape Town

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This research is dedicated to my grandfather whose life and stories continue to inspire my work and my thinking.

Introduction

In 2015 when the #RhodesMustFall (RMF) movement began at the University of Cape Town (UCT) I was an undergraduate student at the University of the Witwatersrand (Wits). While the monument of Cecil John Rhodes was being removed from UCT's Upper Campus, I began to question my identity as a white South African and how my artistic research could engage this broader discourse within an intuition of higher learning. The movement challenged institutionalised racism, and the ways colonial histories are taught and represented in public spaces and institutions. The movement quickly spread to other universities in South Africa resulting in the #FeesMustFall movement that snowballed into project that not only challenged racism, sexism, homophobia, ableism, worker's rights and other social injustices, but developed a language through which the decolonisation process could become a concrete reality. Many artworks and monuments belonging to university archives were subsequently removed from the halls of major institutions and some were destroyed or burned. Curricula were also challenged to reflect an African rather than a Eurocentric perspective. The falling, burning and destruction while contentious were essential moments in the formation of a vision for decolonised institutions and public spaces. This is the context in which my work has developed and has influenced the ways in which I have chosen to unpack my own family history, the stories and people that surround me.

In 2016, I moved to Cape Town to do my masters at UCT and was struck by the number of colonial sculptures in the city. The sculptures are grand and portray colonialism as phenomena which should be honoured and protected. I understood that this was a major problem for many people of colour in this country who on a daily basis have to confront the leaders of colonialism, responsible for the dehumanization of millions of people still dominating central public spaces in a so-called 'free' republic. I found that even in my own family, the tendency to defend this history and protect these monuments was very real. If like my family other white South Africans felt similarly about these arguably violent objects it could stand in the way of realizing decolonization and social transformation. After 23 years of democracy the legacies of separation and exclusion still remain very much ingrained

in the current socio-political and geographic landscape of South Africa. The question of how to deal with responsibility, identity politics and racial segregation is as prevalent now as it was in 1994. This project is my attempt at 'dealing' with this question through my own family history by exposing the victims, perpetrators and everything in-between.

Many crimes were committed during colonialism, and few of those perpetrators were ever put on trial for their crimes. Similarly, after Apartheid, the failures of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) acquitted individuals for heinous crimes with little or no restitution for the victims. My work asks what happens to the children and grandchildren of these perpetrators of historical trauma. How do we start a conversation about decolonisation with these individuals who feel they have a personal stake in the preservation of colonial archives and histories? How do these stories get told or not, and why do many white South Africans either hide away their traumatic family legacies or find ways to justify them? For my MFA, I aimed to reflect on my personal experiences and family history through the medium of a film essay and installation. By showing it in a public space, I hope to start a conversation about how white South Africans can reimagine their role within the decolonisation project as one that is active, present and uncomfortable.

It is difficult to know how to participate in decolonisation when your entire reason for being in South Africa is embedded in the violent history of colonisation. At times, I believe, it is about standing back and giving space to people of colour to speak their truths, to offer respect and dignity by listening and remaining silent. However, I feel it is equally important to face these histories as white South Africans, to acknowledge their existence and the violence they can cause in the present. When Chumani Maxwele threw human faeces on the monument of Cecil John Rhodes, it caused a visceral reaction from the South African public. This act polarised views on the student movement and led to a major backlash from the media. I would argue that some outraged white South Africans used this moment as a reason not to support the student movement and in many ways the movement has faced public condemnation as a result. It is my belief that this action was necessary in

destabilizing 'white settler mentality'¹ by causing discomfort and bringing these questions back to the body, to the self and the abject within identity politics.

My work attempts to take the history of my great-grandfather, which has been hidden from my family narrative, to metaphorically throw faeces on it. To dislodge it from a place of privilege and strip it naked for all to see. I have done this in opposition to the ways in which colonial histories have been defended and justified within public spaces and archives in South Africa. I see this as a way to deal with macrocosmic colonial histories through microcosmic family narratives and revealing each small lie one by one. I have done this not only to make this personal story a public spectacle but to face and deface it; to reflect on the pain these histories can cause to those who have not directly benefited from them. While I was completing my undergraduate degree at Wits, in the midst of the FMF movement, Mcebo Dlamini was the ex-chair of the Student Representative Council. He was suspended for saying that he admired Adolf Hitler, this statement led to him being suspended and ultimately arrested and put on trial for his participation in the FMF protests. Beyond being anti-Semitic and unquestionably problematic Dlamini's statement reflects on an interesting point about the ways violent histories and in particular white masculinities are monumentalized. Despite the atrocities they committed monuments representing these kinds of destructive leaders stand tall in many public spaces in South Africa today. The prevalence of objects and spaces which monumentalize individuals that have been responsible for mass suffering can lead to a public perception which suggests that despite the violence perpetrated by such individuals they are still worthy of admiration. This was something which I did not want to reproduce in the re-imagining of my great-grandfather and became an issue that was central to my decision to conduct my research with a self-critical post-colonial lens.

The Intern 575 (2015) is a feature length essay film about my great-grandfather's immigration from Germany to Cape Town and then to Johannesburg, South Africa during the early 1900s. An interview with my grandfather revealed a chain of

¹ See: *Settler Colonialism and Decolonisation* (2007) by Lorenzo Veracini, which will be discussed in more detail in the section of this paper titled: *Unsettling the Colonial Settler Mentality*.

memories that told the story of his father who was a Nazi or 'Nazi sympathizer', during the Second World War, none of which had ever been mentioned to me before. After hearing the story, I began collecting archival images belonging to my great-grandfather. I then layered the stories with footage of actors as well as recreations of popular music from that period, and locations relating to various aspects of power and preservation. My initial interest was to question his historical narrative and the defensive 'white settler mentality' that may be contained within the telling of it (saying it out loud). The sequences in the film are shot at various sites in the Western Cape; such as the Simon's Town Museum, The South African Naval Museum, the Maitland Cemetery and Rhodes Memorial. Many of the sites are public spaces that engage or contain personal and historical archives. I define myself as an essay film maker who is engaged with the personal as a political act of resistance and action. This story is about moving between different spacio-temporal moments and the risk or potential loss necessary in confronting colonial archives and the legacies of apartheid. The narration recalls the life of a man who benefited from political and social inequality and the racial privileges of nationalistic and fascist ideology but in a twist of fate became a victim to it. He was subsequently stripped of his citizenship and imprisoned in an internment camp for 7 years as a suspected spy for the Nazis. The story is narrated by my grandfather and bares the marks of his loss, desires and shame surrounding his father's identity and subsequently his own. His personal account has been juxtaposed with historical narratives found in public spaces, libraries, online and in museums where the footage was shot.

The sound track is a compilation of popular American and German songs from the 1940s that were recreated by musicians and singers who worked with me on this project. Many of the songs were originally sung by Ella Fitzgerald and recall experiences of love, disappointment and longing. When layered onto the images, the combination creates a complex dialogue. I suggest that it is in these spaces between image, object, and sound that are beyond words or language learning and unlearning becomes possible. The camera was more than just a means to record it became a vehicle for decolonizing my family archive and creating ways of dealing with the shame surrounding my great-grandfather's internment.

By unpacking my great-grandfather, Bruno's, social roles as a father, husband, and white man, I humanise him as a victim of circumstance and war. However, simultaneously, I am mocking these archetypes or stereotypes of my own family history, ridiculing the protective way the story is told by my grandfather and his reluctance to acknowledge his father's role as a perpetrator. By doing this, I have questioned the ways in which the legacy of perpetrators might be protected and defended by family members within contemporary white South African society. Showing this archive in a public space like a cinema, is my way of refusing to sweep it under the carpet because it reveals a painful and uncomfortable truth about where I come from and the privilege I was born into. Sometimes people, like my grandfather and his brother, prefer to hide away shameful family histories, to preserve an image or a memory, and achieve a future that is less embarrassing or painful. I felt it was important to unpack this archive because of the shame and embarrassment surrounding it and to sit in the discomfort this might cause. This story epitomises the way white privilege functions in South Africa, because even though my great-grandfather, was stripped of his rights and imprisoned, he still had more rights than the majority of people of colour in this country at that time. I do not feel that one can speak about colonialism without speaking about apartheid. They are both products of socially engineered systems of oppression, designed to enslave people of colour for economic and social gain. Therefore, this is not just a question of how one man benefited from racial privilege during a singular moment in history, but how power and racial inequality continue to function.

The title for this paper, *Not Making Big Rocks Small: Decolonising and Queering the Archive through Personal Narrative in the Film Essay*, reflects on the fact that that my great-grandfather was relatively comfortable even if he was imprisoned. In my grandfather's words, he was not even required to make big rocks small². While,

² Under colonialism, many persons of colour who were imprisoned were used as an exploitable workforce. It is a contested belief that colonialists believed that forced labour could 'civilise' African people. Later, during Apartheid, persons of colour who fought for basic human rights were imprisoned without a fair trial under similar conditions. Many of these people, like Nelson Mandela, were literally required to break rocks in prisons like Robben Island. These rocks were often used to build roads and public works projects. The empires that were responsible for colonisation benefitted greatly from prison labour forces that increased after the discovery of gold (South African History Online, 2005). This form of

this time and later during Apartheid many people of colour were legally and forcibly stripped of their humanity, imprisoned and required to do menial labour – some of which included literally breaking rocks down into smaller stones for the construction of roads and other public works projects. The title for this paper, does not only refer to the ways my grandfather's race protected him from 'making big rocks small' in a literal sense but also my own position in dealing with white settler mentality and the enormous collective task of unsettling the defences which protect it. In some ways, I have positioned white privilege, and white settler mentality, as the 'big rocks' on the road to decolonization that need to be broken down and destroyed. It is these 'rocks' which sometimes tend to be minimised or 'made smaller' in order to gaslight and disregard the voices of change. I am not trying to minimise these issues or make them smaller than what they really are but to ultimately annihilate them. My work is my attempt to tackle these 'big rocks' head on and to feel uncomfortable or unsettled by them rather than to make them smaller and easier to explain away.

The following essay I will explore the fragmented ideas I have presented above in more detail. In the sections below, I will unpack some of the formal choices I made in the construction of the film and installation. I also discuss and explain the various theories I have drawn upon in my research. In the first section of this paper, I investigate the potential of storytelling through the medium of the film essay as a de-colonial strategy for dealing with difficult or traumatic histories. In the second section I focus on how this strategy of storytelling can lead to the unsettling of colonial settler mentality, and perhaps, lead to greater participation in decolonisation. In the third section I explore the relationship between personal stories and historical narratives as I have experienced them in museums and public spaces. Finally, I discuss what it means to queer an archive in both personal and public spaces and how that can lead to decolonising the hegemonic representations of white settler histories.

prison labour and punishment is reflected in my title, '*Not Making Big Rocks Small*', as my great-grandfather's race protected him from such harsh and inhumane conditions.

