

# **Museums for the Planet**

**Critical Realist Philosophy and the Possibility of an Eco-decolonial Museology**

A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

of

RHODES UNIVERSITY

by

THOMAS CARNEGIE JEFFERY

October 2021

## ABSTRACT

### **Museums for the Planet: Dialectical Critical Realist Philosophy and the Possibility of an Eco-decolonial Museology**

This study introduces dialectical critical realism into museology as a philosophical underlabourer for the development of new theoretical potentials for the transformation of museum practice. The idea of the museum is in a moment of fluidity evident in emergent decolonial and ecological perspectives and in the International Council of Museum's process of redefinition of the museum. The potential to reimagine the museum lacks a coherent philosophical and theoretical foundation. The persistence of museological dualism separates the social from the ecological and absents the emergence of relational modes of thinking and practice. This study conceives an ecological-decolonial or eco-decolonial mode of museology that is disruptive of dualism and generative of relationality, and is thus generative of agency for deeper, more effective and enduring social-ecological justice.

The core of this thesis is the development of the eco-decolonial mode of museology through the DCR onto-axiological chain or 'MELD' schema. At 1M a depth ontological analysis augmented by interviews with key informants establishes a dialectic of society and ecology in the museological context. 1M surfaces capitalism and the implicit neoliberal ontology of museology as deep causal mechanisms of the 2E persistence of museological human-nature dualism. The paradox of 'emancipatory neoliberalism' is a policy-practice contradiction that absents potentials for transformation of the museum and that is held in place by the grounding ontological activity of museology, collection.

The 2E perspective on absences enables the emergence of new transformative pathways towards the 3L vision of the eco-decolonial mode of museology as a (4D) new way of thinking and working to resolve neoliberal restrictions. The fundamental 4D change envisioned for museum philosophy, theory and practice is an ontological transformation from traditionalist human-nature dualism to a progressive human-nature dialectic. A case study considers instances where museum workers exercised the agency to expand practice in this way.

Future work using the expansive learning methodology of Change Laboratories will develop and implement the potentials generated by the onto-axiological chain for the eco-decolonial mode to bring real change to traditional, dualist museum practice, in order to ensure the relevance and the agency of the museum as a social structure in and for a changing world.

### **Keywords**

Museum; museology; decolonize; ecologize; eco-decolonial; social-ecological crisis; critical realism; ontology; expansion of practice.

## Table of Contents

Abstract	ii
List of Figures	vi
Preface	vii
Acknowledgements	ix
1. INTRODUCTION	
1.1. Outline of the thesis	1
1.2. A list of the articles and their status	1
1.3. Approach to the analysis	2
1.4. The formal definition of the museum and why this study mostly ignores it	2
1.5. The need for this study, contextualised within the theoretical framework of museumology and challenges that museums face	
1.5.1. What do I mean by 'museumology'?	5
1.5.2. Theoretical framework	6
1.5.3. Social relevance and dualism	7
1.5.3.1. Dualism, relevance and museum visitors	9
1.5.4. The need for relationality between the social perspective of museumological decolonization and emerging perspectives on the 'ecologization' of museumology	10
1.5.5. Surfacing the paradox of emancipatory neoliberalism: Why this study is unique in museumology	11
1.5.6. Problem statement	12
1.6. Why dialectical critical realism?	13
1.6.1. Reflexivity on the choice of DCR philosophy as the philosophical foundation of the study	14
1.7. A note on the Covid-19 pandemic	15
1.8. A note on the nature of a museum of literature	16
1.9. Positionality	
1.9.1. Introduction	17
1.9.2. Insider and outsider positionalities	20
1.9.3. A critical realist perspective on positionality	20
1.9.4. Reflexivity on personal positionality	22
1.9.5. Reflexivity on the perception of the need for the work	23
1.9.6. Emergence of activities from personal positionality and perception of need	25
1.9.7. Reflexivity on positionality in the work place and museum sector	26

1.9.8. Reflexivity on critical positionality	28
1.9.9. Value positionality of the study	29
1.10. The aims of the work	31
1.11. Research questions	31
2. METHODOLOGY	
2.1. The dialectical critical realist onto-axiological chain	32
2.2. The stratified dialectical critical realist view of reality	36
2.3. Interviews and the data analysis methodology	38
2.4. Literature review	40
2.5. Reflexivity on the use of the onto-axiological chain in the study	41
2.6. Reflexivity on some terminology that is used in this study	42
2.6.1. Terminology and the need for a focus on causal mechanisms	43
3. SYNTHESIS OF THE ARTICLES: DEVELOPMENT OF THE ECO-DECOLONIAL MODE OF MUSEOLOGY USING THE CRITICAL REALIST DIALECTICAL ONTO-AXIOLOGICAL CHAIN OF BEING AND BECOMING	
3.1. Introduction to the synthesis	45
3.2. Synthesis as reflexivity	46
3.3. Synthesis of the articles	
3.3.1. 1M: A deep ontological perspective on museology and its historical context enabled by the stratified DCR view of reality	47
3.3.2. 2E: Absences and absencing	52
3.3.2.1. Surfacing transformative pathways emergent from 2E for a 3L vision	53
3.3.3. 3L: Vision / Totality	55
3.3.4. 4D: Agency in practice	59
4. DISCUSSION: DEVELOPING THE ECO-DECOLONIAL MODE OF MUSEOLOGY	
4.1. Introduction to the discussion	63
4.2. The value of a fluid critical perspective on neoliberalism	64
4.3. Further potentials for the situated narrative approach	
4.3.1. Situated narratives: The perspective so far	67
4.3.2. Transcendental potentials	67
4.3.3. Practical implications of the situated narrative approach	70

4.3.3.1. Collecting and situated narratives: A dialectical mode of collections practice	71
4.3.3.2. Situated narratives and the relevance of museums	73
4.3.4. Reflexivity on the development of critical ideas around collecting and situated narratives	75
4.4. Some policy implications of the study	76
4.5. Possibilities for future work	
4.5.1. The potential applicability of the eco-decolonial perspective across the social sciences	77
4.5.2. Developing museological perspectives on the more-than-human	78
4.5.3. Situated narrative potentials: Service delivery protest and Covid-19	79
4.6. Change Laboratories for the iterative development and implementation of the eco-decolonial mode of museology	80
4.7. A proposed (re)definition of the museum	83
4.8. Reflexivity: A personal, eco-decolonial perspective on capital and capitalism that has emerged during this study	84
5. CONCLUSION	
5.1. Review of how the problem statement has been addressed	85
5.2. Synthesis of the answers to the research questions	85
5.3. Recommendations	86
5.4. Contribution to knowledge	88
5.5. Conclusion of the Conclusion, or, Not Quite the End	89
REFERENCES	91
APPENDIX 1: Ladder Plan: An overview of the four papers and their development of the dialectical onto-axiological chain in relation to museology	109
APPENDIX 2: Interview schedule	110
THE ARTICLES	
APPENDIX 3: Future-Proofing South Africa's Cultural Museums: Climate Change, Heritage Discourse and Cultural Landscapes	112
APPENDIX 4: Critical Realist Philosophy and the Possibility of an Eco-decolonial Museology	122

APPENDIX 5: Towards an Eco-decolonial Museology: A Critical Realist Perspective on the Crises of South African Museums	145
APPENDIX 6: Humanature: Critical Realism and the Possibility of an Eco-decolonial Museology	173
APPENDIX 7: Decolonial Museums in a Time of Social-Ecological Crisis: Cultural Landscape and the Revitalisation of Museological Theory	199

## List of Figures

Figure 1: Overview of MELD/onto-axiological chain	32
Figure 2: 1M Generative Complex	34
Figure 3: The eco-decolonial theoretical constellation	56
Figure 4: Modelling the emergence of the eco-decolonial mode of museology from the onto-axiological chain	74

## Preface

The subject of this thesis is an exploration of ways to overcome museological dualism and the persistence in museum philosophy, theory and practice of the divisions between humans and nature, society and ecology. I decided to address these divisions because it is my feeling that they are the greatest challenge museums face, and the greatest restriction preventing museums from realising their immense potential for doing good in this time of global social-ecological crisis.

I was motivated to write it through my work in South African museums, which showed me that despite a strong agenda of social upliftment and empowerment museums are not attuned to the social impacts of ecological crisis. It seems clear to me that this signifies an absence of social-ecological relationality that emerges from museums' historical dualism in philosophy, theory and practice. It is equally clear to me that without work to develop relational social-ecological perspectives, without work to develop the capacity for museums to engage with the social-ecological crisis that characterises the relationship between humanity and the world today, museums would be doomed to fail to achieve the relevance and impact that current critical museological perspectives emphasise as their main purpose.

Two tenets guide this work. Firstly, there can be no deep and enduring transformation without a focus on the entanglement of society and ecology. Secondly, there can be no deep and enduring change without a focus on deep and enduring causes. As the research for the study progressed dialectical critical realism seemed to offer clear potential to understand the complex causes preventing museums from working to mitigate the social-ecological crisis.

One of the hardest parts of any research project is to decide the limits of the study. It's easy to wander off along any number of interesting pathways, and I spent most of the first year of this study deciding which paths to follow. Those decisions were foundational, a point of departure, and over the course of the five years of the project I discovered new paths and new ideas that I hope will expand the work's usefulness to museum people in South Africa and internationally. Critical realist philosophy is the most significant of these expansive approaches, and seems to offer the revitalised foundation of which I think museology is in need.

One of the problems of scope is not just finding literature but selecting the work that is most relevant and useful from the massive amount of quality scholarship that is accessible online. I searched online resources by keyword, and used abstracts to determine the relevance of a particular article to my work. I conducted a thorough review of South Africa's peer-reviewed and accredited museology journal, the *South African Museums Association Bulletin* (SAMAB), triangulated with Vollgraaff's similar review (2018). SAMAB together with the annual conference of the South African Museums Association (SAMA) offer an invaluable resource for understanding what is as well as what

is not on the country's museological agenda. There was a clear absence of ecological issues such as the greenhouse effect and resultant climate change and of attention to their social impacts. Understanding the generative mechanisms of these absences in museology and overcoming them is the focus of this thesis.

I made exhaustive efforts to find South African museological work published internationally or that locates South African museology in the context of international museology. There was very little. As Dr Helene Vollgraaff has noted, South African museological perspectives lag the international and the intellectual foundation of South African museum practice has received little attention. Interviews that I conducted during this project suggested that the term decolonization itself is poorly understood in terms of what it means in practice. One of the goals of my work is to draw on international perspectives in order to develop the South African, and in turn to locate South African museology in the international context and to contribute to important emergent international trends, such as the decolonization and ecologization of museum practice. A particular goal of the study is the development of a relational perspective, a social-ecological perspective rather than the social *and* ecological perspectives of the traditional museological dualism which remains dominant. This new, relational perspective is the ecological-decolonial, or eco-decolonial, mode of museology.

Participation in interdisciplinary seminars and workshops at the Environmental Learning Research Centre (ELRC) at Rhodes University, where I am based for my PhD studies, was equally vital for identifying research paths. A lot of useful literature that I would otherwise have been unlikely to come across was recommended to me during interactions with ELRC colleagues working in a variety of fields. My supervisor, Professor Heila Lotz-Sisitka, always had excellent recommendations for readings, indicative of her position at the cutting edge of research in the fields of critical realism, education for sustainable development, transgressive learning and others.

There is a particular sense of excitement as one discovers an especially cogent piece of writing, or one that crystallises emerging ideas or inspires new lines of thought. I experienced this with the work of museologist Fiona Cameron and environmental historian Jason W. Moore, and with the book *Curating the Future: Museums, Communities and Climate Change* edited by Jennifer Newell, Libby Robin and Kirsten Wehner. The insidious operation of neoliberal forces has taken centre stage in my thesis. The influence of neoliberal ideology on policy and governance is the primary constraint on the potential for museums to have emancipatory social-ecological impacts. Moore's article 'The Capitalocene, Part I: On the Nature and Origins of our Ecological Crisis' convinced me that the Anthropocene conception, however valuable, needs to be refocused on capitalogenic forces as the primary anthropic contribution to social-ecological crisis. Moore's work,

together with a piece by economist Rajesh Venugopal in which he questions the existence of neoliberalism, were key to the development of my conception of neoliberalism. The dialectical critical realist idea of the epistemic fallacy was equally key to understanding neoliberalism's real-world operationalization.

The peer-reviewers of my work have offered very useful feedback, particularly those at the journal *Museum and Society* who helped me to focus the 1M depth ontological analysis that was a crucial moment of the study.

The philosophy of dialectical critical realism (henceforth DCR) became the foundation of this study. DCR is notoriously complex. This is because it is intended to deal with complex and contested contexts, and to constitute a philosophical basis for research endeavours across the sciences and humanities. I came to understand at least some of the deeply intricate field of DCR philosophy through the work of its principal founder, Roy Bhaskar, naturally, but because of the density and complexity of his work, I relied heavily on commentators, particularly Leigh Price, Heila Lotz-Sisitka and Ingrid Schudel from the ELRC, and the work of Alan Norrie and Mervyn Hartwig. The book *Critical Realism, Environmental Learning and Social-Ecological Change*, edited by Price and Lotz-Sisitka, is an indispensable and accessible resource for understanding DCR. It was intended for the very purpose for which I found it so helpful, understanding the real world application and effectiveness of DCR. DCR philosophy offers profound analytical tools for understanding the ontological depths of a situation, and the onto-axiological chain that is explained below became the principal analytical frame for my work.

From this philosophical framework emerged the theoretical perspectives that will underpin the eco-decolonial mode of museology I have developed here, and that I hope may contribute to the reimagination and revitalization of the museum during a time in which it faces a crisis of being.

### **Acknowledgements**

Some particular thanks are necessary. Thank you to my supervisor, Professor Heila Lotz-Sisitka, for your inspirational guidance through the PhD journey and for teaching me to visualise the work, which was invaluable in planning and execution. Thank you to the community at the Environmental Learning Research Centre at Rhodes University for an inspirational learning environment. You are a remarkable group of people of which I am honoured to be a part.

Most of all, thank you to my wife Tracy for all the cups of tea, love and emotional support, and tolerance of my endlessly distracted state.