Using the film essay to tell stories and confront difficult histories

I first started working with my grandfather's stories because I was struck by how much I could learn about the histories of this country from the way he told them. His personal stories contained evidence of key political moments, social inequality, and the changing geopolitical landscape of South Africa. The history books I read in school always presented 'facts' that were certain and not debatable. My grandfather's stories were only ever partially certain, always subjected to my contestation and argument; they changed and aged as he did. In this section, I discuss why I think storytelling is an important method of dealing with historical trauma and violent histories. To further my discussion, I draw on Amy Schuman's (2005) text *Other People's Stories: Entitlement and the Critique of Empathy*. What I argue in relation to this text is that stories can travel beyond the personal and become political tools in addressing and understanding historical trauma. Schuman calls for a critical empathy in the ways that people enact entitlement over other people's stories and the responsibility that the storyteller assumes in telling another person's story.

The Responsibility of the Story-teller

In order to gain insight into this history I sat with my great-grandfather, Bruno's, archive of photographs and documents. I then recorded stories from my grandfather, Robert, and his brother, Franz Heilig, about the life of their father. In addition to the interviews which I conducted with Robert I had an image of my great-grandfather assembled from a patchwork of stories I heard growing up. These stories and the numerous photographs that Bruno took throughout his life presented a peculiar kind of window into both what he saw and what his family saw of him. Bruno was a photographer by trade and so the notion of the image and these archival photographs feature strongly throughout the film. These images and stories presented various fragments of a reality and that had an effect on my decision to translate them in various media – through film and sculptural installations or assemblages. In a sense, what I attempted to do was queer the gaze of this archive by challenging the ways in which my great-grandfather's identity might be viewed,

and therefore challenge the ways I view myself. The notion of queering the archive, explored in Alana Kumbier's (2014) article *Ephemeral Material: Queering the Archive*, is important for my research and will be addressed in the section titled Queering the Archive. For now, it is sufficed to say that by queering Bruno's archive I stripped it from its stiff patriarchal narrative and bathed it in uncertainty.

The film starts with photographs from Bruno's archive and then dissolves to an actor on Sea Point beach in Cape Town. The first image that is seen is a digitally constructed 8mm film dissolve, seen in the image below, as the story begins with a question: "Is this thing on?". Historical narratives inform us of events that happen in the past. I am interested in personal narratives that in many ways may be uncertain, unsure or doubtful. I suggest that these narratives contribute to alternative ways of understanding history which are not found in history books or the voice of the historian. The historian's voice, is described by Walter Benjamin (1969) in *The Story-teller* as certain, fixed on a singular meaning rooted in a history of empiricism. By starting the film with a question, I position the story-teller's voice as necessarily ambivalent and doubtful, as it questions itself, the camera and even the viewer. I have presented the narration as a flexible, fluid, process of remembering, highlighting the moments where my grandfather is unsure. The historian has the tendency to give a broad overview of events that have occurred and exclude the individual experiences within those events. He exemplifies certain experiences in order to reproduce hegemonic power, re-telling stories that serve existing structures rather than ridiculing them and opting for an alternative. The stories that I collect from my grandfather's history are re-imagined in the film essay in a way that is self-reflective about the affects of history on the present. This self-reflexivity is not just about how my grandfather tells the story of his father, but about the responsibility I have to assume in re-telling this story at this particular moment in contemporary history.



In a sense, I have treated the main character of the film with little empathy and have been highly sceptical of the way the story was told. Being exposed to post-colonial theory has shaped the ways I understand my family history and the questions I have asked of the archive. While my grandfather and his brother tell their stories with sincerity and the process of listening to the stories was very intimate and personal I have received them with 'critical empathy'. By this I mean that although my grandfather and his brother truly believe the narratives that they told and did not explicitly intend to reproduce a story that justifies some of their father's abusive, alcoholic and sexist mentalities; in some ways that is what they did. As such, I questioned how I could represent this history without reproducing the same defensive mentality, and instead to offer a critical empathy that could both understand their position and challenge it.

In her book titled *Other People's Stories: Entitlement and the Critique of Empathy*, anthropologist Amy Shuman (2005:7) calls for a critique of empathy, or rather a "critical empathy" when examining the ways in which stories travel from person to person and from one context into another. In her introduction she states that storytelling is "a means for traveling beyond the personal" through a juxtaposition of individual experience and collective knowledge (Schuman, 2005:1). However, she makes the important distinction that personal narratives do not in and of themselves subvert dominant/hegemonic 'grand' narratives. She claims that personal narratives can be as constructed and as universalising as dominant narratives, but that "the difference may be a difference in how the obligations of tellers and listeners to stories are displayed through claims, apologies promises and disavowals" (Schuman, 2005:10). As such, the subversive potential lies in the way in which the

story is told, and who the storyteller is – their identity embedded in body politics – wherein lies the subversive potential.

Simply by asking my grandfather and his brother to recall the events leading up to their father's internment a chain of memories was triggered and these resulted in the narrative of the film. This event is what Marcel Proust referred to as 'chaining involuntary memories,' and what Julia Kristeva (1993: 8), in response, referred to as 'felt-time.' In the chapter titled *In Search of Madeleine* (1993), from her presentation titled *Proust and the Sense of Time In Eliot Lectures: T.S Eliot Memorial Lectures* (1993) she argues that felt-time is less about a chronology or sequence of events and more about the obscurity of experience. I think it is important to define the role of memory, in order to understand why it is so central to decolonisation. Mbembe (Mbembe, 2015) argues that memory is supposed to do the work of demythologizing history and that this must go hand-in hand with demythologising whiteness:

Bringing Rhodes' statue down is one of the many legitimate ways in which we can, today in South Africa, demythologize that history and put it to rest – which is precisely the work memory properly understood is supposed to accomplish[...]Whiteness is at its best when it turns into a myth. It is the most corrosive and the most lethal when it makes us believe that it is everywhere; that everything originates from it and it has no outside.

I argue that investigating history through personal storytelling and remembering does not completely or partially destroy a grand historical narrative. However, it allows for play with the uncertainty of history through an engagement with an elsewhere and perhaps presents the possibility for imagining a different more democratic future, where the protection of whiteness is not at the centre of institutional and economic interests.

The film explores problematic ways in which both historical narratives and personal stories are told, particularly by those who have benefited from the inequalities of the past. Racism is reproduced in the home. From the microcosmic to the macrocosmic and back again; stories play a significant role in reproducing myths and stereotypes that promote racism, prejudice and discrimination. Franz, my grandfather's brother, speaks about persons of colour in a derogatory manner. It is what he has learned to do through the mechanisms of fear, propaganda and racial superiority. However, this

does not mean that he cannot or should not be held responsible for the ways in which he chooses to speak about his experiences and the experiences of others in the present. In choosing to represent this narrative, I wanted to take on a critical but empathetic lens in order to tell this story in a responsible way, so as to not reproduce offensive attitudes. I suggest, it is about holding these two positions simultaneously which in this work was both my motivation and challenge.



Stories will inherently travel, because they occur through an active and social process of telling. If they are deemed worth repeating they will be told by other people. Eventually, if they are decidedly capable of communicating something that 'exceeds' the individual experience they become representative of a collective narrative, and as Schuman (2005: 6) states, they become "a site for negotiation". However, process of traveling requires further examination in terms of the power implicit in the retelling of stories and their negotiated appropriation. In other words, stories that become representative of a collective narrative if re-constructed to serve an oppressive history do the very opposite of subversion. Instead they serve under a guise of empathy the very thing that the teller aims to challenge. My role as the filmmaker, which is also that of the storyteller, is then central to this discussion. I have assumed some kind of responsibility for the ways in which my grandfather and his brother have told their stories. I have a responsibility to both my family members not to misrepresent them, and also to my audience who I do not yet know. This is the 'site of negotiation' that moves between the personal and public, to which I suggest Schuman is referring in the above quote.

It is my assertion that, even if brought up in a racist period and surrounded by racist ideologies the individual chooses what constructions to accept, internalise, and

reproduce. Therefore, every individual should be held accountable for the choices they make in representing themselves and other people in both public and personal spaces. It is far more difficult to hold those closest to us responsible for using racist, sexist and homophobic language. However, I suggest, it is imperative to the decolonial project. The home can be viewed as the place in which identity is formed; the point at which the infant first deals with and has contact with the world and the cultural ideologies that are circulated within it. In a journal article titled *The Nature of the 'In-Between* (2006) Laura Praglin uses British psychoanalyst Donald W. Winnicott's concept of the *Transitional Space* and German philosopher Martin Buber's *das Zwischenmenschliche* (2006) to discuss the importance of transitional objects in the formative years of a child's development. Using studies and the texts by Buber and Winnicott, Praglin argues that the in-between spaces and transitional objects are the most "'real' and 'authentic' part of our existence" (2006: 4) but also one of the earliest delineations of the 'self' (I-Thou) versus the 'other' (I-It). These objects (dolls, stuffed toys, dummies) mark a profound moment in human development and in the identification with that which is not the self (2006: 3). In Praglin's paper she states that with this transitional object the child learns to identify the mother (or care-giving figure) as separate from rather than as an extension of, the 'self'. In this way they play a pivotal role in the development of the child's identity. Transitional objects (Winnicott, 1986)³ such as dolls, toys, and story-books are the objects through which we start to see ourselves and imagine others as separate from ourselves. This forms what he calls the 'me and not-me' identification: the moment where the child no longer sees the caregiver as just an extension of themselves but as an autonomous being. These objects, that are found in the home (and community museums) repeatedly feature in my film and installation as they play an important role in the early development of identity and the resulting cultural constructs with which one identifies.

³ See Donald Woods Winnicott's research paper titled *Transitional Objects and Transitional Phenomena: A Study of the First Not-Me* (1986) that deals with transitional objects and their social values.



The simple act of recalling repressed memories and asking questions about why they were repressed in the first place provides insight into what they can possibly mean in the present. This is what Timothy Corrigan (2011) calls an encounter with a 'public elsewhere' through imagined and at times obscene memories. According to Corrigan (2011: 35), the real is contested in essay film-making through the self:

Essayistic thinking thus becomes a conceptual...and representational remaking of the self as it encounters, tests, and experiences some version of the real as a public 'elsewhere'.

The notion of an 'elsewhere' is important to the structure of the film and to the entire notion of the film essay as defined by Corrigan. In addition, an elsewhere is particularly relevant to the colonial mind-set that precedes the white settler mentality. The colonial is here in Africa, while always being constructed in relation to a European elsewhere. There is a nostalgic longing which is expressed in monuments, museum collections, street names, names of buildings and other everyday phenomena that remain an ingrained part of the 'post-colony'. Achille Mbembe states that these colonial iconography, cultural symbols, monuments and images are to become the ruins onto which citizenship and democracy are built. If people of colour are to feel that they are part of a country that acknowledges the histories of oppression and struggle that led to the constitution of democracy and freedom these phenomena need to be removed like the monument of Rhodes was from UCT (Mbembe, 2015):

The decolonization of buildings and of public spaces is therefore not a frivolous issue, especially in a country that, for many centuries, has defined itself as not of Africa, but as an outpost of European imperialism in the Dark Continent; and in which 70% of the land is still firmly in the hands of 13% of the population. The decolonization of buildings and of public spaces is inseparable from the

democratization of access [...] We are therefore calling for the demythologization of whiteness because democracy in South Africa will either be built on the ruins of those versions of whiteness that produced Rhodes or it will fail.

Spaces which are public and even those which are private but are open to the public and claim to represent a community of people belonging to particular place (i.e. Simon's Town Museum) need to be curated in a way which reflects a responsibility to all. As Mbembe states, this is a serious concern that should not be underestimated. Museums, even the smallest most intimate archives form part of a collective memory, national history and the right to public space. Then should the images of objects honouring the violent history of colonialism be "recalled and decommissioned if we have to put history to rest, free ourselves from our own entrapment in white mythologies and open a future for all here and now". Or as Mbembe (2016) alternatively suggests should they be placed in a kind of park, or buried in a "graveyard"; in order to create space to imagine new possibilities for the future? Or can digital films and sound recordings present other ways to remember violent histories without them taking up much needed space? With these questions in mind I will define the film essay and further describe what I mean by the radical potential of an elsewhere in the following paragraphs.

The Film Essay and Elsewheres

My question is perhaps more to do with the ability to capture a person's delusions in both my lens-based and object-based practices than achieving realism. Both present the viewer with an immersive environment in which to explore history and memory. It is not my aim to portray a realistic document or documentary, nor is it to re-create musicological practices through installation or to emulate them in any way. The work is something else entirely; it is a visual representation of an elsewhere recovered from the memories of my grandfather; fragments that I have made publically accessible through the medium of the film essay and installation.

While listening to this story and watching the film the viewer sees the old man fall asleep on the rocky beach and the film enters into kind of dream sequence or flashback in black and white. I describe this dream sequence as something which blurs the line between reality and fiction. As an 'elsewhere' it is the space in which

Bruno is able to occupy an excess of identities, events and moments in his life. *The Intern 575* is constructed as a series of memories and stories told by my grandfather and his brother. These memories are explored through the filmic technique of the 'flashback' that at times begins with the literal flash of a camera and allows the scene to move between the past and the present. In these flashbacks suppressed and imagined memories are played out through fragmented clips that are in a sense both real documents and fictional elsewheres. This is represented through shots of community (post-Apartheid) museums in South Africa, many of which were conceptualised during Apartheid and have remained largely unchanged and untransformed. It is these spaces which need to be interrogated as they may affect the ways that people within a particular place imagine themselves in relation to the individuals around them.

I positioned the actor who plays Bruno within an 'elsewhere' as a way to show his fictional struggle to remember who he once was and come to terms with what he has done, as seen in the image below.

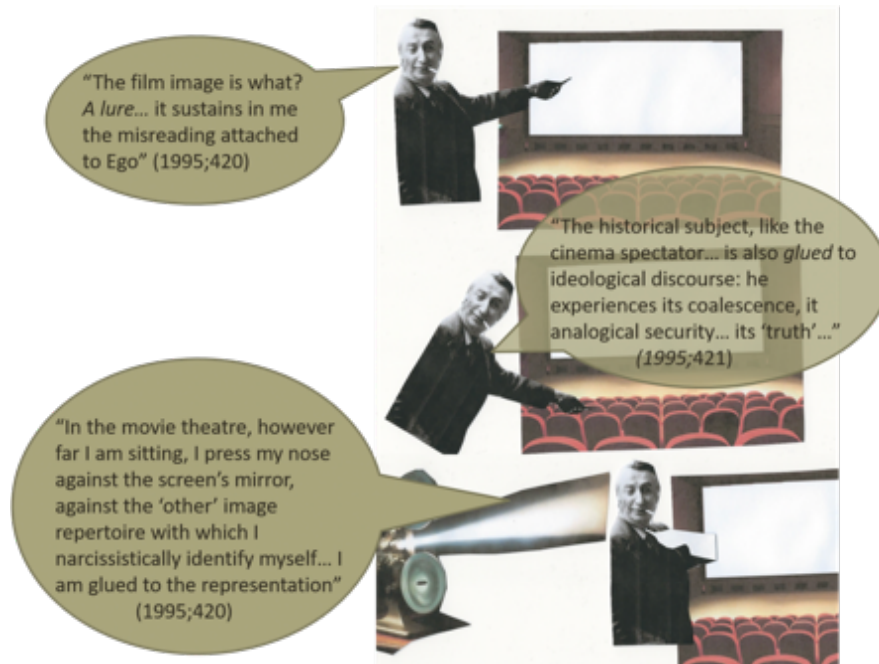


I define the essay filmmaker as an artist engaged in an "essayistic encounter with 'the everyday' as an arena of public experience" (Corrigan, 2011: 32). As suggested by Timothy Corrigan (2003) in *The Essay Film: From Montaigne, After Marker*, this 'elsewhere' is materialised through narration and self-reference. In a sense, what this perhaps does is complicate the linearity of time by bringing history into the present; literally embodying and re-enacting it in the now. As Benjamin (1969: 252) suggests, "history is the subject of a structure whose site is not homogenous, empty time, but time filled by the presence of the now." The images move between the documents and photographs, as well as the staged scenarios based on those images that were

created by myself and three actors. It is the play between objectivity and subjectivity presented in mine and other film essays such as *Statues Also Die* (1953) by Marker and Resnais, that challenge the power structures of the traditional documentary genre. This play destabilises a purely objective picturing of history, bringing these narratives into the present to question contemporary politics.



I filmed very close-up, tight shots of the actor Wolfgang Weissenstein's face and blue eyes and characteristics that are seen as stereotypically 'Aryan', like his blue eyes and pale skin. I focused on the evidence of time, corporality and the fragility of the human skin as it ages, as well as the complexity of felt-time. Bruno is represented as an old man who reminisces about his life and yet his wife Eileen is much younger and remains so throughout the film. This creates a strange kind of relationship between the felt-time experienced by Bruno and the temporality of his dreams and flashbacks experienced by the viewer in real time. Therefore, throughout the film Eileen never ages in the same way that he does and remains only a silent image. The characters and their contexts are described by my grandfather and therefore bare the marks of his fictions, memory loss and, to a degree, historical amnesia. The non-linearity and disregard for historical accuracy forms part of the intention and challenge of 'ungluing', which I will describe below.



In *Leaving the Movie Theatre*, Roland Barthes (1995: 419) discusses the experience of watching film in a public place: its context; the 'darkness'; the seats that immerse the viewer; the city; and in short – "the Cinema situation.". He equates this context with a space for the eroticism and fetishism of being in the particularity of this place – an 'elsewhere' – made up of precise sounds, rays of light and an indeterminate "mass of other bodies." (1995: 419). Barthes describes the image emitted from a projector as "a lure" – an object pregnant with notions of the self, the ego and narcissism. He goes on to describe the cinema as a kind of giant key hole through which an ideological 'truth' or reality may be projected and consumed. This projection is refracted onto a mirror, which reflects the image back onto the viewer who peeps through the aperture. It is this complex process of the cinema spectator simultaneously looking at and searching for a reality that he likens to the historical subject from which one cannot escape – the self. History and cinema both function within the framework of desire and fixation – wanting to see ourselves and our own reality while searching for one that is still unknown or indeterminate. Barthes (1995: 421) states:

it is a lure (our lure, for who escapes it?); the Ideological would actually be the image-repertoire of a period of history, the cinema of a society [...] Is not the stereotype a fixed image, a quotation to which our language is glued?

This film is an attempt to ‘unglue’ and address the historical preconceptions, constructions, and learned behaviours on which I was raised. I have addressed this through the mediums of the film essay because the essay is itself a medium through which to question and multiply our own understandings of history and memory through the personal. As Corrigan (2011:35) suggests, “essayistic thought becomes the exteriorization of personal expression... (through the layering of photographic imagery, text and) material contexts (the film essay is a space) in which to think is to multiply one’s selves.” Thus, I suggest that this essayistic thought transgresses fixed notions of subjectivity and identity. The film essay is a form through which I have tried to multiply rather than singularise. It has given me a form through which I can challenge myself and my identity and ask the uncomfortable questions that needed to be asked of my grandfather’s stories.



Laura Rascaroli’s (2008) article titled *The Film Essay: Problems, Definitions, Textual Commitments* has also been useful for my research; particularly in critically engaging with the history and movement of the film essay as a form that transgresses binaries and fixed categorisation. She notes that the film essay not only creates an interchange between political beliefs and film: “but also introduces distinctive questions, prerogatives, opportunities, and strategies in that relationship” (Rascaroli, 2011: 6). As defined by Corrigan (2011: 6), the essay film is: “an encounter that

measures the limits and possibilities of each (the film and the essay) as a conceptual activity.” I have produced this film within a particular context – the University of Cape Town – in the particular historical moment of 2016 and 2017. The relation between producing an essay film and this specific context has greatly affected how I engage with my own history as well as the histories of others. In other words, the essay film and the context in which it is produced cannot be separated even if the context in which it is shown changes. It is a direct response to the political climate of the time and space in which it is made. This is explored through chosen modes of representing my family archive and personal history as well as the museums and public spaces within which I have filmed. In addition, making the viewing space a central concern to the film/installation, as suggested by both Barthes and Corrigan, affects the ways in which the film is viewed by an audience.

It was an intentional decision to take a personal approach for this project and to use my family history to question the problematics of archives that focus on monumentalising European history, as seen in many public spaces in South Africa. Using digital manipulations, images, objects and music, I have tried to recreate, queer and question the narratives provided by my grandfather and his brother. I have considered which questions emerge through the combination of moving image and spoken word that at times do not emerge from a description of a grand historical event like WWII. Things that we do not necessarily see in that history have been rendered invisible from the aftermath of war and trauma, but still inhabit the personal archives of many homes. I have drawn the conclusions that it may be problematic to look for answers within history books and colonial archives. I am especially critical of public spaces that monumentalize singular historical narratives. I have questioned notions of redemption and reconciliation especially when they are not coupled with responsibility and criticality.



What I have found is that the way I understand history is defined by the time in which I exist and the stories that surround me. What happened in the past is constantly redefined in the present through re-telling, re-presenting and re-appropriating what is no longer considered acceptable. During the process of making the film, I have reflected on history, not as a line or a circle, but as condensation, the standstill, the flash of memory, and the moment that cannot be redeemed. What should happen to the removed statue of Cecil John Rhodes, or to the archive of a Nazi? Should they be destroyed to prevent any further violence and pain? Do we, as Chris Marker (1983) states in *Sans Soleil*, “pick up the ornaments, left-overs from the ceremony, and burn them, in celebration”? Or are there ways of documenting histories that are alternative to monuments, museums and history books – ways that do not aim to singularise but to multiply the different realities and lived-experiences of a given history? As Mbembe (Mbembe, 2015) states, museums are complex places where learning and imagining can happen, not a space where racist leaders should be honoured at the cost of the lived-experiences of people of colour, not to mention the effects they have on public imagination:

It might then be that the statue of Rhodes and the statues of countless men of his ilk that are littering the South African landscape properly belong to a museum - an institution that, with few exceptions, has hardly been subjected to the kind of thorough critique required by these times of ours in South Africa. Yet, a museum properly understood is not a dumping place. It is not a place where we recycle

history's waste. It is first and foremost an epistemic space. A stronger option would therefore be the creation of a new kind of institution, partly a park and partly a graveyard, where statues of people who spent most of their lives defacing everything that the name "black" stood for would be put to rest. Putting them to rest in those new places would in turn allow us to move on and recreate the kind of new public spaces required by our new democratic project.