## **1. INTRODUCTION**

### **1.1. Outline of the thesis**

The introductory chapter will overview the context of the work, with an emphasis on the need for the work that is done in this study. The need is related to the challenges that museums face and the generative mechanisms of these challenges. Reference is made to other relevant contextual and practical elements, including the author's positionality and the study's position in relation to the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic of 2020 and 2021 on museum practice.

The introduction will be followed by a section that outlines the methodology of the study. The philosophical and theoretical frameworks for the study will then be overviewed during a synthesis of the work that was carried out over the five articles that are the core of this thesis, which is a PhD by publication. The synthesis of the work will focus on museums in the context of capitalism and neoliberal ideology, which has emerged as the core theme of this study. The analysis identified neoliberal ideology as the most significant causal mechanism of structural restrictions on museum practice. Perspectives on this mechanism remain absent from museological criticism in the South African context and are only tentatively emergent in international museological perspectives.

The goal of the thesis is to develop a relational ecological-decolonial, or eco-decolonial, mode of museum philosophy, theory and practice suited to decolonization in a time of social-ecological crisis. This development is underlaboured by the dialectical critical realist onto-axiological chain or 'MELD' schema. The study thus takes a critical realist dialectical approach to the relational expansion of museology towards an eco-decolonial mode. The primary moment of expansive potential is the surfacing of neoliberal restrictions on museology at a deep structural and causal level, restrictions which perpetuate in museology the dualism on which neoliberalism relies for its own persistence.

The synthesis will be followed by a discussion that considers potential for further developments to the eco-decolonial mode. The conclusion will then make recommendations for developing the eco-decolonial through further dialectical, theoretical and practical work.

### **1.2. A list of the articles and their status**

The PhD by publication at Rhodes University requires the submission to journals of four articles, three to international journals; two of which must be published or accepted for publication at the time of thesis submission. A fifth article (Jeffery 2019) was also published and may be considered supplementary to the four principal publications that were written for the study, as is discussed in the 'Synthesis' section.

The following is a list of the articles, including a note on the status of each article in the publication process as of July 2021.

1. 'Future-Proofing South Africa's Cultural Museums: Climate Change, Heritage Discourse and Cultural Landscapes'. Published in *South African Museums Association Bulletin* 39, 2017, pages 19-28. See Appendix 3 or [view online](#).
2. 'Critical Realist Philosophy and the Possibility of an Eco-decolonial Museology'. Published in *Museum and Society*, 19 (1) 2021, pages 48-70. See Appendix 4 or [view online](#).
3. 'Towards an Eco-decolonial Museology: A Critical Realist Perspective on the Crises of South African Museums'. Accepted on 11 February 2021 for publication with minor modifications in the *South African Journal of Environmental Education*. The version appended is the final edited version to appear in August/September 2021. See Appendix 5 or [view online](#).
4. 'Humanature: Critical Realism and the Possibility of an Eco-decolonial Museology'. This was submitted to the *Journal of Critical Realism* in January 2021 and awaits editorial feedback. See Appendix 6 or [view online](#).
5. 'Decolonial Museums in a Time of Social-Ecological Crisis: Cultural Landscape and the Revitalisation of Museological Theory.' Published in *South African Museums Association Bulletin* 41, 2019, pages 29-36. See Appendix 7 or [view online](#).

Page references in the study to Articles 3 and 4, unpublished at time of writing, are to the page numbers as they appear as pre-prints on ResearchGate at the links provided.

### **1.3. Approach to the analysis**

The articles that are the backbone of the study will be overviewed and their main conclusions summarized and synthesized below. The introduction will refer to the articles as it sets the stage for the study, particularly as it lays out the challenges that museums face today and which it is the goal of this thesis to elucidate and resolve. The thesis narrative, however, which frames the articles and draws out their implications and conclusions, will try to avoid repetition of their content and instead focus on developing a clear overview of their perspectives and the study's overall development, aims and outcomes.

### **1.4. The formal definition of the museum and why this study mostly ignores it**

The International Council of Museums (ICOM) definition of the museum (International Council of Museums 2020a) is perhaps the most significant frame for museum research and practice, for two reasons. Firstly, from a historical perspective, the ICOM definition has been widely, perhaps

universally, treated as foundational to museology, and reflects the historical ontology and authority of the museum as a social structure. Secondly, this historical authority is now contested in a redefinition process that has surfaced significant divisions in the museum world (as discussed below and in Jeffery 2021a, 58). These are divisions such as that between the individual worker and the quantitative bureaucracy of the museum, which is a focus in this study (Jeffery 2021a, 60).

This study aims to reimagine the idea of the museum and the theory and practice of museum work, and I am therefore reluctant to start out from a definition. The analysis identifies an implicit neoliberal ontology in museology and outlines how this ontology is perpetuated in moves to redefine the museum by ICOM, a process which has been ongoing from 2018 to the moment of writing in late-2021. To repeat existing formulations of the idea of 'The Museum', whether they are historical or in development, risks the repetition of the restrictive structures and authoritative abstractions that inhere in the concept because of the implicit neoliberal ontology, as surfaced in Article 2 (Jeffery 2021a, 50), elaborated in Article 3 (Jeffery 2021b, 9) and outlined in the synthesis below.

These are abstractions such as 'Nature', 'Humanity' and 'Society' through which dualist and relativist neoliberal ideology defines fixed relations that "elide the deep, profound and intimate porosity and permeability" that actually pertains between these ideas (Moore 2017, 598). This calcification of relations is characteristic of "historical capitalism as a world-ecology of power, capital and nature" (Moore 2017, 595) and fundamental to its neoliberal ideology. The study considers that existing definitions of the museum are implicated in and perpetuate the implicit neoliberal museological ontology. Thus, to treat such definitions as foundational is to risk perpetuating the architecture of self-serving epistemic fallacies through which neoliberal ideology absents relationality and appropriates emancipatory museological perspectives such as decolonization and their potentials for empowerment and the generation of agency (as elaborated in Jeffery 2021a, 56-58).

It thus seems preferable to avoid definitions and instead work towards a new understanding of the museum. This study will focus on the idea of the museum as an open system, as a totality viewed as a "complex of intra- and inter-relationships" (Schudel 2017, 170, 177) which offers potential for the identification and resolution of contradictions and inconsistencies that are not visible in closed perspectives. One such contradiction is the fixation on collection, or acquisition, as the core of museology. This study argues that the fundamental and unrecognised shortcoming of the ICOM redefinition process is an absence of reflexivity on acquisition as essential to the idea of the museum, because this in fact perpetuates the very problems of representivity and relevance of museums that Sandahl (2018, 3) writes that the redefinition process is intended to overcome.

Acquisition is the grounding ontological activity of museology (Jeffery 2021a, 59). Without reflexivity on this core idea, the implicit neoliberal ontology remains invisible. An absence of reflexivity thus absents potential for emancipatory change, and absents potentials for a relational framework for understanding the emergence, unpredictability and implications of social-ecological crisis. It mires museology in historical dualism, and aligns it with the reductionism that has plagued the human sciences (Bhaskar 2008a, 220).

Rather than risk becoming prescriptive and reductive from the outset, this study explores what museums might become in the present moment of fluidity in the conception of the museum and the need for deep change. The ICOM process of redefinition of the museum has failed, and has revealed deep divisions in the museum world (Adams 2019, 22 August ; Adams 2019, 18 September; Adams 2021, 2 March), to the extent that the Chairperson of ICOM, Suay Aksoy, resigned in frustration at what she perceived to be resistance to progressive change (International Council of Museums, 2020b). Thus, while the formal definition of the museum is not significant to this study other than in the decision to ignore its nominal authority, the processes and critical perspectives around the redefinition process are significant.

For the purposes of historical context and interest, this is the original ICOM definition that the redevelopment process is intended to reinvigorate (International Council of Museums, 2020a):

A museum is a non-profit, permanent institution in the service of society and its development, open to the public, which acquires, conserves, researches, communicates and exhibits the tangible and intangible heritage of humanity and its environment for the purposes of education, study and enjoyment.

This is the new definition (International Council of Museums, 2020a) that was developed by the ICOM process, but which has been widely rejected:

Museums are democratising, inclusive and polyphonic spaces for critical dialogue about the pasts and the futures. Acknowledging and addressing the conflicts and challenges of the present, they hold artefacts and specimens in trust for society, safeguard diverse memories for future generations and guarantee equal rights and equal access to heritage for all people. Museums are not for profit. They are participatory and transparent, and work in active partnership with and for diverse communities to collect, preserve, research, interpret, exhibit, and enhance understandings of the world, aiming to contribute to human dignity and social justice, global equality and planetary wellbeing.

This study focuses on the deep generative mechanisms of the persistent dualist structure of the museum rather than on dualist definitions that do not develop vital relational perspectives. The study looks towards an iterative reimagination of museums as complex social-ecological structures. Museums emerge from networks of local, regional, national and international relationships and are, or should be, social-ecological structures that cannot be standardised.

The study's broader focus on formulations that affect museum research and practice, beyond the ICOM definition of the museum, looks specifically to those that relate to cultural landscape, as this is considered to be potentially very fruitful ground for the development of new modes of museology (Jeffery 2017; Jeffery 2019; and see sections 3.3.1. and 3.3.3.).

Other frames that might potentially influence museum policy and practice, such as the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and Agenda 2030 (United Nations Development Programme), do not yet seem to do so in South Africa. For instance, the 2021 Annual Performance Plan of the Department of Sports, Art and Culture, which oversees South African museums, notes the SDGs as a potential motivator for programmes of international cooperation (Department of Sports, Art and Culture 2021, 91) but neither further develops this idea nor suggests potential pathways for the SDGs to influence policy or practice. This absence can be better understood in relation to the rhetorical nature of environmental policy that is discussed in section 1.5.5. and in Article 2 (Jeffery 2021a, 56).

McGhie (2019, 34-35) writes that to position museum theory and practice in relation to the SDGs will enable museums to shape impactful programmes, to effectively use their resources for positive social-ecological outcomes, to fulfil their potential in relation to an ambitious global agenda, to build new partnerships, and to demonstrate their relevance to society. The eco-decolonial mode of museology will certainly seek to align museum thought and practice with frames such as the Sustainable Development Goals as it develops new approaches to practice that move beyond the scope delineated by historical frames such as the ICOM definition.

In section 4.7. below, the study offers a proposed (re)definition of the museum grounded in the work that is done here.

## **1.5. The need for this study, contextualised within the theoretical framework of museology and the principal challenges that museums face**

### ***1.5.1. What do I mean by 'museology'?***

When I talk about museology I'm talking about the practice of working in a museum, the act of being a museum worker, a museologist. The practice of museology, however, is underpinned by a philosophy of museology and a theory of museology. Museology is equally the study and

development of this philosophy and theory as it is the practice of doing museum work. People who focus on the philosophy and theory of museum work, perhaps in a university setting, are equally museologists. Each museum worker should ideally have some insight into philosophy, theory and practice.

The distinction between practical museologists, who work in a museum and are for instance engaged in collections work or the development of exhibitions, and philosophical or theoretical museologists who perhaps work in a museum or a university setting and produce scholarly analyses of the practical context, could be considered analogous to the relationship in the literary world between authors who write creative work, and literary critics and theorists who think about how and why authors write. In the same way that authors, theorists and critics all operate within the field of literature, museum workers, philosophers and theorists all work in the field of museology. The distinction could also be considered analogous to the relationship between theoretical and experimental physicists.

I am a practical museologist who works in a museum where I design and curate exhibitions, and I am also a philosophical and theoretical museologist who works on contributions to museological thinking in order to help generate new modes of museum practice – new ways of designing and curating, for instance – suited to the complex and emergent contexts we experience today.

This thesis is predominantly focused on making developments to philosophy and theory that may contribute to the generation of new modes of practice. It develops the eco-decolonial way of museological thinking in order to generate eco-decolonial ways of doing museological work.

### ***1.5.2. Theoretical framework***

Forms of museum practice with potential to explore the dynamics of social and ecological processes as interlinked systems seem increasingly urgent (Anderies, Janssen & Ostrom 2004, 2; Walker et al., 2004, 1; Jeffery 2017, 25). Decolonization and ecologization of practice are current museological trends that have particular relevance to this. The ecologization of museology refers to emergent transformative pathways that connect socially responsible practice to urgent ecological contexts. These emphasize fresh ways of thinking and being in order to disrupt the persistence of museological human-nature dualism, and to expand practice to emphasize the relationship between humanity and the environment as mutually constructive (Cameron 2015b, 16; Newell, Robin & Wehner 2017b; Jeffery 2017, 21).

Generally, decolonization is about the empowerment of marginalized peoples, knowledge and traditions (Dondolo 2005, 68-69; Alonso 2008, 249; Mdanda 2016; Newell, Robin & Wehner

2017a, 11). The focus of South African museological decolonization is the vital amelioration of the depredations of the colonial and apartheid eras, an agenda of inclusivity, representivity and relevance, and the memorialization of trauma and difficult heritage (Corsane 2004, 6, 10; Mosely 2007, 101; Bakker & Müller 2010, 48; Meskell 2012, 6; MacDonald 2015; Jeffery 2017, 23). Emergent international museological perspectives demonstrate an awareness of the entanglement of social and environmental justice, and some individual museums are engaged in progressive and creative practices that critique and transgress dualist museology in order to find ways to engage with crucial social-ecological issues (Plumwood 2002; Scott & Oelofse 2005; Allen 2015, 49; Nixon 2017; Phillips 2019). Such perspectives are largely absent from the South African decolonial museological programme (Jeffery 2017, 22). This study sees the separation of decolonization and ecologization as emergent from the tensions of dualist museology, and explores potentials to bring them together in a progressive and relational form of thought and practice suited to a global context of social-ecological crisis. This form is conceptualized as the ecological-decolonial, or eco-decolonial.

The study's focus will be on the museology of South African national and provincial government-funded museums. These principal museological entities express the standards for national museum practice that emerge from ideology and policy. Connections will however be drawn between South African and international museum theory and practice, so that South African museum theory and practice may be expanded through the integration of emergent social-ecological perspectives, and may in turn contribute to international developments.