The digital presents new ways of imagining what could be done with the colonial archive in ways that do not take up physical space, and in particular public space. I have used the film essay to show how these problematic objects can be recorded and exist in a virtual space. What I am arguing is that essay films but also the future of virtual reality, 3D and other digital innovations, present an alternative way to look at these difficult histories and question the politics that continue to affect people in the present. In the following section, I will discuss how telling stories through the medium of the film essay can unsettle a defensive colonial settler mentality, that could perhaps lead to greater participation in the decolonisation process.

Using storytelling to unsettle the colonial settler mentality and encourage greater participation in decolonisation

It is difficult to confront a family member when they tell a racist story or ‘joke’ but even more so if they are part of an older generation that grew up during Apartheid when these prejudices were propagated, accepted and encouraged. I know that I have struggled with this and argued with my family over many meals, debating with them about the history and politics of this country. However, it is my firm belief that this is how decolonisation starts – with the self and those in your immediate environment. In my experience it is in these personal stories told in private spaces in the safety of the home where many white people’s hidden prejudices become most visible. In the following paragraphs, I will define and describe colonial settler mentality within the context of South Africa. I draw on *Settler Colonialism and Decolonisation* by Lorenzo Veracini (2007) and Achille Mbembe’s (2016) article *Apartheid Futures and the Limits of Racial Reconciliation* to situate my project within this post-colonial framework. In this section, I explore how discrimination, racism, sexism, homophobia and ableism get reproduced in one-on-one interactions through the ways stories are told and heard. I suggest that white South Africans can play an active role in decolonisation by unsettling colonial settler mentality in personal everyday interactions and starting in the home. Through my film, I have attempted to reveal the subtle ways by which prejudices are reproduced in the home through the politics of storytelling.

The question of monumentalising, defending and erasing colonial histories

In August of 2017 I attended a panel discussion held by the Institute for Justice and Reconciliation titled *Elite Resistance to Economic Reforms in South Africa and Australia: The Persistence of Settler Coloniality* (2017). In this panel, the speakers⁴

⁴ The speakers included Sarah Maddison, Associate Professor of Politics at the University of Melbourne and visiting professor at UCT; Dr. Helen Scanlon, Senior Lecturer of the Justice and Transformation Programme in the Department of Political Studies at UCT; and Nivrata Bachu, project office for the Justice and Peacebuilding Programme at the Institute for Justice and Reconciliation. The panel discussion was moderated by Professor Tim Murithi, Head of Justice and Peace-building Programme at the Institute for Justice and Reconciliation and Professor of African Studies at the University of Free State.

discussed the relationships between prevailing colonial phenomena in both Australia and South Africa. The discussion was centered around economic transformation and how that can lead to greater reconciliation. The panelists discussed the ways in which the lack of redistribution of wealth, land reform and the payment of reparations have presented challenges to and even undermined reconciliation. They suggested that these power imbalances and resistances were largely a result of continued settler colonial logic and a defensive white settler mentality. What was particularly interesting for me was the discussion that arose regarding defensive white settler coloniality, the question of how these individuals could participate in decolonisation and the importance of such participation for tangible transformation.



The research presented in this discussion correlated with what I perceived to be an anxiety around preserving the colonial archive in contemporary South Africa. From the manner in which it is protectively written about and shown emerges a strong defensiveness concerning the preservation of these artworks, objects and texts. Instead of attempting to justify, protect and defend the colonial archive because I experience the benefits of historical inequality I have scrutinised my great-grandfather's archive by looking for what is not there. Making whiteness hyper-visible within the film by using only three white actors and focusing on spaces and archives that honour the legacies of colonialism and Apartheid (such as the Rhodes

Memorial), I have aimed to highlight the erasure of identities that is inherent within these spaces. I have attempted to use a critical lens to reveal an approach that I believe highlights the racial, sexual and gendered politics of the time and of the present.

Attempts to glorify colonisation in public spaces leads to the monumentalisation of an exclusively Eurocentric history and has lasting effects on collective memory. It can breed a defensive settler mentality that could very easily lead to a racist rhetoric rooted in imperial ideologies.⁵ Material culture contained within colonial archives has actively contributed to the erasure of lived experiences of people of colour, and in far too many public spaces in South Africa this continues to be the case. This kind of erasure in public spaces and museums – where an overly sensitive and protective atmosphere around colonial objects and archives is created – has been of concern to me in conceiving of this project. This sensitivity has impacted the spaces with which I have chosen to engage and in which I filmed. The defensive mentality to which I refer in this paper and that is evident in my film essay, engages with the issue of the perpetrators' legitimate claims to ignorance, i.e. German soldiers, Nazi's or perpetrators during Apartheid claiming that they did not know what was really happening, as suggested by my grandfather and his brother. That they were not aware of the mass murders and violence of which they were a part may very well be true. However, according to the law, not knowing that something is illegal does not change the fact that it is and, in many ways, ignorance is a choice. This defense is nonetheless coupled with other defensive statements that serve to justify colonialism and Apartheid and legitimate it as somehow necessary to 'progress'.

⁵ See Tweets by Helen Zille, the former political leader of the South African Democratic Alliance (DA), that publicly applaud colonialism. The statement suggested that colonialism had positive impacts in Africa that people should be grateful for, even if it has led to the enslavement and continued impoverishment of millions. Zille's statement both implied and stated outright that the only reason the so-called global South has roads, piped water and infrastructure (which many poor communities in South Africa still do not have access to) is because of colonialism, and that for this we should all be grateful. Her Eurocentric ideology is rooted in everything from high school history classes to family discussions and museum trips with the Sunday school. It is part of a defensive settler logic that attempts to justify the violent past with the relative gains only reserved for a few.



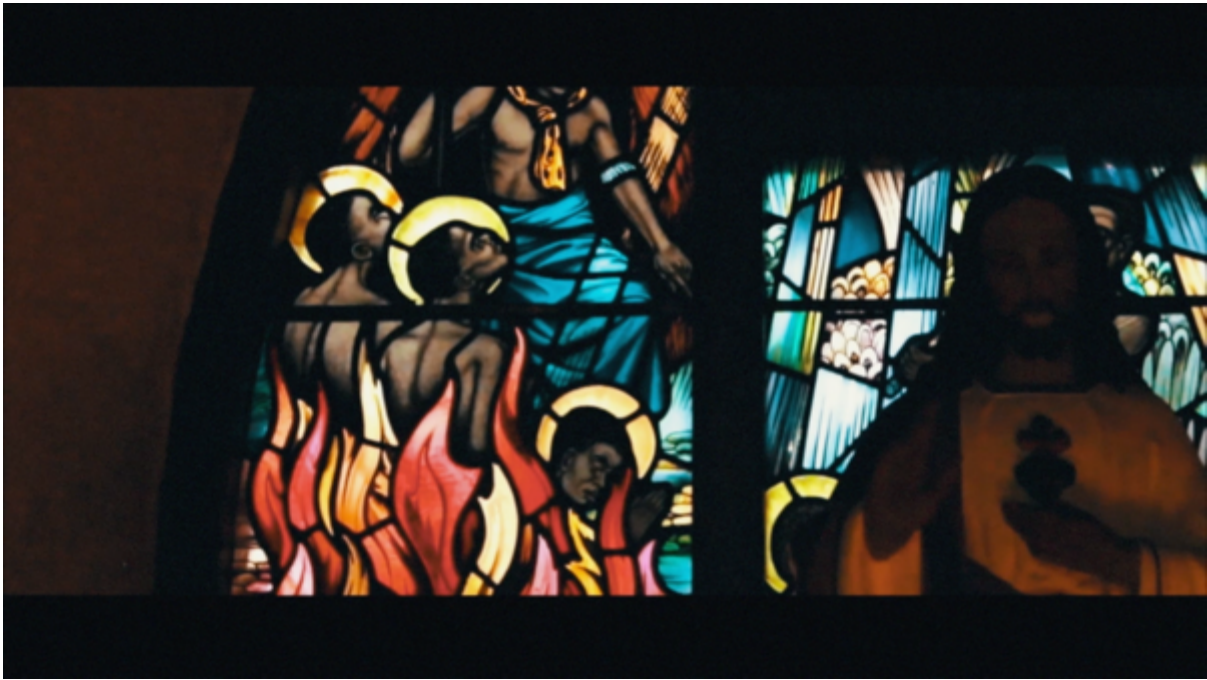
Once people come to realise and acknowledge the ills of the past they may become ‘unsettled’, but can that make people want to give up the privileges awarded to them as a result of these violent histories? Often, the answer is no. Certainly, in South Africa when the question of reparations and land reforms is raised, many are not even willing to engage. In this instance, while many can see the ways in which a history of inequality has benefited them, very few are willing to give up those benefits to rectify these injustices as doing so may put themselves at a disadvantage. In defense, many white people argue that Apartheid ended in sudden rupture during 1994 and so their defenses revolve around the notion of a definitive ‘end’ to oppression and a supposed rupture that, in fact, has not really occurred. The inequalities that resulted from colonialism and Apartheid continue to exist in a multitude of ways not least of which include basic human rights to housing, water and safety.

The TRC led to the criminalisation of individuals rather than the institutional structure of the Apartheid government.⁶ This made the everyday structural inequalities and oppressions invisible and shifted the focus to only the most heinous and infamous

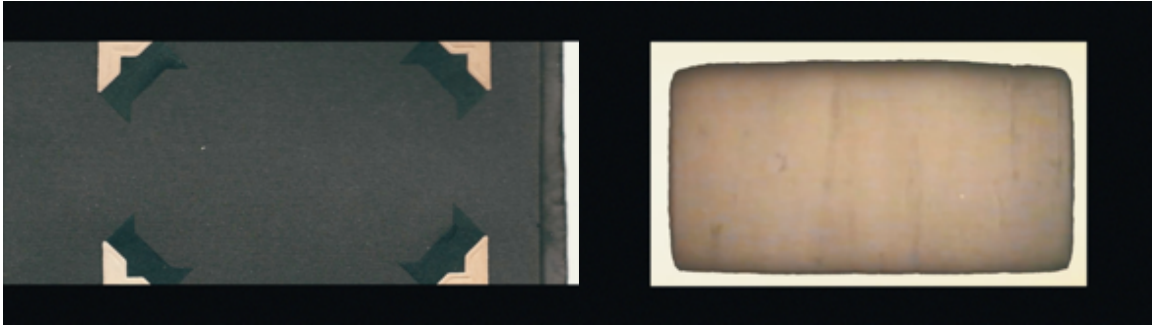
⁶ See public seminar held by the Institute for Justice and Reconciliation titled *Elite Resistance to Economic Reforms in South Africa and Australia: The Persistence of Settler Coloniality* (2017).

crimes that could be prosecuted by the commission. As a result, only the most severe crimes were ever acknowledged and structural inequalities largely continued to be perpetrated through institutional powers and economic structures. Considering this, the question remains: what would make someone give up the things they gained from a history of war, inequality and colonialisation? Talking about 'giving back the land' and ways to actively decolonise may not ever change the minds of defensive settlers. Not only do settlers have to be willing to be unsettled, but these changes need to happen structurally, through taxes, economic reparations and laws in order for transformation to become tangible. However, in order to constitutionally implement changes which could radically alter the lives of millions of people, settlers have to be willing to give up the privileges awarded to them as a result of inequality.