### ***1.5.3. Social relevance and dualism***

The challenge of social relevance and impact is generally regarded as most vital to contemporary museology (as discussed in Article 1, Jeffery 2017, 21; also see, for instance, Sandell 2003 and Nielsen 2015). To successfully demonstrate relevance is increasingly tied to vital government funding (Scott 2003; Scott 2006), which this study argues is not an indicator of neoliberal altruism but a mechanism of neoliberal appropriation of emancipatory discourses such as decolonization (Jeffery 2021a, 56). Nevertheless, museums have changed their attitude towards their audiences, with a focus on inclusivity and on serving sectors that were previously neglected (Meskell 2012, 6; Mdanda 2016; Newell, Robin & Wehner 2017a, 11). If they are to continue to be seen as valuable institutions, however, museums must become actors with not just social but social-ecological agency in the lives of their constituents, which is the aim of the eco-decolonial mode of museology developed in this study.

The movement for relevance and agency is structurally limited by historical museological human-nature dualism, which is generative of an absence of relationality between entangled social

and ecological perspectives (Jeffery 2017, 22; Jeffery 2021a, 48; Newell, Robin & Wehner 2017a, 1). The philosophical heart of museology is Cartesian dualism, and the historical emergence of the dualist museum is detailed in many studies (see, for instance, Bennett 1995). While museums vary widely in their size and focus of interest, and in the things that they collect (for a broad overview see Ambrose & Paine 2006, 6-8), dualist museological practice reflects the human-nature dualism of western society and means that there are two broad types of museum: cultural museums and natural history or science museums. The persistence of this restrictive philosophy in museology and the urgent need for its disruption are vital elements of this study's argument, and underpin the need for the development of relational modes of museology such as the eco-decolonial.

Museologist Fiona Cameron (2015b, 17-21) provides an overview of the emergence of Cartesian dualism and its entrenched position in museology, which is worth quoting at length:

Cartesian rationality refers to a series of conceptual and practical divides between mind and body, human and object, nature and culture, and self and other, formulated by French philosopher René Descartes on the basis of a division between the mind/soul, and the body. ... This logic became a habitus (set of values and practices) used by modern Western society to establish its own vision of the world; a standard to judge and subjugate others, both human and nonhuman; and a classificatory schema to act in the world. ... Humans became distributed into social collectives (culture) that excluded nonhumans from civic life. The structure and properties of human social collectives became pluralized and variable according to the subjectivity of their minds and perceived moral capacities.

Thus superior humans were separated from inferior nature and animals, and humanity was ordered into superior European groups and inferior indigenous groups, or rather, everybody else. The persistence of this hierarchical dualist matrix means that today, "intersubjectivity is impossible to achieve between humans and nonhumans ... and difficult to achieve between humans" (Cameron 2015b, 18). Cameron concludes that, "The modern museum form based on hierarchical and dualistic principles is ... inadequate ... because it fails to acknowledge the entanglements between human and nonhuman actants" (Cameron 2015b, 18). This means that it is not able to deal with the relational complexities of the social-ecological crisis. Cameron (2015b, 16) looks towards "new ways to represent, talk about humans, nonhumans, culture and cultural diversity, heritage objects, the environment and climate change as new types of narratives, sets of practices, and concepts." The eco-decolonial is one of these new ways.

In a move towards consistency of relational thinking, this study will use the term 'humanity-in-nature' to reference the entanglement of human and non-human life and the impossibility of considering one as separate from the other. This term comes from Jason W. Moore's work on the Capitalocene and encompasses the understanding that under Capitalism, "the living, multi-species connections of humanity-in-nature and the web of life" (2017, 598) are all decisively mediated by "accumulation by capitalization" (2017, 606). This means that both human and non-human lives are treated as no more than resources to be used by those at the top of the hierarchy in "the praxis of turning life into useful work for the accumulation of value" (Moore 2017, 608). Capital, and its neoliberal ideology, are the deep causal mechanisms of dualism, and of the injustices that dualist museology does not see. To lodge in museological discourse the relational term humanity-in-nature with its implicit criticism of capitalist thinking is a step towards healing that blindness and disrupting the dualist habitus.

Humanity-in-nature is a relational and dialectical perspective akin to Haraway's naturecultures (2004). Milstein (2011, 21) uses the similar compound term 'humanature' to "reflexively engage human and nature ... in integral conversation [in a] turn toward lexical reciprocal intertwining," and draws links to Haraway's notion of "nature and culture as inter-related historical and contemporary entities." Haraway writes (2004, 2), "There is no border where evolution ends and history begins, where genes stop and environment takes up, where culture rules and nature submits, or vice versa. Instead, there are turtles upon turtles of naturecultures all the way down." This study emphasizes such deep humanature relationality as vital to the emergence of the progressive museology that is needed to counter persistent dualism, and the infinite and relational regression of natureculture 'turtles' is added to the eco-decolonial theoretical constellation developed in Article 4 (Jeffery 2021c, 14). 'Humanature' is also the title of an exhibition project that I curated during my PhD study with such reflexive and reciprocal relationships in mind, and which is the focus of a case study in Article 4.

### **1.5.3.1. Dualism, relevance and museum visitors**

One of the decisions made in determining the analytical focus of the study in relation to dualism and relevance was in how to treat the museum visitor experience. 'Visitor-object' is a relationship that is mediated by the authority of the museum. This historical authority is structured by the dualist ontology discussed above.

While research such as that conducted by Kiersten Latham (2007; 2013) into visitors' experience of museums and their relationships with museum objects is certainly fascinating and valuable, I made a decision to focus on marginalized peoples who do not visit museums and on

surfacing the structural conditions that prevent them from doing so, and on looking for ways to overcome those conditions. This is a particular focus of the situated narrative approach that is developed in this study. This approach is discussed in section 3.3.2.1. 'Surfacing transformative pathways emergent from 2E for a 3L vision' and also in Article 4 (Jeffery 2021c, 17), and overviewed and further elaborated in section 4.3.1 and particularly in section 4.3.3.2., 'Situated narratives and the relevance of museums'.

I felt that the transformational agenda that is prioritized in the study could more fruitfully focus on means to bridge the divide between museums and, in particular, marginalized peoples who do not have access to museums, than on the relationships between museums and people who *do* have access. The museum objects which are often the focal point of visitors' engagement with the museum will certainly play an important role in this process of bridge-building through the envisioned dialectics of an eco-decolonial mode of museology, as emphasized in section 3.3.2.1., but objects are not necessarily at the centre of eco-decolonial museum practice. This is elaborated in detail below.

#### ***1.5.4. The need for relationality between the social perspective of museological decolonization and emerging perspectives on the 'ecologization' of museology***

Colonialism was a system of simultaneous capitalist separation and exploitation of people and nature. Humanity was separated from and classed as superior to Nature in order to allow Nature's exploitation by capital. Simultaneously, great numbers of people were classified as 'of Nature' rather than human, in order to allow their exploitation by capital. These violent dualist contradictions continue in the era of neoliberalism (see for instance Plumwood 2002, 8 on "our current failures and blindspots in relationships with nature"; Plumwood 2002, 9 and Moore 2017, 611-612 on cheap nature and labour, and who counts as 'human'; also see Nixon 2017).

Human-nature dualism is responsible for the separation, or abstraction, of Humanity from Nature and the positioning of the Natural as inferior to the Human. This justifies the exploitation of Nature. Human-nature dualism justifies the subaltern status and the exploitation of the Other by positioning indigenous peoples as of 'Nature' and not of 'Humanity'. The capitalist exploitation of Nature and the marginalization and exploitation of the Other are thus deeply entangled. This condition emerged in the colonial era (Plumwood 2002) and is perpetuated by the material conditions of the neoliberal era (Moore 2017) which rely as much as did the colonial on the hierarchical distinctions of dualism (Cameron 2015b, 20). This is why there is a need for the development of relationality between the decolonial and the ecological perspectives in museology, a

need for the development of relationality between perspectives on social justice and ecological justice.

Neoliberal exploitation is not confined to indigenous peoples but has spread to encompass the entirety of the societies that live under the material conditions of modern democracy (Pichler, Brand & Görg 2020). The decolonial museological focus on the effects of historical colonialism can effectively develop a focus on the ways in which neoliberalism today makes use of the same hierarchical processes as colonialism and perpetuates those effects. This new focus has to be grounded in social-ecological relationality if it is to engage with the material conditions of neoliberal injustice in a way that gets to its deep causal mechanisms, that is, an ontological way (also see 4.3.4. below).

These are the perspectives and principles that ground the eco-decolonial mode of museology.

#### ***1.5.5. Surfacing the paradox of emancipatory neoliberalism: Why this study is unique in museology***

The focus of this study is on national and provincial government-funded South African museums, the circumstances of which are generally congruent with those of government-funded international museums in that they are embedded within neoliberal systems of governance. The policy of the South African Department of Arts and Culture (2017) echoes the explicit international commitment to embed heritage as part of the “cultural and creative industries” (Thomas 2016, 37) and thus framed within neoliberal governance at the mega- and macro-levels. Heritage is seen as an industry, in which “optimal performance” is measured in relation to job creation, investment and economic growth as the solutions for social problems (Kamga & Heleba 2012, 83; also see South African Government 2011; South African Cultural Observatory 2018).

This ensures that macro-level heritage policy is focused on a decolonization process – that is, a process of social justice – operationalized through economic principles that in fact marginalize social as well as ecological justice concerns. Emancipatory practices cannot be supported by the neoliberal ideology which underpins Nixon’s “slow violence” (2011) and that generates and perpetuates the inequalities and injustices of the Capitalocene (Moore 2017). This is the paradox of emancipatory neoliberalism. The oppressive ideology of neoliberalism is positioned at the policy level as the fundamental driver of emancipatory, relational impulses such as decolonization and ecologization. This ideology in fact hampers rather than encourages the emergence of such perspectives that would challenge the injustices upon which it relies, as can be seen, for example, in the rhetorical nature of progressive environmental policies (Jeffery 2021a, 56).

The critical realist 1M analysis conducted in Article 2 surfaces the deep generative roles of capitalism and neoliberalism in the ideological formations that shape museum practice and the deep structural restrictions of emancipatory neoliberalism on museums' agency and agentic capacity (Jeffery 2021a, 56). The laminated perspective reveals how this happens historically, through the co-evolution of dualist museology and dualist capitalism. This deep neoliberal ontology remains unrecognized in the South African museological context and is only recently emergent as a tentative focus of critique in the international context. Fiona Cameron's work is among the most significant in this regard, particularly for its ontological perspective (see Cameron 2015a; Cameron 2015b; Cameron & Neilson 2015; also see Nixon 2017 for tentative and symptomatic rather than causal connections between museology and capital). By way of example, the book *Curating the Future: Museums, Communities and Climate Change* (Newell, Robin & Wehner 2017), of which Nixon's (2017) article is a chapter, is focused on an emergent social-ecological relationality in museology but does not draw connections with neoliberal capital as a generative mechanism of persistent dualism.

What sets this study apart from other such emergent and progressive museological perspectives is thus its focus on the deep level from which the restrictive effects of neoliberalism on museum practice emerge. More specifically, this study places emphasis on the entanglement, at the ontological level, of the dominant dualist museological philosophy with the injustices of capitalism and neoliberal ideology. Even in perspectives critical of dualism and that emphasize the need for the development of social-ecological relationality in museum practice (for instance Wehner (2017), in another chapter from *Curating the Future*) the deep causal mechanisms of the absence of social-ecological relationality from contemporary museology remain hidden.

#### **1.5.6. Problem statement**

This study thus argues that in the postcolonial era, the historical dualism that set up human-nature hierarchies in museology is perpetuated by and through neoliberal governance systems, which implicate museums in an intensifying global pattern of injustices and inequalities (as articulated by, for instance, Nixon 2011). The implicit neoliberal museological ontology relies on dualism, perpetuates dualist philosophy, and undermines museology's emancipatory potentials as it appropriates them into neoliberal systems (Jeffery 2021a, 56).

In critical realist terms, neoliberalism is a 'There Is No Alternative' (TINA) formation (Bhaskar 2008a, 108; Schudel 2016, 259), from which dualist museology emerges historically and in the perpetuation of which it is implicated. It is thus this study's position that the principal challenge that museums face today is the implicit neoliberal museological ontology, because this is at the root of the persistence of museological human-nature dualism and its restrictions on practice. This ontology

remains hidden, however, by the absence of a museological perspective on deep causal mechanisms. This study absents this absence through its development of the eco-decolonial mode of museology, which is underlaboured by dialectical critical realist philosophy with its potential to surface such deep mechanisms. Lotz-Sisitka and Price (2016, 4) note the capacity of an ontological focus such as that of dialectical critical realism to surface “the deep-seated structural conditions and mechanisms that shape and hold a (globally) powerful, colonially inspired anti-environmental lobby in place”.

Vollgraaff (2018, 382-384) concludes that South African museological perspectives are underdeveloped and lag behind international thinking (also see Levitz & Mathers 2000, 20; Martin 2000, 13). Bluntly put, the intellectual foundation of South African museum practice has received little attention, as was also noted by a number of the interviewees whose responses informed Article 2 (Jeffery 2021a, 56-59). Decolonization is poorly understood in terms of the transfer of theory into museological practice, and dualist museology absents relationality between decolonial and ecological perspectives.

Despite emergent international strands of thinking that are initiating a critical approach to dualism, the absence of perspective on the deep structural and causal mechanisms of the persistence of museological dualism means that both South African and international museums are prepared neither philosophically nor theoretically for practice in a context of social-ecological crisis. This is the problem that this study seeks to resolve.

### **1.6. Why dialectical critical realism?**

Dialectical critical realism (DCR) is notoriously complex, but valuable to the understanding of social structures and phenomena such as museums, and the mechanisms that steer practice in particular directions (Price 2016a, 18; Lotz-Sisitka & Price 2016, 1). The philosophy of DCR offers “explanatory tools and forms of reasoning that allow for making the complexities found in our contexts more visible and open for dialogue, engagement, learning and reflexivity” (Lotz-Sisitka & Price 2016, 5) and DCR thus has potential to contribute to the emergence of progressive modes of museological theory and practice.

Fiona Cameron (2015a, 345) writes that the contemporary museum is ontologically “ill-equipped” to face the challenges of a “messy and turbulent world”. Fresh critical perspectives are thus vital to museums’ quest for social relevance. The postmodern wariness of authority has been useful for museum work (see, for instance, Smith 2014, 33), but ultimately relies on principles of anthropocentric cultural pluralism (Cameron 2015b, 20). Critical theory has become disillusioned with the insistent relativist position of neoliberal postmodernity, which has undermined curatorial

articulation of visions for alternative futures (Wray 2019, 319), and the endless language games that have absented crucial environmental action (Martin 2000, 13-14; Potter 2001, 184; Keene 2006; Lotz-Sisitka & Price 2016, 6; Rosenberg 2020a, 203). There is a need for a revitalized philosophy for museological theory and practice, one which may better support important emergent perspectives such as decolonization and ecologization and also facilitate the emergence of relationality between them.