The film essay highlights issues of responsibility and erasure of the role that individuals, objects, images and language play in the constitution and maintenance of power – particularly within personal stories, museums and public spaces. Veracini (2007: 7) discusses the ways in which settler colonialism is resistant to decolonisation and the removal of settler colonial phenomena. He argues for the importance of settlers (people who have come from outside of the country through the historical process of colonisation) to participate in the process of decolonisation, noting: "i.e. being both European and non-European, deliberately establishing new lifestyles and ostensibly reproducing old ones, being colonized and colonizing at the same time, etc." (Veracini, 2007: 7). This is a complex argument that I feel is relevant to my discussion and to the kind of defensive white settler mentality to which I am referring. I support Veracini and suggest that in order for transformation to occur and for a truly decolonised South Africa to be realised, this process has to start by unsettling one's own settler mentality. For it is in these personal spaces, in stories told and jokes shared, that oppressive behaviour is most visible precisely because these spaces are safe. Decolonisation involves making those spaces which were once safe for oppressive language into spaces that call on an ethics of responsibility. This may be done by challenging the racist, sexist and homophobic stories told by those close to us, or even ourselves.



In the empty frames seen in both the film and archive, missing photographs and omissions in my grandfather's re-telling of his father's history lies a completely different reality from the staged drama playing out on the screen. Although my family must have surely suffered from this long separation, in effect, nothing tragic or torturous happens to the characters in the film; as my grandfather says, the interns were not even required to make big rocks small. In the film, the viewer sees a woman in a field flying a kite and a man on a balcony drinking sparkling wine or wandering along a beach. Meanwhile, all over the country, people of colour were being murdered for their race and fighting for basic human rights. I have attempted to show this juxtaposition through archival imagery from the holocaust museum, newspaper articles from the Johannesburg library archives, lyrics or sounds and the ways in which the narration unfolds. The frivolity of such objects and stories only becomes truly disturbing once one becomes aware of the severity of the historical moment. For my family, this story is one that has remained a secret. However, even when I asked to hear the history my grandfather's recollection was idyllic in many ways. Perhaps, it was even naïve in its innocent attempt to paint a prettier picture of the past than the violence that was experienced in reality.



The installation is a three-dimensional version of my grandfather's story as I have come to understand it. Listening to it innumerable times, editing and re-editing, has made me cynical towards his story. This has been a surprisingly useful position for interrogating the role my family played in an incredibly violent history. Like the collection of party decorations, blue eyed dolls and balloons seen in the film, these objects hide a far more sinister reality; they are sweet memories told by an old man to his granddaughter about his father's hidden criminal record. My decision to work with artificial objects such as masks, wigs and props, is not just to speak to the constructed nature of the archive and story but is also a political decision. It is the layering of the pretend, the false and the exaggerated artifice. It is an evasion of content and a modality of camp, which I will discuss in the next section.



Perhaps the difficult history to which I am referring, stems from coming to terms with the advantages gained through centuries of oppression, by questioning how this inequality is represented in the home and in public spaces in the present. Museums, like the Simon's Town Museum, and public spaces, like Rhodes Memorial, show an inordinate amount of colonial iconography given the many histories still waiting to be told and recognised and this is true for many major museums dedicated to Africa or African Art around the world. In *The Intern 575*, the scenes, family archives and public museum displays start to bleed into one another. The blurred lines between them present a picture of success, growth, progress, the white man's "burden", the civilising mission, Christian ideologies and education. Like my grandfather's stories about his father, the way the museums in which I filmed tell the story of South Africa, often paints a kinder picture of a far more horrific history. What is apparent in these spaces is an excessive celebration of imperialism and colonisation to which I have drawn attention in the film and installation through displays of material excess: an excess of toys, photographs, bottles, party decorations and regalia.

These objects have led me to ask several questions. Most acutely, what horrors have been buried in this history, by other sincere individuals, just trying to protect their family legacies and shelter themselves and their children from unfavourable public perceptions? When facing the realities of your father's crimes cause you so much pain, is the only solution to deny that any crime happened at all? Or to build a shrine in his honour to cover it up? Maybe, like my grandfather, you continue to recall the story of an honest man who loved his wife dearly, who did good things for other good people, built a business and worked hard. In his retelling my grandfather did not mention the bad things that his father may have murdered, raped, controlled his wife's career and abused others, yet this is entirely possible. All his sons recalled was that he was a good German who might have drunk a little on the weekends but was pretty well-meaning.



In public spaces and museums, the tendency to paint a 'kinder' image of colonialism has kept stories like my great-grandfather's largely unexplored and undocumented. I suggest that there are not only personal but political motivations as to why it has been important to memorialise only certain versions of oppressive colonial histories. My great-grandfather's experience of the second world war was arguably less traumatic than it was embarrassing or shameful. This is expressed by my grandfather when he states that he thinks the interns had quite a cosy existence: "they had good food, a warm bed and were not even required to do menial activities like 'making big rocks small'" (Heilig, 2017). Meanwhile, on the battlefields, South African people of colour in the Cape Corps and Native Military Corps were made to do intense menial labour and dehumanising tasks such as collecting the bodies of dead soldiers. The only trauma experienced by Bruno, so my grandfather believes, was that he was legally and forcibly separated from his family. However, he lived a comfortable life with his close friend and companion Dolf Mossner, whose relationship to Bruno was very dear and intimate.

Bruno's internment left him in a comfortable non-space, he was no longer a citizen of anywhere yet because of his race was still awarded more rights and comforts than black citizens of South Africa. The film engages with an event that was devastating

in its banality – an absent father, a single mother raising two children in a war – by ‘documenting’ ways in which public spaces monumentalise the figure of the ‘white man’, the patriarch and ‘colonialist’. In the film, the museum spaces are presented as fragmented moments of re-appropriation, humour and absurdity rather than sites and repositories of nostalgia, commemoration and monumentalisation. Humour and absurdity are important tools which I frequently use in my work, as seen in the final scene at the Rhodes memorial, seen in the image below – which shows Bruno masturbating a large pink helium balloon over the City of Cape Town. Using images which refer to or represent the penis, was a way of approaching the white saviour trope and paternalism, that is so prevalent within public spaces and some museums in South Africa, which I will describe in the next section.



We tell stories to make meaning, as a way of dealing with the archive and organising thoughts, but stories also become justifications for guilt and repositories of pain and abuse in their own right. This is seen in my film in the form of the museums and dioramas of a purely white history. The objects and spaces literally display white colonial settler ‘cultural capital’, the residual evidence of the prevalence of white settler logic in South Africa. By putting them in my film and installation I question how these objects are reproductive of hegemonic power. A society begins to imagine or erase body politics through the objects and stories it produces and endorses. Although historical investigations can render particular information about the past,

one does not need to look at the political policies of Apartheid to see the ways in which racial inequality is embedded in the historical objects and narratives seen in contemporary society – the ‘leftovers’ of the colonial ceremony. This embeddedness of racial inequality is exhibited in contemporary museums, presented as consumable displays in the everyday.



I have asked myself several times, what is the relevance of the intern’s history in this present moment and how can the scenes in my film, or what I have termed ‘experiments’, complicate that relationship? A major feature of the film essay is the testing of historical realities as they are experienced in contemporary public spaces. By using animal masks and juxtaposing images of mannequins from the museum dioramas with the image of my great-grandfather was one of the ways I attempted to position him within the realm of the abject. My decision to use an abject representation of my great-grandfather was a specific choice, set in direct opposition

to prevailing representations of the white saviour.⁷ This is an entire discourse in contemporary film practice and is a backdrop against which I set *The Intern 575*. It highlights the importance of showing my great-grandfather's failures and making public my family's shame surrounding his crimes.

White Privilege in Post(?)-Apartheid South Africa

In post-Apartheid, post-colonial South Africa, race and identity politics are highly contested. The question of whether Apartheid is truly in a state of 'post' existence is being debated. Many people who are still living in the aftermath of poverty and oppression, would argue that systemic and institutional racism is still very much alive in contemporary South Africa. In his article entitled *Apartheid Futures and the Limits of Racial Reconciliation*, Achilles Mbembe (2007) argues that the struggle for equality is far from over. Mbembe asks how we can structurally address racism and the continued inequality along racial lines through law, while there remains such a disparity in the economic distribution of wealth. This has come to be understood as white monopoly capital, a system through which many of the large corporations and top-level management remains in the hands of a few, usually older, white men.

The desire for a post-racial society has been echoed by some white South Africans and even some academics during the student movement. This leads to the belief that racism is no longer an issue as we have been a democratic state for 22 years

⁷ The white savior industrial complex is a term coined by Nigerian-American novelist Teju Cole. He claims that it is a construct, a multi-million-dollar industry, that he has termed "the white savior industrial concept" (Cole, 2012). It is this complicated relationship between perpetrator and victim that permeates understandings of race relations both historically and at present. Cole (2012: 7) states that these narratives maintain the myth of race, which relies on notions of normative behaviors and identities through the naturalisation of "white paternalism." In the present moment, in which racial politics are rightfully critiqued, there is a general atmosphere of sensitivity experienced by many white South Africans involved in conversations about race. Some would even go so far as to claim to be persecuted and subjected to 'reverse racism'. The problem with this tendency is that the danger of paternalism becomes invisible to those who have a stake in it. When this is questioned by individuals who have benefited from a history of colonialism, those who experience it as an every day violence are silenced by their proclamations of the so-called benefits of systemic racial inequality. What I mean by this is that colonialism is used to justify continued white paternalism in a narrative that requires people who have been oppressed by historical racism to be grateful for the 'civilization' this brought about. Assertions like those of Helen Zille (<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2017/03/outrage-helen-zille-colonialism-tweets-170316154748367.html>) imply that this white savior ideologies brought with it civilisation and 'progress', roads, schools, infrastructure. Essentially what is being suggested by the argument is that 'colonialism wasn't all bad', that we should look beyond the human cost and see it as something that irrefutably 'saved' Africans from their 'primitive' state. The imperialist white savior narrative from the turn of the 19th century is so pervasive in contemporary South African society that many white people still believe that colonization brought light to the 'dark continent'.

under a government consisting mostly of people of colour. For the 'rainbow nation' generation born before 1994, and for many individuals who grew up in South Africa under Apartheid there is a rhetoric that suggests that people who were oppressed under Apartheid should 'get over it' and 'stop making everything about race'. This suggestion is based on a logic which implies that because most white South Africans' daily lives are not affected by the after-effects of Apartheid and colonialism, that racism does not exist or is not as prevalent as it was. However, the legacies of Apartheid can be seen in the geopolitical landscape that still closely resembles the inequalities of the past, with many persons of colour still living in subhuman conditions in informal settlements, and traveling long distances to go to work and school. This attitude fails to engage with the systemic and institutional racism that has been embedded in private and public spaces, and in the ways in which we speak about ourselves, and each other. This is reflected in the negative ways in which Franz, my grandfather's brother, speaks about people of colour and, in particular, the domestic worker who was employed by my great-grandmother. He refers to her as "this woman" and says that she tried to exercise control over him by threatening him with what he terms the 'amalites' or 'amalitas', a racialised and gendered 'boogiemán' that featured in both my grandfather's story and my separate interview with his brother. His prejudice is also evident in the ways he speaks about the guards at the internment camp who he said were "coloureds" who shot down any prisoners who tried to escape. Reflecting on these brief examples, it is evident that a post-racial world, even if it was so desired, is inconceivable in a space in which prejudice is so ingrained in everyday conversation and language.



The 'getting over it' mentality of the so-called post-racial South Africa is only desirable to those whom it benefits; for those whose experiences it erases, this thinking leaves much to be desired. Storytelling, through filmic practice, presents a dynamic tool in establishing modes of representation within public spaces, that do not solely display the histories of white people. It also presents white people with ways to disrupt the white saviour tropes, rather than to justify and defend oppressive objects and histories. In my film, I show the absurdity of feeling attached to stone and cement memorials, by literally exhibiting what could be considered object sexuality or objectophilia. In the final scene of the film, we see Bruno hugging and caressing two sculptures, one of a young man and one of a small female angel. His hands rub and sexualise the cement in close-up shots before we move to a wider shot of him physically embracing the base of the sculpture. This moment is not intended to be sentimental but rather ironic, highlighting the perversity of such an intimate relationship with an inanimate object, like a sculpture or monument, especially if it causes someone else pain.



The Intern 575 is my attempt to grapple with the violence on which my own privileges as a white woman in South Africa rest. Race and responsibility is a complex combination in contemporary South Africa, as stated by Mbembe (2007 4-6):

In a country [...] where most killers and torturers escaped jail time, the persistent denial of white privilege partly explains the acrimonious nature of the controversy [...]. Current South African disputes about race and 'transformation' are therefore expressive of the extent to which, twenty years into democracy, the country finds it difficult to clearly articulate the ethics of care and responsibility, duties and obligations that freedom demands [...]. It also helps to remember that after each of these major initiatives, the operations of white privilege and supremacy could not proceed as before. White racism in an era of legal racial equality had to don new clothes [...]. They continued to embrace the privileges of white skin and devoted an extraordinary amount of energy restoring their normalcy. Not only did racism become subtle and often unconsciously practiced, many whites went as far as declaring that racism was a thing of the past. They argued that in fact, white men were now suffering from reverse discrimination.

In the above quote, Mbembe states that many white people do not recognise the privilege that they have inherited from the ills of Apartheid. He states that many individuals, who committed heinous crimes against humanity, were not prosecuted during the TRC. As a result, many murderers were never made to take responsibility for their crimes, and racist attitudes and beliefs were never redressed. For many white South Africans, racism and white privilege changed its name but not its face. Although many white South Africans do not consider themselves racist, some now

demand that race is in fact not acceptable, or appropriate, to bring up in polite conversation or use it to victimize themselves.



In *The Intern 575*, the footage of the museums has been presented as dreamlike fragments and images that are cut and edited in such a way, so as to question their representational values. Museums, rather than framing artefacts as mere historical documents, become sites of education and repositories of cultural capital. If not constantly critically engaged, they can slide into a regressive even violent nostalgia, that tends to only document the supposed 'benefits' of colonialism that led to the enslavement and oppression of millions. Mbembe (2016: 9-10) states that:

The element of cruelty and brutality it took to maintain white privilege has to be forgotten. Whites have to be discouraged from understanding the benefits that still accompany their own skin colour, including in the new democratic dispensation. Instead, in a typically neo-conservative move, they are encouraged to absolve themselves as the new victims of a corrupt and incompetent black government which in addition is 'soft on crime'.

Even with the most innocent intentions, the denial and omission by white South Africans of the realities suffered by people of colour, has consequences for the way history is taught in schools and spoken about in homes. In turn, it leads to a perpetual cycle of racist ideologies under a different polite mask. As Mbembe suggests, many white people in South Africa have refused to acknowledge their privilege and instead, have attempted to erase an uncomfortable history from public imagination. They have replaced this uncomfortable history with images and phenomena that aim to attribute all so-called progress to white settlers, maintaining that they were the white 'saviours' of the 'dark continent'.

Many of the texts, images, objects and individuals that are memorialised and monumentalised within South Africa still glorify a history that does not represent the multitude and multiplicity of experiences or histories that exist. This form of memorialization is currently being questioned by the student movement, which is challenging the structure, content and modalities through which institutions and public spaces represent history and historical narratives. The result of colonialism and Apartheid seem to somehow be justified and idealised in these public spaces. Eerily, museums seem to be avoiding the critical questions that are currently being asked of the colonial archives in universities and other public institutions. In the section of his text titled *Amnesia*, Mbembe (2016: 8-9) states that one of the great ironies of post-Apartheid settlements is that many white South Africans do not agree with decolonisation or 'transformation' because they cannot accept that their privileges come from a history of violent oppression. He notes:

They feel entitled to their privileged position in society. They are willing to fight for their constitutional rights, but they are not ready to contemplate, and deal with, the accumulated atrocities on which these privileges rest [...] To protect white privilege, boundaries were created that took the forms of laws, customs and traditions. A deeply embedded racist ethos helped justify whites' loss of feeling for human fellowship with blacks. This is how white privilege came to be seen as entitlement that was hardly ever contested. Over many centuries, whites developed an ability to pass on to succeeding generations the spoils of racial violence and atrocities. These took the form of monetary or property value, banking practices, housing and land assets, educational resources, cultural capital, insider networks, good jobs, a sense of self-esteem, dignity and superiority.



The film essay is a compelling medium for queering my family archive because it causes me to question my own preconceptions, settler colonial logic and inherited ideologies. Through the subjective and personal experiences of my individual voice, and that of the storyteller, the film essay shows a history aware of its own historical inaccuracy. History is written by the victors, and so perhaps it can never truly be an accurate representation. This is the position of the essay film as I see it; between subjectivity and 'objectivity' lies something in-between. It is through this in-between space of uncertainty and indeterminacy⁸ that the film essay, as an art medium, presents the possibility to imagine different futures and re-imagine the past.

In this work, while involved in telling my family history, I am simultaneously attempting to 'unglue' myself from my family archive and distance myself from my image repertoire. One of the key aims of this essay film and installation, is to discuss this image-repertoire (the collection of images, objects and texts) that exists in public spaces and community museums, to show its artifice through the medium of film and installation. The argument I am making is that once the collection of stereotypes and ideological tropes become self-evident to those who have a stake in them they may become 'unglued'. For it is those whose sentiments are most affected by their reflections (whose very reality lies on the reflections of the self, the ego and historical 'truth') who maintain the process of hypnosis that produces the glue.

I have done substantial research into the linguistic and metaphysical definitions of indeterminacy. However, due to the scope of this paper, this discussion has not been included here. I will, however, provide a brief description of what I mean by indeterminacy. What has been a very unexpected and welcome result of my artistic process is its rootedness in the contingency between different determinate factors. In his essay *Ambiguity, Generality, and Indeterminacy: Tests and Definitions*, Brendan S. Gillion (1990) describes the process of defining ambiguity as a problem within the context of linguistic theory. Gillion describes how, if an expression or situation is known, but the particularities of the situation or expression are unknown or undefined, it can be considered indeterminate. In addition, Elizabeth Barnes and J. Roberts G. Williams (2010) define and describe indefiniteness as a conceptual framework used to describe general indeterminate factors as opposed to semantic (systemic) indeterminacy. In their essay, *A Theory of Metaphysical Indeterminacy* (2010) the philosophical framework of indeterminism is linked to notions of 'reality' – contingency or tense, rather than 'truth' – and therefore, to notions of time and modality (2010: 4). From the writing of the script, to the filming, to the interviews, to the editing process, I tried to maintain a process that was organic and allowed interruptions in both time and modality. I suggest that these moments of indeterminacy allow questions to emerge from a kind of ironic ambivalence, revealing an equally unstable and shifting position for both the storyteller and the recipient or participant.



Corrigan (2011: 15) states that the film essay “stretches and balances itself between abstracted and exaggerated representations of the self (in language and image) and an experiential world encountered and acquired through the discourse of thinking out loud.” I see this moment as an opportunity to think about this history out loud. I hope this will allow me to ‘unglue’ myself from a surface that propagates the fixed image and the defence of a singular Eurocentric narrative of history. In the next section, I will look at how I used my film essay to queer notions of hegemonic masculinity, as it relates to Bruno and my family archive. I do this in order to destabilise heteronormative definitions of ‘father’ and ‘family’ in the archive, and further question Eurocentric colonial categories that fix and police identity politics. This type of disruption of clear and singular categories of identity, such as man, woman, wife, husband, mother and father are very much postcolonial concerns, and are important concerns of this project.

Queering my family archive

I identify as a queer person and, therefore, I did not want this film to reproduce a heteronormative narrative, as presented by my grandfather. It was important for me to acknowledge my identity and frame it within the film, the archive and the installation. Whether my great-grandfather was heterosexual or queer is irrelevant because I believe that sexuality is not fixed nor finite, it is fluid, constantly in flux and renegotiated. Again, indeterminacy⁹ was a key modality through which I explored Bruno's perceived sexual and gendered boundaries. Heteronormativity is so prevalent in the representation of the 'family' and 'father figure'; therefore, to tell this story and show these images in ways that do not reproduce this was very important for me. My father is homosexual and my entire upbringing and relationship to notions of family and 'father' are rooted in this lived-experience. Therefore, I understand first-hand how fluid sexuality is, and that a man married to a woman is not necessarily heterosexual nor is he necessarily queer.

In the following paragraphs, I describe what I mean by queering the archive, drawing on Alana Kumbier's (2014) article *Ephemeral Material: Queering the Archive*. I also found the chapter *Queer Theory – Not Quite as Queer as the Queer of the Normal* by Ing-Marie Back Danielsson (2007) very useful in unpacking the term 'normative'.