DCR is, at least in part, a reaction to the ways in which postmodern relativism undermined potentials for the development of the concepts necessary for the understanding of vital, complex, open-systemic phenomena, such as the greenhouse effect (Bhaskar 2010, 22). This study uses DCR to contribute to the potentials of an emergent, emancipatory museology to disrupt persistent, restrictive dualist structures and their constraints on practice, and to bring greater freedom to humanity-in-nature.

DCR was developed to act as a philosophical “underlabourer” for emancipatory social sciences (Bhaskar 2008a, 335). Underlabouring can be understood as “the process of clarifying ... ontological and epistemological confusions and uncertainties [to support] a transformative research intent,” or the practice of philosophy for real social-ecological change (Bhaskar 2008a, 335; Bhaskar & Parker 2010, vii; Price 2016a, 18; Rosenberg 2020a, 192). Through its capacity to elaborate a new level of ontological structure (Bhaskar 2008a, 30), DCR may help develop emergent progressive museological perspectives suited to the practice context of social-ecological crisis.

DCR specifically looks to the “re-vindication of ontology ... as distinct from and irreducible to epistemology” (Bhaskar 2010, 1) to the extent that it “stresses the crucial role that being (ontology) plays in our ... efforts to understand the way things are” (Norrie 2010, 7). As such, it has potential to equip museums to meet the philosophical and ontological challenges that Cameron references (2015a, 345), and further the museological goal of transformation towards the betterment of peoples’ lives (as outlined in Article 1, Jeffery 2017, 21-22). DCR is here proposed as underlabourer, as a philosophical support system, to the exploration and development of potentials for an eco-decolonial ontology with the capacity to move museum practice away from its persistent dualist framework and away from the implicit neoliberal ontology surfaced by this study.

### ***1.6.1. Reflexivity on the choice of DCR philosophy as the philosophical foundation of the study***

I made the choice to use DCR because of the potential that it offers to open up dialogues, discussion and positionalities that have become entrenched. I chose DCR because of my perception of its emancipatory vision. I do not suggest that DCR is the only way, but that it is certainly a very useful

way to surface potentials to transform museology, such as the potentials to be found in the eco-decolonial mode of thought and action.

When I was looking for a philosophical foundation for my study, the principles of DCR resonated with me on a critical as well as a personal level. It seemed to me that, through such mechanisms as the constellational perspective that is elaborated below, DCR could be an effective means through which to enable such theoretical positionalities as Fiona Cameron's post-humanism to inform the eco-decolonial mode of museology, while ensuring that the eco-decolonial remained an open and iterative way of thinking about museums and museum practice.

There are many ways to use critical realism. The use of DCR in the social sciences is expanding, as is shown in the 2018 special issue of the *Journal of Critical Realism* dedicated to exploring applied critical realism in the social sciences. Price and Martin's introduction to the special issue gives a useful overview (2018, 89-96). The ways in which DCR is applied in this thesis are not intended to be prescriptive or to be considered definitive. The aim of the study is to draw on and to demonstrate the potential that DCR has to enable the transformations that are needed in museology.

One of the principal points made in the study is that museums are in need of a new guiding ontology. I do not intend to say that DCR is or should be that ontology, but that DCR is a means to surface new ontologies, such as the eco-decolonial. The museological ontology that is underlaboured by DCR is one in which I envision a plurality of perspectives can meet and merge in new and interesting ways towards progressive developments in thinking and practice. DCR facilitates imagination and creativity through emancipation from 'there is no alternative' or TINA formations such as neoliberalism, and DCR was chosen as the philosophical underlabourer for this study because of the initial sense that it was just such formations that were holding back the development and transformation of South African and international museology. While one of the goals of DCR is to generate action in response to constraints through "the application of moral realism, leading to normative assertions and suggestions for action," (Price and Martin 2018, 90) DCR is not an end, but a means.

### **1.7. A note on the Covid-19 pandemic**

Covid-19 has had profound impacts on the ways in which museums carry out their work. It has forced museums to rapidly develop their digital capacity and skills and learn new ways to, for instance, conduct conferences and public programmes (see, for instance, Tully 2020; Samaroudi, Echavarria & Perry 2020), as are being used in the development of the Heritage, Literature and Ecology Conference that is discussed below. The focus of this thesis, however, is on the deep causal

and generative mechanisms of restrictions on museum practice, particularly capitalism and the implicit neoliberal ontology of dualist museum practice. These structures have operated over a far greater historical extent, and museums, even in their responses to Covid-19, continue to struggle to identify and address them, and in fact legitimate and perpetuate them through the sacrosanct position of the grounding ontological activity of acquisition, as is elaborated below and in Article 2 (Jeffery 2021a, 58).

The thesis will outline the ways in which these structures and mechanisms restrict every action that a museum takes, which is deeply significant to processes of decolonization and ecologization of practice as well as to responses to Covid-19. Museological responses to the global pandemic, however innovative in terms of technology and valuable in terms of highlighting perspectives on social justice (see, for instance, Manderson & Levine on the inequities evident in personal capacities to respond to Covid-19), and which already inform an emergent body of museological work that is certain to grow rapidly, nevertheless occur within the persistent dualist museological practice frame. It is these deep causal structures and the persistence of the dualist form of museology emergent from those structures that are the focus of this thesis and its aim of reimagining museology.

This reimagining will, however, hopefully enable museums to respond to such emergent crises more effectively in the future, through a new, relational and interdisciplinary mode of practice. The Covid-19 pandemic is also raised in the discussion that follows the synthesis of the articles, as potentially informing some of the situated narratives of social-ecological experience that this study identifies as crucial to the eco-decolonial mode of museology.

### **1.8. A note on the nature of a museum of literature**

A museum of literature such as Amazwi South African Museum of Literature where I am curator of exhibitions is in many ways a museum of storytelling, which certainly affects the way in which such a museum tells stories in its exhibitions, for instance. Such a museum is in a unique position in comparison to other museums, as its focus on *the stories within* physical editions of creative work means that it is more open, conceptually, to intangible heritage, and to the idea of people and their stories as the vital and vitalising core of the museological project. This is a significant element of the vision for museum practice that is developed in this study, which explores means to disrupt acquisition of physical things as the grounding ontological activity in museology. Articles 3 (Jeffery 2021b, 13) and 4 (Jeffery 2021c, 11) elaborate this vision as potentially rooted in the facilitation of situated personal and community narratives of social-ecological crisis, a position which is further developed in the discussion below as it considers the revitalisation of the ontology of museology.

Article 1 introduced the potential for ecocritical perspectives from literary studies to inform the development of relationality between social and ecological perspectives in museology (Jeffery 2017, 24-25). Article 4 (Jeffery 2021c, 14) further elaborates the idea that a museum of literature is perhaps more readily able to adopt a relational perspective because the ecocritical genre of literature and literary criticism has such a perspective itself and, because the genre is ascendant, has an increasingly significant presence in the collections and is thus on the agenda for exhibitions. It also notes the potential irony that in this case, the museological focus on acquisition that is critiqued in this study is potentially the source of a relational perspective. This, however, has more to do with the character of ecocritical literature (which is discussed in detail below), which has a relational perspective on social-ecological issues, and with the intangible nature of literature itself than with the principle of acquisition, which cannot be absolved of the injustices it perpetuates on the basis of this fortuitous exception.

Article 4 develops a constellational perspective (Jeffery 2021c, 8) on potentials for interdisciplinary theoretical connections that may inform the eco-decolonial mode of museology. Ecocritical literature features in that constellation through the theoretical and creative insights it offers on social-ecological relationality, and on which museology may draw in the development of its own relational perspectives.

## **1.9. Positionality**

### **1.9.1. Introduction**

The reflexive development of positionality is a critical and challenging area for a doctoral study, and is part of the work of ensuring the quality of the thesis and the value of its contribution to knowledge. A reflexive stance on positionality should carry through as a sincere element of the study and not a simplistic 'ready to wear' statement. The perspective on positionality developed below emerged initially from participation in a series of online workshops on ensuring quality in PhD studies, held during Rhodes University's Education Faculty 'PhD Week' from 20 to 24 July 2020 and facilitated by Drs Kirstin Wilmot and Roxana Chiappa and Professors Heila Lotz-Sisitka and Sioux McKenna.

For the researcher to carefully consider their positionality deepens the nuance of the work and offers credibility (Berkovic et al., 2020, 1). Hyland notes (2002, 1091) that academic writing is about "representation of self" as much as about "conveying ... ideational content." "Academic prose is not completely impersonal [and] writers gain credibility by projecting an identity [that displays] commitment to their ideas," as well as by demonstrating an awareness of the "connotations of authority" implicit in a doctoral study (Hyland 2002, 1110). Reflexivity on positionality shows

personal investment in ensuring the quality of the work and is most vital in relation to areas that are potentially contentious. In the post-apartheid museum context issues of identity, authority and representation are prominent and charged with historical tension, and the researcher's positionality thus constitutes an important ethical issue for museology. This is the reason that positionality is emphasized here and explored in some detail, as well as for the fact that it potentially initiates dialectical approaches to such tensions, particularly if it is undertaken with the support of a philosophical underlabourer such as dialectical critical realism.

To write a PhD is to open new knowledge spaces. It asks that the researcher do more than tick the minimum requirement boxes, which is an inadequate form of practice that is encouraged by, for instance, quantitative management practice frames such as are experienced in museums (as is discussed in Article 2, Jeffery 2021a, 58). Greene (2014), considers that positionality can be understood in terms of the researcher asking, 'Who am I?' in relation to the object of study. The researcher looks at the aspects of self or identity which are aligned or shared with the study (Chavez 2008, 475). Greene (2014, 6) emphasizes that, "It is certainly important, and not only from an ethical standpoint, that the researcher be as forthcoming about their own identity as is necessarily relevant to the research". Factors such as gender, race, nationality, career status, disability status, linguistic ability, mother tongue, etc., affect access to information and intervene in what is "seen, unseen, and unforeseen" (Milner 2007, 388) by the researcher in their study.

Positionality affects the way that we read interview data, the way we read the literature, the way we see or don't see potential connections or contradictions, the way we understand our profession and its mode of practice, the way we understand and represent what needs to happen in our field of practice to improve it, and the way we interpret the validity of the means we have selected or developed (philosophies, critical positions, theories and methodologies) through which to bring about the change that we feel is needed. To think through these issues of positionality means that they are less likely to become a risk factor for the work.

Confirmation bias is a challenge in the development of positionality, through which a researcher may "selectively seek evidence that is consistent with their prior beliefs and expectations" (Hernandez & Preston 2013, 178). Confirmation bias is stronger when one's cognitive ability is under stress, the experience of "cognitive load" (Hernandez & Preston 2013, 180). When one is engaged in a project that is cognitively demanding, such as a PhD, it is important to remain aware of the potential for such bias. The use of Change Laboratories and their collaborative, inclusive and historically aware methodology is a potential means to counter personal bias in the development of critical perspectives and expansive methods, as is discussed in section 4.6. below.

Self-censorship is “the act of preventing oneself from speaking” (Das & Kramer 2013, 120), particularly in relation to beliefs about when and why speaking is perceived as risky or inappropriate (Detert & Edmondson 2011). “Perceived audience” lies at the heart of this issue (Das & Kramer 2013, 120), while reluctance to speak may be “attributed to ... concerns about personal consequences [and] undesired outcomes, such as harm to one’s reputation or image, reduced self-esteem or emotional well-being, or negative work evaluations and reduced opportunities for promotion” (Detert & Edmondson 2011, 461). Fear at the sub-individual or individual-level may be focused on the potential for negative consequences to emerge from the researcher’s critical perspective, and self-censorship thus speaks to a need to belong and a desire to avoid conflict. Such apprehension may be experienced when a researcher challenges established positions in their field. As my work has developed it has become focused on challenging the deeply ingrained conventions and norms of museum practice. Such critique of the fundamental tenets of museology may meet with aggressive responses depending on the interlocutor’s own emotional and critical positionality and their own reflexivity thereon, and it is this kind of expectation or foresight that is potentially generative of self-censorship.

Personal positionality is thus non-neutral, much as the institutional positionality of museum work is non-neutral (Duggan 2011; Jeffery 2017, 22; Wray 2019, 320), and knowledge itself is non-neutral (see, for instance, de Sousa Santos 2018 on the “cognitive empire”). It is necessary to make explicit our potential biases to ourselves as researchers, to our potential research subjects, and to the readers/consumers of our research.

It is also necessary to be aware of the potential for emergence of ideological and institutional biases from overlying levels, positionalities with which we as researchers may have to contend. Ramos (2015) is insightful on positioning research in decolonial thought and offers an excellent example of reflection on positionality.

Defining positionality is not an essentially negative process of identifying limitations, but a reflexive process of identifying opportunities for expansive learning and growth of the “human instrument” of research (Knapp 2016, 15). Critical reflection on positionality adds to the credibility with which a researcher may live up to the values that inspire their work and move towards the goals that emerge in their work, and adds to the credibility of their contribution to knowledge. I hope that the reflexivity on positionality undertaken here will enhance the credibility of the eco-decolonial mode of museology that is this study’s core contribution to knowledge, and thus enhance its capacity to expand philosophy, theory and practice in ways that generate emancipatory potentials.

### **1.9.2. Insider and outsider positionalities**

Insider research can be defined as “the study of one’s own social group or society,” and the insider can be understood as someone who “possesses *a priori* intimate knowledge of the community and its members” (Greene 2014, 2). This contrasts with outsider research, conducted by someone without such a position or such knowledge.

My positionality demonstrates overlap between the concepts of insider and outsider positionalities. In my study of South African museology I am an insider in the sense that I work in a South African museum. I do possess *a priori* intimate knowledge of the community and its members through my status as an active member of that community.

While I am insider at the meso- and micro-levels of practice by museum workers, I am an outsider at the macro-level of neoliberal ideology, policy and governance. Within the South African decolonial practice context, there is also an extent to which I am an outsider as a white male in an environment that is focused on heritage that was marginalized during colonialism and apartheid. I hope that my commitment to the development of eco-decolonial philosophy, theory and practice for South African museum work does simultaneously add to my status as an insider.

The relational perspective that I value in my work leans towards the idea that “the role of the researcher can be conceptualized on a continuum rather than as an either/or dichotomy” (Greene 2014, 2). Chavez (2008, 474) similarly considers the insider-outsider opposition a “false dichotomy” and prefers a relational perspective that emphasizes that qualitative researchers may express “various identities or positionalities.” I have identified elements of both insider and outsider positionalities in myself, and my reflexive stance considers that this characteristic is not dualist but both supports and emerges from the “continuum” perspective, which is equally a dialectical perspective. This relational perspective on positionality seems more likely to have positive effects in the development of the relational eco-decolonial mode of museology.

### **1.9.3. A dialectical critical realist perspective on positionality**

DCR conceives the concrete universal as a general category that is differentiated into the concrete singular (Bhaskar 2008a, 95). Price (2016, 27-28) elaborates:

‘Women’ is called a concrete universal ... an ontological category. ... However, although all women will have characteristics that allow them to be placed in this universal category, so each woman will be entirely individual, due to the unique mediations of her life (her birth-place, her race, religion, age, life history). Therefore every woman is both a concrete

singular, and is part of the concrete universal [women]. The concrete universal is emergent from the concrete singular.

Similarly, 'researchers' is a concrete universal, within which "unique mediations" configure a concrete singular researcher, some of which I will discuss below in relation to my own critical-personal positionality. A concrete singular may thus have a "multiplicity of aspects" (Bhaskar 2008a, 119) which construct the individual researcher's unique positionality insofar as the concrete singularity represents the location of our "real interests" in the sense of what is valuable to us, symbolically, physically, or otherwise (Bhaskar 2008a, 143).

Ultimately Bhaskar theorizes the concrete singularity as "the key to the realm of freedom," insofar as the freedom of the concrete singularity (the individual), if guaranteed in society, is the path to general emancipation (2008a, 121). There is thus a meaningful extent to which critical self-knowledge of the concrete singularity through reflexivity on positionality is a foundation of emancipation, as it can reveal to us our own prejudices as well as our needs.

The emancipation of the concrete singular is a motivating factor in the eco-decolonial focus on situated narratives. The eco-decolonial shifts the museological focus away from the archive, away from the purely historical and towards the present and future and the (nevertheless historicized) experience of the real (Jeffery 2021b, 17), but it potentially facilitates the self-realization of the concrete singular through the provision of a path to agency and transformation through the transformed social structure of the museum.

It must however be remembered in eco-decolonial practice that, "applied explanations of concrete singulars ... are a [messy] affair likely to be (multiply) explained by elements at the same and lower-order levels in addition to higher-order (deeper) ones" (Bhaskar 2008a, 124). People are complex, their positionalities are layered and the layers are relational and emergent. People may thus be understood and approached as open systems, which is an equally vital understanding for a reflexive stance on personal positionality. People, both researchers and those with whom they interact, are thus stratified in that they interact with each other and with social structures at various levels in various ways, and are thus also emergent. In every action and interaction, furthermore, "Whether you like it or not you will be engaged in a process of social change. Either repetition and reproduction or transformation and change" (Price 2007, 113), which reflects a choice regarding agency as well as the structural conditions that effect that choice.

It is interesting to consider, as an aside here though potentially to be developed in future work, that what may be considered the psychoses of fundamentalism, for instance the recourse to extreme violence in the face of threats to belief systems in which people are emotionally invested at

fundamental levels, may stem from trauma experienced in response to this innately emergent, and thus ontologically fluid, nature of human being, that is, a fundamental resistance to the absence of certainty. The potential for ontological fluidity to be experienced as trauma has potential repercussions in relation to the transcendental potentials discussed below, and will be borne in mind in preparations for future Change Laboratory work, also elaborated below.

#### ***1.9.4. Reflexivity on personal positionality***

This section will employ personal reflexivity on some aspects of my 'PhD researcher' concrete singularity. I am a white male South African. I was born in Scotland to a South African father and Scottish mother who in 1981 brought me, aged 7, and my two younger brothers to live in South Africa, at arguably the start of the most volatile moment of the apartheid era as it entered its death throes. It is possible to write volumes on the impacts of spending my formative years in such an environment, but all I will say for now is that my nostalgia for my childhood is clouded with guilt and sadness in the retrospective knowledge of the appalling systemic conditions within which those pleasant memories were formed. I believe that nobody, of any ethnicity, who grew up in apartheid South Africa can have escaped psychologically unscathed.

I am not religious in a conventional sense. I don't believe in any capital-letter 'God'. I do believe there are depths to the universe that we cannot perceive, and meanings that are unavailable to us and yet no less meaningful in the very search for them. I believe there are deep connections between living things that I see in unspoken understandings between friends and unspoken communication with animals. I increasingly sense the value of spirituality and increasingly sense that the strict rationalist perspective I used to value – that of which Richard Dawkins is perhaps the prime spokesperson – is too bleak to be meaningful to me in any fulfilling way. I can also now appreciate the irony in my lifelong enjoyment of speculative fiction, science-fiction and supernatural fiction, which now speaks to me of an underlying belief, or perhaps need to believe, that there is more to the world than can meet any eye. Dialectical critical realism's concept of metaReality offers a means to legitimately include a spiritual element in academic work (see, for instance, Price 2016b), and this is another reason that I have come to feel that dialectical critical realism is a philosophy with capacity to guide both academic and personal life. This is also why I value the transcendental potentials of DCR that are discussed below.

The 'messiness' of the concrete singularity can be seen in the way that my academic positionality is emergent from sub-individual and individual perspectives and feelings: empathy for living things, and fear for the future of myself, my family and fellow humans-in-nature, potentially on a devastated planet, and anger directed at the greedy and selfish people and institutions that control

the restrictive governing systems I see as responsible for this Capitalocene condition. My positionality is also constituted by my meso- or practice-level responses to perceived restrictions on the potential for emancipatory social-ecological research and practice in museums in general, and restrictions on the expression of my personal social-ecological values in the workplace. The desire to express and mobilize these values is motivated by a personal desire to make a meaningful contribution to the mitigation of the global social-ecological crisis, or at a more mercenary and functional level, to publish articles and to finish my PhD.

The Environmental Learning Research Centre (ELRC) at Rhodes University, where I am a PhD candidate, is a safe, supportive and understanding space that offers and encourages empathy, kindness and care. I have experienced this at a personal level during such difficult experiences as coping with my wife's cancer diagnosis in early 2019, thankfully in remission since early 2020 after two surgeries. This ethos of care, which has also been prominent in the ongoing Covid-19 crisis, is one that I now feel to be important to academic work. I used to feel such work should be impersonal and distant, which is reflective of my previous adherence to a positionality of empirical rationalism and realism which is the subject of further critique in section 4.3.2. below. The idea and the practice of being a concrete universal 'researcher' may be oppressive if it is not situated within such a logic of care for its constituent concrete singulars (see, for instance, Price 2016a, 27), which is significant to research work because it recognizes that it is important to consider that personal positionality is inevitably tied to critical positionality.

I used to value the environment over people, a misanthropic positionality, but through time and reading I have come to feel that neither ecological nor decolonial issues can be effectively treated separately. This is the personal position that underpins my study's focus on the development of an eco-decolonial mode of museology. I am personally, emotionally and practically invested in generating relational perspectives on ecological and decolonial work. I believe the ecological and the decolonial to be deeply entangled perspectives, and that relationality in approaches to them is vital to the success of any intention to mitigate the most critical crises of our time, which are neither social nor ecological but inevitably social-ecological.

#### ***1.9.5. Reflexivity on the perception of the need for the work***

My experience in the field has led me to believe that South African museums' great potential is not and cannot be fully realized within present systems of governance or through the present condition of museological philosophy and theory. The same absence of relationality this study identifies in the South African museological context causes the emergence of equally significant challenges in the international sphere.

My initial sense of the need for this study grew from my work as a member of the committee and then as Chair of the Eastern Cape branch of the South African Museums Association (SAMA EC), and because I was Chair of a regional branch, as a member of the national SAMA committee. Participating in SAMA's annual regional and national conferences at an organizational level and reading every issue of the *South African Museums Association Bulletin* (SAMAB) demonstrated to me that ecological issues are not at all on the agenda of cultural museums, despite the effects they are certain to have on the same social issues that *are* the focus of that agenda. (Article 1, Jeffery 2017, formally outlines this initial perception and context.)

There is also very little cross-disciplinary interaction between cultural museum people and museum scientists, who tend to attend conferences related to their scientific fields rather than the general SAMA conferences. Discussions with museum scientists suggested that the SAMA conferences are perceived as cultural museum conferences, and in practice this is effectively true, as the conference programmes of recent years demonstrate. The 2015 and 2016 conferences, for instance, both had themes with broad potential for the treatment of social as well as ecological issues: "Museums and Sustainability" in 2015 and "Museums and Cultural Landscapes" in 2016. At the 2015 conference, however, only two papers made any mention of environmental sustainability, and in 2016 the only mention of ecological impacts on culture and society was in the reading of the ICOM-SA *Declaration on Museums and Cultural Landscapes* (ICOM-SA 2016). No papers considered the potential impacts on society or on the work of museums in society of, for instance, the greenhouse effect or climate change, the effects of which are predicted to be severe in South Africa, as discussed in the first Article (Jeffery 2017, 19-21; also see, for instance, Masipa 2017 on the impact of climate change on food security in South Africa; and Chersich et al., 2019 on the potential for climate change to exacerbate the already high rates of violence in South Africa).

My understanding of the nature of the social-ecological crisis, and that potential solutions have to work from a relational perspective on people and the environment, led me to feel that there was an urgent need for work that emphasized and developed perspectives that focus museum work on the entanglement of society and ecology (Anderies, Janssen & Ostrom 2004, 2; Walker et al., 2004, 1). The eco-decolonial mode of museology envisioned in this study is intended to bridge dualism, and the social-ecological relationality imagined here includes the development of interdisciplinary communication and practice between the two types of dualist museum at the professional level, that is, between workers in cultural and science museums. The Literature, Heritage, Ecology Conference discussed in Article 4 (Jeffery 2021c, 16) and below is being developed with this intention, and such relationality may also emerge as an element of the interstitial activism elaborated as a transformative pathway in Article 3 (Jeffery 2021b, 13).

### ***1.9.6. Emergence of activities from personal positionality and perception of need***

During my tenure as Chair of SAMA EC and organizer of its annual regional conferences, and as Chair of the organizing committee of the 2018 edition of the national SAMA conference, I drove the active development of themes and programmes with the specific goal of bridging the divide between cultural and scientific museologists as a means to develop a more relational mode of practice. Prominent scientists were invited to present keynote addresses: archaeologist Dr Janette Deacon at the 2017 Eastern Cape regional SAMA conference, whose paper was titled 'Evidence for Climate Change and Modern Human Origins in the Eastern and Southern Cape,' and palaeontologist Dr Robert Gess at the 2018 national SAMA conference, whose paper was titled 'Africa's Earliest Four-Legged Animals by 80 Million Years, the World's Only Known High-latitude Devonian Tetrapods: Communicating an Exciting Discovery in the Contemporary Communications Environment.' Dr Gess's paper emphasized the importance of finding ways to communicate scientific discoveries to non-scientist audiences.

In my work as curator of exhibitions at Amazwi South African Museum of Literature (henceforth Amazwi), I made efforts to bridge the divisions between museology and other disciplines. In 2019 I curated the 'Humanature' exhibition as part of this PhD project. This exhibition was specifically curated to disrupt dualism, as is discussed in detail in Article 4 as an example of dialectical critical realism in action (Jeffery 2021c). As part of the 'Humanature' project, Amazwi took on the organization of an annual 'Literature and Ecology' colloquium that was then in its 15<sup>th</sup> year and in need of a new organizer as Professor Dan Wylie, its founder, was retiring. While the focus of the 2019 event remained largely on ecocritical literature and criticism, efforts were made to draw in perspectives from disciplines outside literary studies. An example is Duncan Haynes paper, 'Indigenous well-being in urban gardens. Human nature relationships, spiritual belief and biodiversity: Using biocultural diversity to understand urban place-making among amaXhosa in South Africa'. An 'Educators' session' exploring water scarcity emerged from a collaboration between the Colloquium and the 'Sustainability Starts With Teachers' initiative, a regional flagship programme of the UNESCO Global Action Programme on Education for Sustainable Development.

The 2020 event was delayed until 2021 due to the Covid-19 pandemic. In 2021 the Literature and Ecology Colloquium was expanded to become a Literature, Heritage and Ecology Conference in order to encourage interdisciplinary perspectives and emphasize collaboration and accessibility across disciplines. Held from 1 to 5 March 2021 as a virtual event, the aim of this conference was to foster cooperation and interaction between the humanities and the sciences and between different perspectives on social-ecological issues in order to generate pathways towards relational approaches. Examples of papers that contributed to this include Maneo Ralebitso's 'Decolonizing

Basotho's preference of genetically modified plants over indigenous plants: Selected examples from Makhoarane cultural landscape' and Francois Nortje's 'Heritage and ecology: The (future) place of plants in the physical environment: An architectural and urban perspective.' This intention will continue to inform future iterations of the conference as well as the development of a Literature, Heritage, Ecology Communication Network, which is conceptual at time of writing but will emerge initially from the contact list that has been built over the 2019 and 2021 events. Recordings of the sessions of the 2021 Literature, Heritage, Ecology Conference may be viewed on the YouTube channel [Amazwi Museum](#).

These are examples of the kind of practical disruption of dualism that a personal sense of the need for relational modes of practice might bring about, and while the impact of each activity is perhaps relatively ephemeral, they are examples of contributions to the iterative development of social-ecological relationality that is envisioned and described in this study.

Perhaps more important, however, is the philosophical frame in which they are carried out, motivated by the *idea* of bridging dualist practice and disciplinary divisions. These are examples of how my personal positionality, my personal belief in the need for such actions, brought about activities that run counter to the dualist structure, in the mode of interstitial activism discussed in the third and fourth articles (Jeffery 2021b and 2021c). This is activism from within the ontological formation so that it may be "opened up" from the inside, and which should be seen "not as an attack on these public institutions for their duplicitous value systems, but as acts of love for what they could be" (Mahony 2017, 132).