⁹ An interesting question that is central to my own conceptual concerns is: what is knowable and therefore what is unknowable? Even the conceptual framework of indeterminism, as it relates to linguistic and semantic discourses, runs the risk of not making sense or not being understood. "We might say that sentences about metaphysical indeterminacy are barely true, true, but not true in virtue of anything else" (2010: 4). According to Ken Akiba (2014), whose research often centers on indeterminacy in terms of identities and objects, indeterminacy is fundamental to reality. In this line of argument, reality exceeds mere spatial and temporal dimensions and is defined by particularity and specificity. So, without the determined dimensions of experience, which itself is necessarily indeterminate, at least in a linguistic sense, reality may be perceptively altered. I would argue that this applies to digital film-making, wherein perception is constantly being challenged by what one sees, hears and feels. It is this play between the senses and understanding wherein lies the possibilities of the digital. Truth is no longer the focus of a 'true-story' but rather a logic that can be acknowledged and then used to question or create doubt. According to Akiba (2014: 27), this kind of indeterminacy "as metaphysical, only says something about what the indeterminacy is not, namely a consequence of an imprecise representation." Indeterminacy is at the center of how reality is understood: "reality itself has different precisifications (things that make it precise or specific)." These objects, which are at once known and unknown, present and absent, reveal "multiple actualities" (Akiba, 2014: 27-28). Akiba (2014: 28) argues that if you can understand the idea that an object can be at home in different possible but precise realities, and that a part can vary in its relation to a whole (and the whole to a part) across these worlds, then you can understand mereological indeterminacy *de re*."

Danielsson (2007: 27) complicates normativity within the framework of queer theory by suggesting that queer theory is not strictly about making 'non-heteronormative' sexualities visible but acknowledging the ways in which "normal matters are queer."



Archives are usually seen as belonging to national museums and large public institutions. However, the museums on which I focus in this film are 'community' museums that display collections of family photographs and household objects. One such museum is the Simon's Town Museum, which displays personal objects donated by families, many of whom have resided in Simon's Town since colonisation. The actual museum building is heavily embedded in the history of colonisation as it was once used as a residence for the Dutch East India Company Governor of the Cape. According to the museum's website, it has served many purposes, but currently houses a collection of objects that exhibit the 'cultural history' of Simon's Town and its connections with the Dutch East India Company and the Royal Navy. Images of families who were forcibly removed from Simon's Town are completely absent and, while it tells the story of a colonial 'cultural history', it neglects to inform about the effects of slavery for people of colour in this area. In this way, although the museum claims to represent the 'cultural history' of Simon's Town, it in fact is only representative of a culture of white colonial and military histories.



Many of the objects displayed here are associated with the white settler home, showing photographs depicting family celebrations like white weddings and religious occasions like christenings. Since my film is also made up of similar effects from my great-grandfather's archive, these seemed like appropriate places to film specific parts of my film. In the following paragraph, I will describe the scene that was filmed in the Simon's Town Museum titled the *Symphony Scene*. In this section, I also discuss the ideas of heteronormative and hegemonic white masculinities as they relate to my film and installation. I argue that Bruno's alcoholism largely stemmed from attitudes surrounding his masculinity and what 'makes a man', particularly within a time of war. I argue that in my film I have tried to destabilise the notion of the 'white man' as it relates to my great-grandfather, even going so far as to mock him, perhaps not always entirely successfully. By doing so, I aimed to disrupt his supposed normative sexuality and gender identity by queering his archive and showing how 'normal matters' are queer. As Danielsson (2007: 27) states in her article:

[...] the heart of the matter is to elucidate how normal matters are queer. It is the appraisal and labelling of certain behaviours and beings as normal and others as deviant that is queer and subsequently will be scrutinized.

After my great-grandfather returned from the internment camp he developed a serious addiction to alcohol. In some of the stories my grandfather has told me, many of which he omitted from the narration, Bruno was increasingly abusive toward Eileen. This is explored in what I have called the Symphony Scene. The scene begins with Bruno waking up and joining his wife on the veranda of their house. There is a pink beer crate with a pink balloon tied to it and a glass table. In this scene both Bruno and Eileen are played by one actor, so the scene was shot twice and then cut and joined together in post-production. Eileen, who is played by a male identifying actor, wears a pink wig and blue dressing gown. I used role-play as an important tool in fragmenting my great-grandfather's white male identity to expose its fragility and the ultimate malleability of identity. This is something that I have taken seriously in my film and translated into the use of masks, props and 'costumes'. I have chosen to focus on the vulnerability and fragility of the construction of Bruno's white heteronormative male identity in a way that brings about laughter, and therefore disturbs the power dynamics that keep it protected. I suggest that laughter forces the character to face his identity in its most vulgar form. Through laughter, the viewer shows his or her complacency in or resentment towards the absurdity and violence with which the white male body, and indeed every other body, is culturally constructed.



The narration extends to how my grandfather and his brother came to define masculinity as inextricably tied to the consumption of alcohol. What made a 'man', in this context, was the ability to show up for work despite severe alcohol abuse. The alcohol in this scene is important in implying both how fragility can be understood, but even more so within this context, the ways in which 'manhood'/masculinity is

achieved. There are several studies¹⁰ on the relationship between alcohol consumption, masculinity and ex-prisoners of war. However, what I would like to focus on here is the relationship between notions of hegemonic masculinities and alcohol consumption. This relationship has been analysed in a psychology paper by Richard O. De Visser, Jonathan A. Visser (2006: 598). The authors note:

[...] if alcohol consumption is seen to be a masculine behaviour, then men who are insecure in their masculine identities may use alcohol consumption to demonstrate masculine competence [...]. However, previous research has not examined the different ways in which alcohol may be used (or not used) in the construction of a masculine identity.

They argue that in situations in which an individual's masculinity is challenged, they are more likely to resort to hegemonic stereotypical behaviours such as sexual violence or crime, in order to reassert it.



¹⁰ The links between alcohol consumption and gender have been discussed by the World Health Organization in an article titled *Alcohol, Gender, Drinking Problems: Perspectives from Low and Middle-Income Countries*, edited by Isidore S. Obot and Robin Room (2005). The chapter titled *Differences in Drinking Patterns Between Men and Women in Brazil* by Florence Kerr-Correa, Andrea M. Hegedus, Luzia A. Trinca, Adriana M. Tucci, Ligia R.S. Kerr-Pontes, Alessandra F. Sanches and Tricia M.F. Floripes, considers gender as important in understanding the cultural and contextual variability of alcohol consumption.



My disruptions to Bruno's masculinity are made visible by my choice to use a pink bottle, which he holds in the place of his penis. The light pink flesh-coloured foil around the bottle of sweet, red sparkling wine explodes before he pours it into an oversized glass. My references to the penis, and to its relationship to power, is explored in the Symphony Scene in detail. The bottle becomes a mask or prop for a more fragile and bodily material. In this context, the bottle of alcohol becomes representative of the penis and refers more broadly to relationships between hegemonic, white masculinities and alcohol consumption. This is not a sexual object but, rather, may be read as suggestive of a suspended fragility and the susceptibility of power to suffering "intimate suffering, both physical and psychic, (as it) joins with sexual excess. There is nothing pornographic, nothing attractive or exciting in such a baring of instincts" (Kristeva, 1982: 148). Throughout my film, sexuality and sexual excess is explored through inanimate objects, such as toys, dolls, bottles of alcohol and other substances. It is both an act of seduction and repulsion, as Kristeva states in the above quote. I have done this not to create something entertaining or pornographic, but in nuanced ways that 'bare' – make naked and exposed – the fragility of the human body and malleability of sexual desire.



The comical almost hysterical scene of this old man drinking from a giant wine glass escalates with each sip. My grandfather told me a story of how Bruno had a beautiful glass table in their house. Each time he and his friends would get together and drink they would slam their glasses against the glass surface, slowly chipping away at it. I liken this chipping away to, what I imagine to be my great-grandmother's spirit, and the kinds of gendered power dynamics that would have restricted her in the face of such destructive behaviours. In the scene the 'female' character's leg shakes incessantly with irritation while her partner consumes more and more alcohol. In my reimagining of this moment, every sip Bruno takes as he slams his wineglass onto the table brings it closer to breaking. Eventually, the fragility of the moment is brought to bear when the table and glass are smashed into pieces and the startled Eileen turns around and looks at the mess. It is then that the viewer is made aware that both Eileen and Bruno are played by the same male identifying actor, chipping away at the gendered expectations of the audience. The fact that both characters were played by one actor is an attempt to show how through his dreams and flashbacks Bruno empathises with his deceased wife. In my imagining of this story he attempts to reconcile his abusive ways, by literally embodying both his own and his wife's position, searching for a form of redemption from his own shame and failings as a lover, partner and (hu)man.



The film presents the memories of an alcoholic, violent man who has lost control of his power: a dichotomy which in fact is not dichotomous at all of a fragile patriarch. He is a vulnerable human that is required to enact a violent persona; the pressure to assume the position of abuser (of substances/people/animals/objects) in order to maintain his identity as a man or patriarch. Engagement with representational practices, particularly those that are oppressive or violent, are essential to critical humanism.¹¹ However, I suggest that it is my role as an artist not to reproduce, in my work, the same violence I am trying to critique. I have tried to represent this awareness in this story by blurring the lines between binaries such as perpetrator and victim, coloniser and colonised, man and woman even while emphasising them. Bruno was stripped of his citizenship and separated from his family for almost a decade due to choices he made while under the influence of Nazi propaganda. As stated in the narration: “look we don’t know”; it is not the purpose of this project to reach any definitive ‘truth’; I only wish to draw attention to the fact that these lines are blurred and that much can be gained from a space of indeterminacy. Fixed categories, such as perpetrator and victim, man and woman, human and object, can

¹¹ In the section *A Dog of No Description*, from chapter two of the book *Visual Century: South African Art in Context Vol 4 1990-2007*, Colin Richards (2011) engages with the relationship between art and morality as it applies to the colonial archive that is “stained with the darker registers of human history.” Richards (2011:53) quotes curator and academic Okwui Enwenzor as saying: “whether it is a critical project of representation or of disingenuous sentimental abuse. This is a minefield.” My film arguably engages with a personal, subjective questioning of history through storytelling. I have questioned the ways in which histories are affected by a contemporary politics of representation. Critical humanism in representational practices questions not just what work is produced, but who is producing the work and in what context, in order to analyse the politics from which it arises. Richards (2011: 55) argues for a challenge to these violent representational sites and practices, where the history of apartheid and traditions of oppression are played out within power-relations between individuals based on race, sexuality, gender and ability. He calls for an engagement with and against these representational practices in colonial art and anthropology, as “they have all through violence and voyeurism – dehumanised living subjects, rendering people as objects”. This challenge and engagement, he states, constitutes the project of critical humanism. Engagement with representational practices, particularly those that are oppressive or violent, is essential to critical humanism; however, responsibility within that process is just as important.

bleed into one another in stories and even historical narratives. This should not be something to dismiss or hide away. I feel that it is important to show multiple versions of the same story, layering them through different modalities or mediums. This has the capacity to bring to light the internal contradictions, and to further complicate individual relations to historical situations.

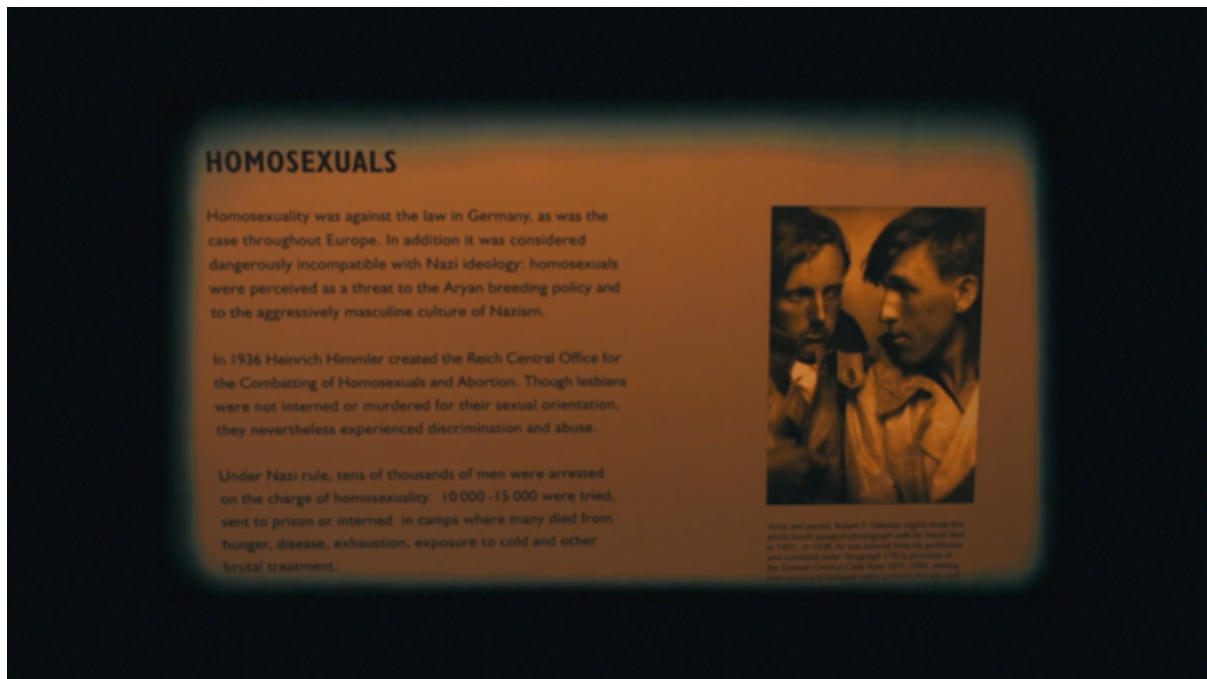
Perhaps, one would think that this project attempts to subvert white masculinity, the image of a Western/European patriarch made to be absurd and grotesque.¹² However, these two representations are not at odds with one another; they are part and parcel (particularly in the post-colony), of the preservation of an otherwise fragile construct. This construction ensures strictly heteronormative models of life that privilege specific kinds of bodies and sexualities. The following paragraphs explore the idea of queering the archive and how this can be seen through the film essay.

In Suzanne Juhasz's (2005) essay *Amplitude of Queer Desire in Dickinson's Erotic Language*, the author defines 'queer' linguistically as a verb, adjective and noun. I will focus on her description of the term as a noun. In academic terms, queer theory can be viewed as "a tool to question and disarrange normative systems of behaviour and identity [...] especially as they regulate gender, sexuality and desire" (Juhasz, 2005: 24). I suggest that this framework is particularly useful within a post-colonial context as it can disturb Eurocentric and heteronormative classifications, presenting new possibilities for self-definition and discovery. Donald Hall (2005) in Juhasz's essay is quoted as stating that an "excess of meaning" emerges, even and especially when we try to limit or make understanding monolithic.

¹² See *Notes on the Post-Colony*, in which Achilles Mbembe (1992: 1) critiques Mikhail Bakhtin's claim that the obscene and the grotesque are to be found in so-called 'non-official' cultures by stating that they are "intrinsic to all systems of domination and to the means by which those systems are confined or deconstructed." Mbembe agrees with Bakhtin's argument that the obscene and the grotesque are vital in undermining the power of officialdom, by ridiculing it and thereby lifting its stoic mask and exposing its fragile vulnerability. Although, he also states that the important questions to ask are not simply *whether* the vulnerability of officialdom can be exposed by ordinary people, but *where* (context), *with what* (with what materials), *in what way* (the manner) and *for whom* this is achieved. One could argue that, while exposing the fragility and absurdity of identity, particularly that of the 'patriarch'/'white man', I still reinforce its power, simply because of the overwhelming presence of a strictly white male body. This critique is something that I consciously grappled with in my writing about and making of the work.

I suggest that it is possible to queer the archives that exist within public spaces and museums in South Africa. What I am advocating is a move away from singular readings of historical events and experiences. Much existing museum discourse already attempts to address this in terms of race and representation. However, I am advocating an even more intersectional approach, that takes account of all the various aspects that constitute identity politics, as highlighted by the student movement, i.e. sexuality, race, religion, ability, gender identity, transsexual and transgendered visibility and access. This move would involve redefinition, reordering and re-articulation, but also, perhaps, de-ordering and de-articulating. In Franklin A. Robinson's (2014) research into queering the archive, his focus is on preserving and documenting the LGBTQI+ community through historical texts. However, I suggest it also necessitates a direct engagement with the ways in which archives normalise certain identities. This contributes to the ways certain sexualities, gender identities, races and cultural groups/communities remain hegemonic through the stories and events that are memorialised. As such, queering the archive is not just about making different sexual identities more visible in public spaces, but also about acknowledging the hypervisibility of so-called 'normative' sexualities and gender identities.





The film and installation deal with abusive relationships in several ways. On one level, the abuse between individuals and substances is evident, as is abuse within paternal relations and between romantic partners as a result of social conditioning. Dislodging the 'white man' as a constructed category from the framework of 'paternal dominance' is part of the decolonising project, as Minh-ha (2009: 103) states:

therefore (is) a challenge to the entire notion of (sexual) identity as commonly defined in the West and the entire gamut of concepts that ensues: femininity-femaleness-feminitude-woman- womanhood/ masculine-maleness-virility- man-manhood- and so on.

The fragmentation of identities and fixed archetypal roles such as 'father', and its relationship to 'provider' and 'abuser', should be seen as a political act of destabilising the fixed representation of the colonial patriarch. In this process one cannot deny the primary signifier that is the body, as Mbembe (1992: 8) states in *Notes on the Post-Colony*:

It is these that have force (primary signifiers), that get interpreted and reinterpreted, and feedback further significance into the system [...]. What gives rise to conflict is not the frequent reference to the genital organs of men in power but rather the way in which people by their laughter kidnap power and force it, as if by accident, to examine its own vulgarity. In other words, prestige contains within it elements of

crudeness and the bizarre that the official order tries hard to hide, but which ordinary people bring to its attention, often unwittingly.

As such, this project aims to focus on the vulnerability and fragility of the construction of white heteronormative male identity, to bring about laughter and therefore disturb the power dynamics that keep it protected. Bruno exposes himself to the audience, and perhaps as laughter or discomfort enters the room we are forced to face the vulgarity of his identity as a primary signifier. Through laughter, or the refusal to laugh, one could perhaps gauge the audience's identification with or resentment toward the irony and absurdity with which the body is constructed (Mbembe, 1992, 9). The discomfort or amusement associated with laughter can also be read as a way in which the audience transcends the position of mere spectator, and becomes an integral participant in the work.



Conclusions:

The film I have made explores what it means to voluntarily forget and lose a memory. The subject of the film fails to give up his privilege – and experiences loss, unhappiness and involuntary memories or anxious flash-backs to another time, an elsewhere. This elsewhere is both a fiction and a very real place in South Africa currently. The film unfolds, like a series of disorganised thoughts, that are suggestive of racial, gendered and sexually normative ideologies literally expressed in the narrations and in the non-linearity of the scenes. I have asked what happens when you unpack the image, what does it do to history, what effect does this have on memory. The images exist but they are not what they seem, they are not just images and stories. My questions have been concerned with what happens when you unpack the image, the object through spoken and unspoken words to extract meaning. How do actors within a failed revolution, war or historical moment understand their own image? The images seen in the film show individuals who are stuck between various poles of survival, entangled in themselves – their reflections – and their relation to history and memory. I have tried not to show the images in ways that reference ‘reality’ but rather as fictional constructs in order to think about the relationships between them and to suggest that what we see/hear is not always as clearly defined as it seems. It is not what you see in the film essay but what is already contained within the history of a place or person that is of significance.

The Intern 575 reveals that something can be in a place that is tied to that history without showing or telling the whole (his)story.¹³ It is possible to go inside to see the outside, as is the case in the museum dioramas – which are literally attempts to re-create the ‘outside environment’ in an interior space – that I repeatedly reference in my film. I am curious about how ideas start to become uncovered when you start your journey in a new landscape and begin to explore it, by going through its history what happens is change. I can liken this to the film editing process, where an empty timeline offers the possibility of complete re-imagining of the future of the image but first requires the task of looking and looking again. Traditional archival, black and white images printed in the darkroom and the silver print tied to a specific tradition of

¹³ The ‘his’ in history is in brackets in order to challenge the historical canons of gendered pronouns and the prevalence of masculinities in colonial history.

documenting the world around you constitute a small part of the overall accumulation of images, of possibilities, of stories, which may be re-presented through the digital. The images do not simply depict a location, a museum, a train station, a beach, an ocean; these are active signifiers of war, of South African history, of the fragility of humanity in the aftermath of colonialism. The film looks at war up-close without ever showing the realities of that war. I have attempted to bring up this past at an appropriate moment, so that it is not forgotten and to critique the aftermath. Once a historical narrative is lost it is not gone, it just needs to be recovered differently. I have done this to critique the aftermath by representing the un-representable, and also asking why it is un-representable. In some ways, this project comes to nothing more than a reflective moment – it is no more than what it is – but an essay film interaction is taking place and there is transformation in process. The film is constructed around the aftermath of nothing, using photographs that are not traumatic, but simply every day. The film is an in-depth analysis of the way space is lived in after the aftermath, in the moments of re-appropriation, transformation, invention and commemoration.

In this decolonial moment, I believe it is important for white settlers and their children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren, to deal with these archives with an ethic of responsibility. This creates a space in which individuals can question their relation to history and memory, and could lead to greater participation in decolonisation. I have done this by reflecting on my great-grandfather's archive, through the medium of the film essay and installation, investigating particular sites that I felt were relevant to my project, filming these spaces and asking why for some they may present an answer, and for others they are a problem in contemporary South Africa. The question that remains is: why are the politics of representation still dominated by white settler logic, and how do we start to see other futures and other realities within everyday interactions, public spaces and collective narratives?

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