#### **1.9.7. Reflexivity on positionality in the work place and museum sector**

This study surfaces a tension between museum workers' and institutional positionalities (Jeffery 2021a, 60). My work on this study has helped me to understand my experience of this tension, the tension I feel between what I understand to be my progressive individual-level social-ecological positionality and the neoliberal ideology that frames the practice of the institution within which I work (similar to the tension Ramos (2015) notes around decolonial work in Eurocentric institutions). This tension has negative impacts on my individual-level senses of agency and value, and is at the root of a desire that surfaces regularly to change jobs, or to find other means of supporting myself and my family. That is, I experience a desire to leave the museum sector in which I lose sight of a meaningful future for myself, because of the operation of the forces and conditions that are elaborated in this study.

The formal description of the inadequacy of a macro-level economic perspective on meso-level transformative and emancipatory potentials that is outlined in this study thus emerges from my

personal experience of this inadequacy. Equally, my understanding of my situation and my ability to articulate it developed and emerged through the research for this study.

A structural logic of care is vital to the emancipatory potential, and the potential for emancipation, of the concrete singular. My work in this study has led me to understand that this is a logic that is absent from museum practice, because it is absent from the ideology that governs museum practice and that determines its character. The idea that museums should be agents for emancipatory transformation of peoples' lives, which is a principle that underpins the eco-decolonial mode, should apply equally to the people who work in the museums as it does to the museums' audiences. People who do not feel valued and who do not have agency cannot impart value and agency.

The eco-decolonial perspective is a philosophical and theoretical foundation from which museum practitioners, myself included, may talk back to the contradictions of the overlying levels, interrogate the paradox of neoliberal ideology as the driver for the emancipatory potentials of the museum as a social structure, and disrupt practice constraints. The work I am doing here is as much for my own emancipation as that of others, an instance of what Bhaskar (2008a) refers to as the "pulse of freedom".

My career status is perhaps less developed than it might be for my age, 46. I am an exhibition curator, working at middle-management level. Besides the circumstances outlined above, I feel there are two factors that play a role here. Firstly, it is perhaps to be expected that a white male in the post-apartheid South African museum sector may have a hard time finding a management position in a museum sector focused on black empowerment and employment equity. I have no complaints about this because I am aware of the historical context of injustice. I have a feeling, however, that we are all potentially trapped in a loop of injustice and counter-injustice, which I mention out of a sense of sadness at the seeming inevitability of a cycle of power<sub>1</sub> / power<sub>2</sub> conditions (Bhaskar 2008a, 55) in which someone will always lack agency. This must also be considered and balanced in relation to the parallel continuum of widespread poverty and the continuous rather than cyclical absence of agency for the poor.

The second contributing factor is that I have a fear of becoming a higher-level manager mired in administrative duties, trapped in the neoliberal systems of governance that this study surfaces and critiques, entangled in the restrictions I want to resist. I love creative work, researching and writing and developing exhibitions, and I have perhaps avoided applying for upper management positions out of a fear of losing a focus on creativity. This fear, as I reflect on it here, is perhaps irrational, as upper management is the level at which decisions around programme directions are made and at which there is greater potential to influence policy and practice. I still, however, have a

deep desire to write, research and make photographs and exhibitions rather than to fill in spreadsheets. The right job, or self-employment, will perhaps offer the chance to do all of these things to their greatest emancipatory effect, both for me personally and for the people with whom I come in contact in the course of my work. The journey continues.

While this may seem obvious given the nature of this study, a recent realization is that I see myself now primarily as a museologist, a philosopher and theorist of museum practice, and that my practice follows from this. That is, as I have worked through this study my creative, practical work has become ever more deeply rooted in philosophy and theory, and this has resulted in a greater clarity of purpose. I now understand philosophy and theory as creative and imaginative activities because to develop the eco-decolonial mode of museology required creative and innovative thinking about complex problems. This is the change in perspective that I hope to generate in South African museum practice in which, as is explored in Article 2, there is a potential, even a need, for deeper engagement with philosophy and theory.

#### ***1.9.8. Reflexivity on critical positionalality***

I work in a cultural museum, a museum of literature, and this is therefore the context from which this study emerges. It is necessary, given the continued, powerful presence of historical structural inequalities, to recognize my status as a white male in a field focused on redress. My critique of decolonization, or more specifically of the practical implementation of its theory, is intended to bolster and contribute to its development and success, and to simultaneously contribute to the mitigation of ecological crises. This will happen through the development of the relational eco-decolonial perspective with its entangled ecological and decolonial emphases. As I stated in the preface, my position is that without urgent work to develop the relational social-ecological perspectives that are absent from South African museology, museums cannot achieve the goals of transformation and the creation of better lives. It is also my position that the creation of better lives must be a principle applied across the systems in which humanity-in-nature is embedded. I adopt these critical positions from a desire to help repair historical damage, and to help disrupt the systems that perpetuate social-ecological injustice and inequality.

My critical positionalality has evolved as my project progressed. My initial position, when I started the PhD work in 2016, was a somewhat vague 'champion of ecology' stance focused on getting cultural museums to see what I understood to be the significance of ecological issues to their socially-oriented work. As my study developed and I read more and thought more deeply, and interacted with people across various disciplines, my ideas became more nuanced. Now, at the end of my PhD project, a general sense of ecological urgency has developed into a focus on neoliberal

constraints on emancipatory social-ecological potentials in museum practice, and on potential means to resolve those constraints. Rather than a relatively simplistic notion of bringing what I saw as necessary changes to practice, the study is now focused on surfacing deep causal mechanisms for the problems that are identified in my work, and on developing detailed, practical and deep means to adapt systems of museum practice in South Africa and internationally to the nexus of social-ecological crises and the systems of neoliberal governance that generate and perpetuate them.

The evolution of critical positionality as the study progressed can be seen through reflexivity on the evolution of the critical treatment of the dualist division between cultural museums and science or natural history museums. Article 1 (Jeffery 2017) focused on South African cultural museums, because of the perception of a complete absence of climate change from their public programmes. At that point, the critical realist position on relationality that evolved over the course of the project had not yet begun to influence the work and the article considered that South African cultural museums lagged the country's science museums in treating the social impacts of climate change (Jeffery 2017, 19). The treatment of climate change as a consequence of the deep causal mechanism of the greenhouse effect, as discussed below, had also not begun to influence the study at this point.

By the time of writing Article 2 (2021a) the critical realist perspective had become central to the study, and it was clear that the expansion of the focus of the work to include national and international museology and museums required a change in the approach of the analysis. To focus on cultural museums is to replicate the dualism the study challenges. The focus has to be on the museum as a social structure, without distinction between the types of museum, as those types emerge from the problem the study seeks to resolve. The study is thus grounded in an understanding of the limitations that dualism places on museums as social structures, and its goal of development of a relational eco-decolonial mode of museology encompasses the goal of the development of relationality between the types of museum.

### ***1.9.9. Value positionality of the study***

It is important to clearly articulate the value position from which this work is conducted. This is a position which Rosenberg (2020a, 203) captures succinctly: a commitment to education and human development, environmental protection and just social transitions towards a sustainable future for all life on Earth. This is the value position from which I hope that this study will contribute to museological philosophy, theory and practice. This study agrees with Rosenberg's position (2020a, 203) that such a value position is necessary, "if research is going to make a contribution to the issues emerging in the Anthropocene," although the analysis here reframes such issues as emergent in the

Capitalocene (Moore 2017) and sees capitalogenic forces as the primary generative mechanisms of social-ecological crisis.

The capitalogenic perspective emphasizes a hierarchical and uneven north-south geographic distribution of responsibility (see, for instance, Nixon 2011) rather than assigning responsibility for social-ecological crisis to a homogenous humanity in a way that does not take into account the truths of global inequality and the uneven distribution of agency, and the uneven distribution of the suffering consequent to social-ecological injustice. The Capitalocene model is thus more readily aligned with decolonial as well as ecological values and has capacity to generate deeper and more nuanced relational perspectives.

Rosenberg (2020a, 203), following Lotz-Sisitka and Price (2016, 1), emphasizes that if we are to find ways to solve the deep social-ecological challenges of our time, then the idea of 'our' has to expand to include all "planetary subjects," an entangled focus on humans and non-humans or as this study phrases it, humanity-in-nature. The DCR perspective on the urgent need to "ensure the flourishing of all current and future generations" (Lotz-Sisitka & Price 2016, 1) can be connected to Cameron's (2015b, 18) post-humanist museological vision which demands the extension of participation in "civic life" to the more-than-human.

This social-ecological logic of relationality and care is the philosophical basis for this study, and the positionality from which it imagines new theories and practices for museums. This thesis uses DCR to support the relational expansion of museological theory and practice for greater social-ecological agency and agentic capacity. This work is grounded in the value position that the development of relationality between emergent decolonial and ecological critical museological positionalities is crucial for museums if they are to survive as meaningful and relevant social structures in this time of social-ecological crisis.

From the stratified DCR perspective that is elaborated below, at the sub-individual and individual levels the inspiration for my work emerges from my belief in the value and vitality of the development of such relationality. This is tied in to my empathy and my feeling of a duty of care for living things. This is a duty because the greatest threat to the world in which we live with other beings as humanity-in-nature is the destruction of ecosystems through my own species' capitalism and consumerism, as per the Capitalocene perspective discussed in this study. These are the values, the ethos, that I hope carries into my work.

### **1.10. The aims of the work**

- To develop a relational, social-ecological form of South African museology, conceived as the eco-decolonial mode. This will draw on emergent, progressive international perspectives, and in turn contribute to those perspectives, so as to contribute to social-ecological justice at the macro and mega levels.
- To thus locate South African museology in the global context.
- To develop a philosophy and theory for a relational museum practice suited to decolonization in a time of social-ecological crisis. That is, the development of the eco-decolonial mode of museology, so as to enable museum practice to become more emancipatory.

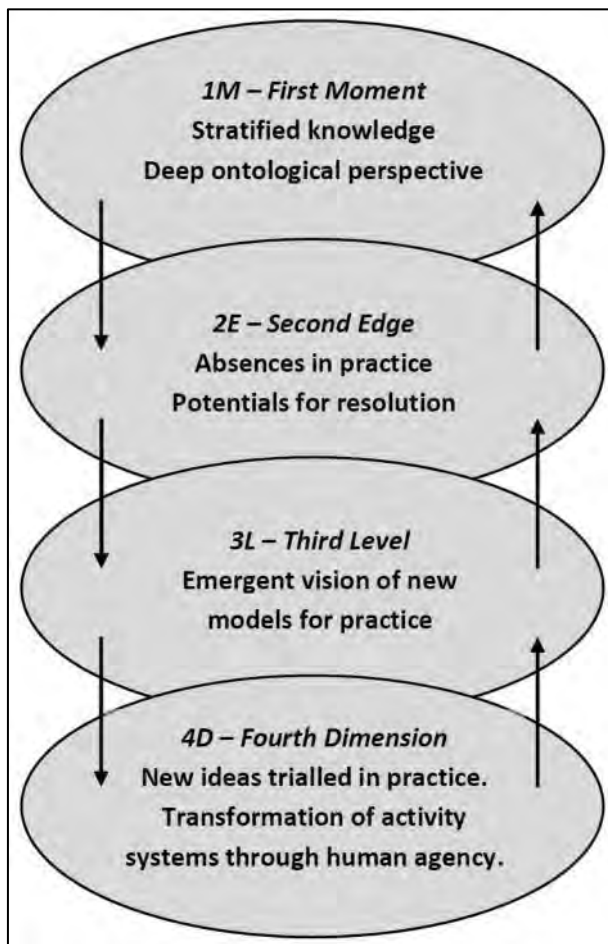
### **1.11. Research questions**

1. Persistent museological dualism restricts the emancipatory impacts of museology. What are the deep, structural causal mechanisms of museological dualism?
2. How can those mechanisms, and thus dualism, be disrupted in order to progress towards a mode of museology suited to contemporary contexts and needs?
3. What philosophical and theoretical developments are possible to better enable South African and international museology to achieve the demands of transformation in a time of social-ecological crisis?

## 2. METHODOLOGY

### 2.1. The dialectical critical realist onto-axiological chain

*Museums for the Planet* is an ontological and theoretical exploration of existing museum practice to surface potentials for its expansion. It does this using the dialectical critical realist onto-axiological chain of being and becoming, the “critical realist dialectic that engages absence and emergence ... which are interrelated projects in decolonizing and transforming societies” (Lotz-Sisitka, Rosenberg & Ramsarup 2020, 12). The movement along the chain is movement towards an emancipatory, eco-decolonial mode of museological philosophy, theory and practice. The argument that runs through the four articles that are the backbone of this thesis by publication is structured by this chain. The ‘Ladder Plan’ in Appendix 1 gives an overview of the four papers and their development of the argument.



**Figure 1. Overview of the 'MELD' schema**

The onto-axiological chain is described using the 'MELD' schema. 'MELD' is “a robust schema for investigating ... research contexts concerned with societal transformation,” and a means through which normalized practice can be expanded reflexively (Hartwig 2008, xiii; Lotz-Sisitka 2016, 318; Schudel 2017, 163). It is a dialectical process that potentially removes constraints on transformation towards social-ecological justice (Bhaskar 2008a, 38; Lotz-Sisitka 2016, 324; Mukute 2016, 196; Schudel 2017, 174, 179). 'MELD' stands for first Moment (1M), second Edge (2E), third Level (3L) and fourth Dimension (4D) (Hartwig 2008, xiii). Figure 1 (left) gives an overview of the schema, and the bidirectional arrows indicate its relational nature.

1M explores “the intrication of a multiplicity of explanatory mechanisms” that delineate the activities of social structures and agents (Bhaskar 2010, 6; Fletcher 2017, 181). 1M is focused on surfacing the mechanisms that drive the phenomenon that is being studied, in this case the perpetuation of museological dualism. The 1M analysis below surfaces the deep causal position of

capitalism and neoliberalism and the ways these constrain potential for the emergence of emancipatory social-ecological forms of museum practice.

Figure 2 (page 31) gives an overview of the laminated 1M generative complex of dualist museology that emerges in Article 1 (Jeffery 2017) and Article 2 (Jeffery 2021a). An initial exploration of the policy and practice context of dualist museology surfaces a dialectic of society and ecology (Jeffery 2017), an analysis which is then developed into a deep ontological perspective on museology (Jeffery 2021a).

2E absences are introduced towards the end of Article 2 (Jeffery 2021a, 61), and are further developed in Article 3 (Jeffery 2021b, 9-12). 2E is “the point of transition or becoming” (Hartwig 2008: xiii), concerned with identifying absences (tensions, social ills, untruths, injustices, constraints) in practice made visible by the 1M analysis. DCR conceptualizes change in terms of absence, as absence is ontologically prior to presence, which implies that the potential for emancipatory change lies within absences, and that agency can thus be viewed as a reflexive, dialectical act of the absenting (negation) of absences (Bhaskar 2008a, 266). The absenting of absences is an emancipatory movement towards more adequate knowledge and the expansion of normalized practice (Bhaskar 2008a, 38; Lotz-Sisitka 2016, 324; Schudel 2017, 170). At 2E, the researcher elucidates the absences in practice that have been made visible at 1M, and imagines means through which these absences may be absented. Absenting of absences occurs through the resolution of tensions, and as such can be understood as an expansive process.

Expansive learning as a mode of change similarly emerges from tensions (Engeström & Sannino 2010, 4; Sannino, Engeström & Lemos 2016, 600). This connectivity between DCR and expansive learning is the focus of the concluding parts of this study, as it looks towards potentials for the use of expansive learning methods in future work on the development of the eco-decolonial mode of museology.

3L is about exploring possibilities in the newly understood context, the moment of a vision for the world in which social-ecological justice predominates (Schudel 2017, 179). 3L is the moment of totality, a vision of what was (the previous systems that the study is trying to improve) and what may be if the absences of the previous systems are absented (the eco-decolonial mode of museology). There is a danger of idealism here, which Bhaskar (2008a, 252) warns against as he notes that “the only plausible concept of a totality is that of a partial totality, rife with external as well as internal, and ... accidental as well as necessary connections, replete with gaps, discontinuities, voids.” DCR negation is a relational process and there is no clearly delineated movement through ‘MELD’ towards some perfect end point. The moments overlap and feed back

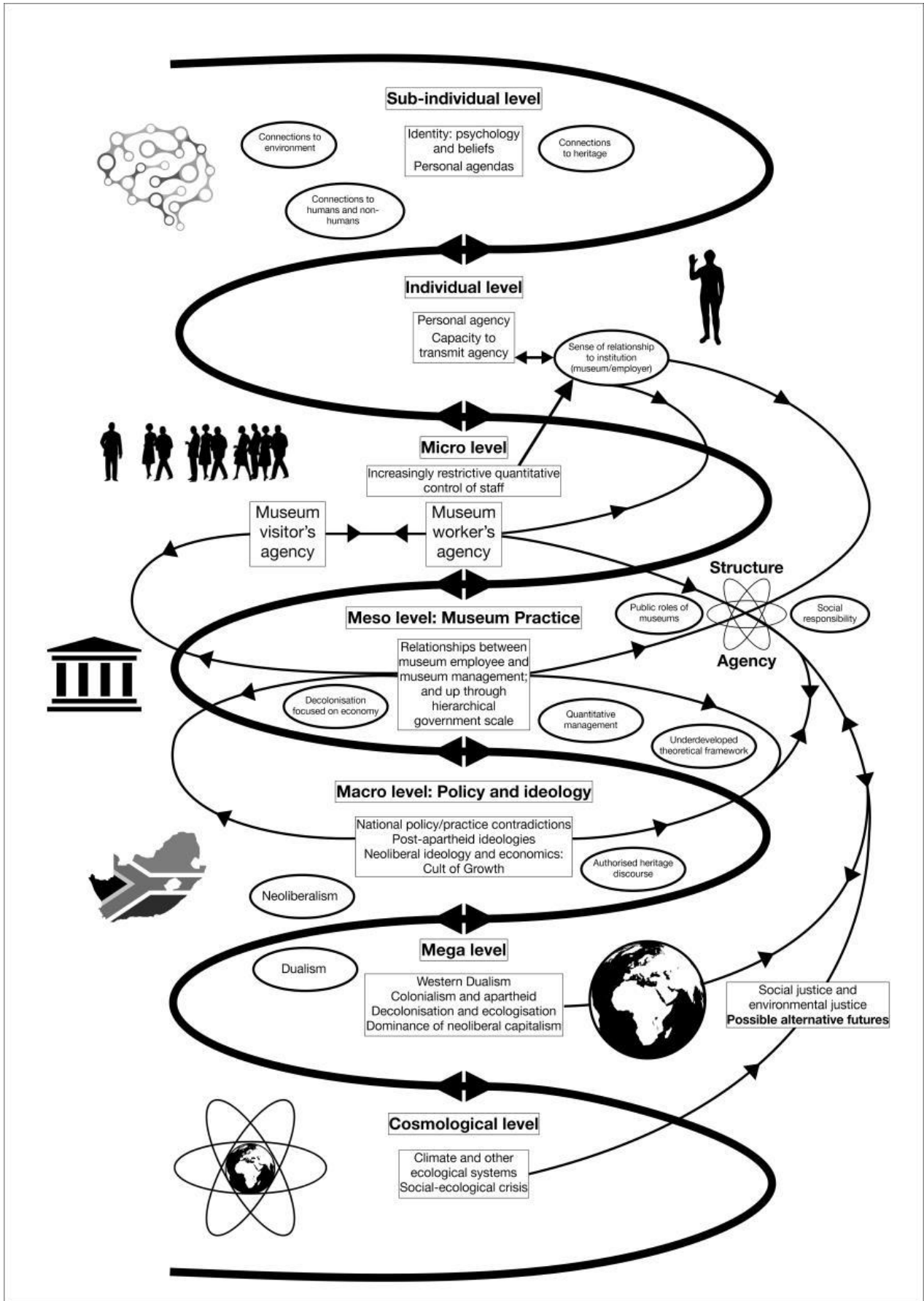


Figure 2. Overview of the laminated 1M generative complex of dualist museology

into one another, and any new vision will inevitably have absences of its own.

This is why the further development of the eco-decolonial mode in future work that will build on the deep foundations laid here will make use of expansive learning methodologies such as Change Laboratories which allow for the iterative, historically rooted and relational processes that are necessary (Engeström et al., 1996; Viela 2014). In this way the process of willing museum workers learning to work in the eco-decolonial mode is simultaneous with the workers' development of the eco-decolonial mode. Change and learning are entangled and reflexive processes.

3L is thus a "differentially charged nexus" (Bhaskar 2008a, 252), the "realm of emergence" which is "fluid and variable," (Bhaskar 2008a, 253) and which relates to the moment of fluidity in the concept of the museum identified above and in Article 3 (Jeffery 2021b, 3). This is a fluidity within which there is potential to "resolve the traditional problems of opposites" (Bhaskar 2008a, 253), such as the false dichotomy of human and nature, society and ecology, "a separation that so clearly does not exist" (Moore 2017, 598) and which yet informs museological dualism. This study moves towards the resolution of museological dualism, which is a problem of a false opposition of society and ecology.

4D is the moment of real change, as the new ideas are tried in practice and transformative human agency brings change to social structures, moving towards greater social-ecological justice through active resolution of ills (Bhaskar 2008a, 8; Mukute 2016, 196; Schudel 2017, 174). 4D is about "active and reflexive engagement within the world" (Bhaskar 2008a, 8). Bhaskar notes that the resolution of the "problem of opposites" may be achieved through the "key figure of constellationality" (2008a, 253), which offers a "hiatus" of duality (2008a, 259). A case study carried out in Article 4 (Jeffery 2021c, 9-16) is grounded in a constellational view of interdisciplinary theoretical perspectives with potential to inform the eco-decolonial mode of museology.

Interstitial activism becomes possible at 4D, particularly in the dialectical practice frame imagined at 3L. Museum workers may assume the activist agency to break down the resilience of an inherently unsustainable system (Lotz-Sisitka et al., 2015, 74) and become agents for real emancipatory change outside the neutralizing paradox of emancipatory neoliberalism. This exercise of agency is the focus of the case study, which explores an exhibition project carried out at Amazwi. The case study has a retrospective DCR focus on the exhibition's attempt to move towards social-ecological relationality in practice. This is an empirical and reflexive moment that retrospectively considers the development of the exhibition as an example of workers reclaiming the agency that has been lost to a practice grounded in an implicit neoliberal ontology. The analysis frames this as an empirical example of the potential for the practical application of the axiology of freedom.

The MELD analysis thus uses the DCR onto-axiological chain to approach the museological opposition of society and ecology in a dialectical manner, which enables the emergence of a relational eco-decolonial perspective. This emergence represents the fundamental shift envisioned for museum practice in this study: *an ontological shift from traditionalist human-nature dualism to a progressive human-nature dialectic of learning and change.*

## **2.2. The stratified dialectical critical realist view of reality**

The laminated or stratified dialectical critical realist perspective on reality was useful in developing the study's insights into the context of museological philosophy, theory and practice. The articles and the synthesis below have a particular reliance on 1M stratification as this is the moment that initially surfaces the deep causal mechanisms of museological dualism and potentials for their disruption. This deep ontological perspective is the key absence from emergent transformative perspectives on museology.

DCR initially conceives three levels of being, or "ontological domains": the real (that which exists independent of human experience), the actual (the moment at which human experience 'discovers' the real and interacts with it), and the empirical (cultural mediation of the real and the actual) (Bhaskar 2010, 2; Price 2016a, 18-19; Rosenberg 2020a, 197).

Higher [domains] of being are emergent from lower [domains]. ... [For] instance ... society [is] 'a real thing', emergent from the activities of people, but irreducible to the people who daily reproduce it, in the same way that climate is a 'real thing' that is emergent from the activities of the molecules of the atmosphere, but is not reducible to those molecules. We ... cannot fully explain [real] society by reducing it to the [actual] collective activities of empirical individual agents (Price 2016a, 19).

The epistemic fallacy is the reduction of the domain of the real to the domain of the actual, and the reduction of ontology to epistemology, which "functions merely to cover the generation of an implicit ontology" (Bhaskar 2008a, 4; Bhaskar 2010, 1). That is, a powerful epistemology may take on or be given an ontological position. To disambiguate ontological and epistemological questions is to identify instances of the epistemic fallacy (Bhaskar 2010, 2). The epistemic fallacy and the generation of an implicit ontology is vital to the perspective on neoliberalism and museum practice that is developed in this study. Neoliberalism uses an architecture of epistemic fallacies to position itself as an irreplaceable ontological perspective, an architecture through which it emerges as the implicit ontology of museology (Jeffery 2021a, 57, and overviewed at the mega-level below).

Neoliberalism, however, is merely the ideology of capitalism, however powerful that ideology may be, and it *is* possible to imagine alternatives to such dominant epistemologies, as de Sousa Santos explores (2008). The eco-decolonial mode is one such alternative.

DCR views the world as constituted by real, open systems characterized by stratification, or lamination, in which social structures and organizations operate over intersecting levels that interact in emergent ways (Bhaskar 1998, 8; Bhaskar 2010, 5; Lotz-Sisitka 2016, 320). The DCR perspective on ontological conditions at 1M is thus deepened using the stratified and retroductive “seven laminations of scale,” which offers understanding of “the intrication of a multiplicity of explanatory mechanisms” that delineate the activities of social structures and agents (Bhaskar 2010, 6; Fletcher 2017, 181).

DCR thus offers a historical perspective on how practice has changed over time to have the impacts and characteristics that it does today (O’Donoghue 2016, 170). Its focus on deep, generative, structural causes offers “a better explanatory grasp” of the research context (O’Donoghue 2016, 173). This is a reason for the cooperative and collaborative potentials that exist between DCR and the expansive learning methodologies of Cultural Historical Activity Theory (CHAT) (see, for instance, Mukute 2016 and Lotz-Sisitka 2016). CHAT can build on DCR’s deep, historical contextual perspective on tensions. As mentioned above, this is discussed further in the conclusion as it looks towards future work to develop the perspectives elaborated in this study.

The analysis at 1M in Article 2 (Jeffery 2021a) and in the synthesis below is structured by the seven laminations of scale (Bhaskar 2010, 9; Price 2016a, 26), as follows:

1. The planetary (or cosmological) level concerned with the planet (or cosmos) as a whole.
2. The mega-level of the analysis of whole traditions and civilizations and, it should be added, their interactions. For instance, the South African trajectory from pre-colonialism, to colonialism, to apartheid, to independence, and the interactions between national and international powers within that trajectory.
3. The macro-level, the level of policy and ideology, oriented to understanding the functioning of whole societies or their regions, for instance the South African economy and the nation’s heritage policy framework.
4. The meso-level, the level of practice, which concerns the relations between functional roles such as manager and employee.
5. The micro-level, the level of social interaction and of production of social order between individuals.

6. The individual or biographical level, which can be understood as the level of personal positionality and individual agency.
7. The sub-individual psychological level, the level of personal psychological agendas and a person's emotions.

This model enables a careful and structured approach to what is being revealed and helps researchers to avoid relativism through its perspective on the interconnected nature of the world (Rosenberg 2020a, 197). It elucidates the generative mechanisms from which most social phenomena in open systems emerge (Bhaskar 2010, 3, 11; Frank 2010, 102), phenomena such as museum practice and its relations to society and ecology. This perspective avoids the reductive, linear, cause and effect philosophy of dualism (Cameron 2015b, 29) and enables a deep understanding of emergence of phenomena through complex interactions (Bhaskar 2010, 8; Price 2016a, 19; Mukute 2016, 192). Such a deep, ontological and reflexive perspective is just what seems to be needed as the museum as a social structure struggles with the nature of its being.

It should be noted that generative mechanisms are not necessarily negative but are the constitutive forces, the “antecedent condition” or “causal chain” (Bhaskar 2008a, 371) of whatever phenomenon is being studied. In this case, however, the focus of the study is the generative mechanisms of restrictive dualist influences or constraints on museology that absent museums' agency and agentic capacity in response to the social-ecological crisis. Figure 2 (page 31) gives an overview of the 1M generative complex of restrictions on museum practice.

### **2.3. Interviews and the data analysis methodology**

The 1M analysis (Jeffery 2021a) is augmented through the input of key informants. The interviews were conducted with workers at national and provincial government-funded South African museums with at least five years' experience in exhibition or education programming, and who were selected for their potential insights into practice. 49 surveys were sent out and 15 were returned completed. Respondents were promised anonymity, and are referred to as Respondent 1, Respondent 2, etc. They answered a set of 13 open-ended questions that explore decolonial and ecological positionalities in museum practice. The interview schedule is included below as Appendix 2. Similar to Vollgraaff's research (2018, 384), though the respondents cannot be considered representative of the museum sector, the consistency of the responses is indicative of challenges that South African museums face, and responses were congruent with many of the conclusions that emerged from the literature review.

The survey data were analysed through abduction, induction and retroduction. Abduction refers to the recontextualization of existing knowledge (Togo 2016, 89). Each article drew on

themes, or codes, from the analysis conducted in the prior work. For instance, the initial exploration of policy and practice (Jeffery 2017) identified an absence of ecological issues from museum practice, generated by their absence from the policy framework, and a need to link ecological and decolonial concerns for meaningful transformation of museum practice. These constituted abductive codes for exploration of the survey data in Article 2 (Jeffery 2021a, 56-61).

Induction refers to the identification of new codes from the data at hand, “a process that ... helps us to [move] from a set of observations to a theory” (Sabai 2016, 182). In Article 2 (Jeffery 2021a), inductive analysis surfaced further codes as the survey data were analysed. For instance, a number of respondents noted the alienating influence of quantitative management practice, so it is possible to induce that quantitative management practice is generative of alienation. Such general premises may inform changes to practice (Sabai 2016, 183). Other induced codes were commodification of practice, a restrictive authorized heritage discourse, and the suppression of staff agency and interest in social-ecological issues (Jeffery 2021a, 56-59).

These abducted and induced categories suggested the need for a new way of analysing the emerging information that could offer a deep perspective on historical and structural causes. There was a need to bring the various experiences related in the survey data together with the information emerging from the first article and the ongoing literature review. A DCR laminated view (1M) became useful for doing this in a way that allowed coherence and relationality. See, for instance, Munnik (2016, 307) on the ‘constellational’ DCR perspective on open systems such as museum practice, and which also informed the constellational perspective on interdisciplinary theoretical perspectives developed at 3L and 4D. This deepened the interpretation and analysis of these abducted and induced codes and provided a tool to consolidate a depth ontology analysis through retroduction.

Retroduction is a form of logical inference which starts with an observation then seeks to find the simplest and most likely explanation. It operates through “inferential judgements from the analysis of indirect evidence” (Lotz-Sisitka & Price 2016, 6; Price 2016a, 29) and in the historical mode discussed above.

The survey responses generally expressed resistance to structural restrictions on practice, such as the authorized heritage discourse and quantitative management (Jeffery 2021a, 57-58). There was a clear sense of frustration with the slow pace of transformation, and with the limitations on agency that emerge from the neoliberal governance structures of museum practice, although none of the respondents actually drew out connections between museum governance methodologies and the neoliberal governance frame. This is again suggestive of the invisibility of such deep structural mechanisms, the invisibility that absents critical perspectives on neoliberalism

from emergent perspectives on social-ecological museology. Many survey respondents were critical of the managerial focus on economic performance, for instance, which this study identifies as emergent from the implicit neoliberal ontology of museology and which limits the processes of decolonization that governance structures claim to champion. The neoliberal practice frame may be 'obvious' in the TINA sense at the 'world' or mega- and macro-levels, but what has not been tracked in museology before is the ways in which neoliberal governance systems operate under the pretence of emancipatory values but are actually generative of and perpetuate the problems with which society is struggling, while simultaneously absencing relational perspective that may resolve those problems. This is the paradox of emancipatory neoliberalism that this study surfaces from the hidden ontological core of museology.

The interview responses had a clear focus on issues that relate to macro-level ideology and meso-level practice, which is to be anticipated as these are the levels at which the structural restrictions on practice emerge and are felt by the workers who responded to the surveys. This is why the survey responses begin to appear at the meso-level, relatively late in the 1M analysis in Article 2, and subsequently surface micro-, individual- and sub-individual-level perspectives on practice. Article 2 sets the 1M foundation for further progress through the onto-axiological chain, through 2E and towards 3L and 4D.

#### **2.4. Literature review**

This thesis draws on a thorough review of South African museological literature. In the international museological sphere, it draws on the work that is being done around decolonization and particularly focuses on the emergent critical strand exploring the ecologization of museum work (the work of Fiona Cameron and the book *Curating the Future* (Newell, Robin & Wehner 2017) are particularly significant here).

In the development of a relational, social-ecological perspective for the philosophy, theory and practice of museology this study draws on, among others, perspectives from dialectical critical realism, Education for Sustainable Development, environment and sustainability, climate change education, policy and governance, economic and humanities perspectives on capitalism and neoliberalism, cultural landscape, social and ecological justice and their entanglement, intergenerational knowledge, expansive learning, and perspectives on social-ecological activism and activism in museums. This broad range of standpoints is representative of the study's goal of developing interdisciplinary perspectives, which as Bhaskar notes (2010, 4) has gained new urgency as a catalyst for emergent social-ecological practices.

To thus disrupt “disciplinary purity” (Phillips 2019, 331) is particularly crucial for museums in their movement towards relational modes of practice that are better able to engage with entangled decolonial and ecological demands, and this is reflected in the constellational perspective on interdisciplinary eco-decolonial potentials developed in this study (Jeffery 2021c, 5-9).

## **2.5. Reflexivity on the use of the onto-axiological chain in the study**

The four articles are an iterative development of a DCR perspective on museology. The moments of the relational ‘MELD’ onto-axiological chain flow across the boundaries of the discrete publications. For instance, the perspective on absences identified in the course of the 1M analysis in Article 2 is crystallized in Article 3 (Jeffery 2021b, 9-12) as the article prepares the base for the 3L vision. One of the challenges of writing the four articles was to ensure that the articles built upon each other coherently through the chain, and that the introductory part of each clearly built upon the foundations from the previous work and developed the arguments through the dialectical sequence.

The iterative development and refinement of ideas reflects the need for a careful approach. This study introduces DCR into the museological context, and the demonstration of its value must be measured and thorough. Furthermore, some issues that are relevant to the study are potentially sensitive. The eco-decolonial critiques museology’s neoliberal ethics and seeks to disrupt the foundational principles of museology, dualism and collection, as it implicates these in historical and ongoing injustice.

Another such sensitive issue is the decolonial perspective on ecology, specifically the postcolonial persistence of the association of conservation with anti-human racism (Adams & Mulligan 2003, 9; Nixon 2011, 175). The critical eco-decolonial position and its challenge to human-nature dualism as a given condition of reality relates decolonialism to social-ecological crises with a historical perspective on colonial conservation as the removal of people from place, and the ways in which this has resulted in deep suspicion of ecological positionalities on the part of decolonial positionalities. The study emphasizes that the eco-decolonial is founded on a relational perspective that places importance on people in and through their vital entanglement with the natural world. That is, the study’s position is that people cannot be emancipated without a focus on the world in which they live and the ways in which that world is threatened by ecological degradation. The conflict between decolonial and ecological positionalities is an element of the ontological shift from dualism to dialectic that this study envisions.

Such conditions mean that the emergence of the eco-decolonial mode of museology has to be a considered process that is conducted carefully and clearly. The DCR onto-axiological chain with its deep and historical perspective is an ideal frame for this process.

## **2.6. Reflexivity on some terminology that is used in this study**

There is a focus in this study on developing a relational way of thinking that may disrupt traditional dualist patterns of thinking in the museum world, as well as in the broader sphere of the social sciences, as is elaborated in the discussion below. To this end an eco-decolonial mode of museology and a dialectical approach to culture-landscape are both conceived in this study. These feature together with the idea of humanity-in-nature, which is borrowed from Moore (2017). These relational concepts are discussed and further developed in this study, together with other relational terms such as ‘more-than-human’ (Abram, 1996) which are becoming more familiar and broadly accepted in the social sciences.

These are all expressions of a desire for a relational mode of thinking to disrupt calcified dualist thinking. They each, however, have their own significances. The eco-decolonial is the mode of museological philosophy, theory and practice that this study envisions and initiates. Humanity-in-nature is a relational formation with which the eco-decolonial displaces anthropocentric discussions of humanity as the most important species on Earth. Culture-landscape is the study’s dialectical development to anthropocentric discussions of cultural landscape in which culture is formative of landscape.

The dialectical culture-landscape perspective includes a sense of landscape as real, pre-existing and independent of human activity, and not only actual or empirical. We may use words like ‘geological formations’ and ‘biome’ to discuss ‘landscape’ but the necessity of linguistic mediation does not displace the real nature of the planet and its features, which predate humanity on a cosmological scale and will continue to exist long after our species disappears. Culture-landscape instates a perspective that allows landscape an initial independence from its entanglement with culture. This is significant to the eco-decolonial desire to displace anthropocentrism in favour of relationality and stratified perspectives.

The study refers to social-ecological crisis as the broad context in which the work is conducted. This refers to the well-documented crises of environment and society that are deeply entangled, and ever-more difficult to resolve through the lack of action that emerges from, for instance, the limitations of empirical realist science that are discussed in the ‘Transcendental Potentials’ section below.

It should be noted that despite the tendency in museological circles to refer to ‘indigenous knowledge’ this may be more accurately and sensitively expressed as local knowledge (Hirst 2002, 3), or intergenerational knowledge (O’Donoghue, Sandoval-Rivera & Payyappallimana 2019, 1). Hirst (2002, 3) writes of the term ‘indigenous knowledge’ that it was coined in “a report published by the World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO) [and] concerned with securing US copyright and

patent restrictions in member countries” (see World Intellectual Property Organization 2001). It was not possible to verify this claim for the origin of the term ‘indigenous knowledge’ but it is recounted here for interest, and for the illustration the WIPO report certainly does offer of neoliberal injustice in heritage contexts.

The ‘Protection, Promotion, Development and Management of Indigenous Knowledge Act’ of 2019 does, however, formalize that “indigenous knowledge means knowledge which has been developed within an indigenous community and has been assimilated into the cultural and social identity of that community” (Department of Arts and Culture 2019, 8). Ecological indigenous knowledge, however, remains formally limited at the macro level to “knowledge of natural resources” (Department of Arts and Culture 2019, 8). The ‘nature as resource alone’ positionality seems congruent with the implicit neoliberal ontology identified in the museological sphere, and supports the idea that is considered in the conclusion that this implicit ontology and the associated absences identified in this analysis in fact broadly permeate the macro- and meso-levels of not just museology but the social sciences in general.

This study thus makes use of the term ‘intergenerational knowledge’. While this has the effect of dislocating such knowledge from what might be called a previously colonized perspective in that *any* group of people surely has such knowledge, the need for a focus on marginalized perspectives is certainly vital and the development of the situated narrative perspective carried out below frames this in relation to a focus on marginalized peoples.

### **2.6.1. Terminology and the need for a focus on causal mechanisms**

The need for a focus on deep causal mechanisms is crucial to dialectical critical realism, as is emphasised in the articles and reiterated in the synthesis. Price (2019, 41) emphasizes that it is vital, for instance, to refocus attention on the mechanism, the greenhouse effect, that is the cause of what we generally refer to as climate change or global warming. These are “two levels of stratified reality - the level of the mechanism (greenhouse effect) and the level of its empirical manifestation (global warming),” and to ignore this distinction “gives leverage to the arguments of climate change deniers” (Price 2019, 41). Deniers point to periods in which warming stops as proof that climate change is false. Such pauses in warming, however, are due to open-systemic phenomena such as volcanic eruptions, and do not falsify claims that the global climate is experiencing a warming trend due to the exacerbation of the greenhouse effect by humanity’s emission of greenhouse gases.

While the idea of climate change has gained immense cultural currency, to refer to the greenhouse effect instead of climate change undermines such spurious arguments by referring to the level of the persistent mechanism rather than its variable manifestation. The eco-decolonial

mode of museology, where it relates to the phenomenon, will thus refer to the greenhouse effect rather than climate change. In the context of the argument developed in this study, to emphasize causal mechanisms in this way is also a means to underlabour the idea of neoliberal ontology as a deep causal mechanism of the manifest practice of dualist museology.

### **3. SYNTHESIS OF THE ARTICLES: DEVELOPMENT OF THE ECO-DECOLONIAL MODE OF MUSEOLOGY USING THE CRITICAL REALIST DIALECTICAL ONTO-AXIOLOGICAL CHAIN OF BEING AND BECOMING**

#### **3.1. Introduction to the synthesis**

The aim of this study is the development of the philosophical and theoretical frameworks of museology towards the emergence of new modes of museological practice. These frameworks are developed over the course of four articles, which elaborate the potentials for an eco-decolonial mode of museology that is generative of the social-ecological relationality that is absent from contemporary museology. The arguments developed in the articles will be synthesized in this section as succinctly as possible.

The PhD by publication at Rhodes University requires four articles, three submitted to international journals, with two accepted for publication or published at the time of thesis submission. A fifth article (Jeffery 2019, attached below as Appendix 7), which is supplementary to the four principal publications, was published in the course of the study. The goal of this fifth publication, which appeared in the *South African Museums Association Bulletin* (SAMAB), is to share some of the ideas developed for the South African context in the South African context. This article overviews some aspects of the study's emerging positionality on museology, with a focus on potential for the emergence of a dialectic of culture-landscape to contribute to a reimagining of the museum. Some points raised in the fifth article are revisited in the discussion that follows the synthesis, for instance the idea of service delivery protest as an example that may be explored through the situated social-ecological narrative approach that this study considers vital to the eco-decolonial mode of museology.

The premise of this study is that DCR offers museology a deep and coherent philosophical positionality with which to underpin emergent theory and practice suited to contemporary social-ecological crises. Cameron's theorizing of the idea of the "liquid museum," (Cameron 2015a; Cameron 2015b, 25), for instance, is a response to her identification of the need for social-ecological relationality (Cameron 2015b, 16) and is grounded in a vision for ontological change in museum practice (Cameron 2015a, 345). The DCR work undertaken here to develop the eco-decolonial mode builds on such vital museological perspectives as Cameron's by contributing a perspective on capitalism and its neoliberal ideology as deep causal mechanisms of the conditions that demand ontological change. These mechanisms and their historical trajectory become more visible through deep ontological DCR perspectives. The four principal articles illustrate the potentials of DCR to

underlabour the eco-decolonial mode that is intended to contribute the philosophy and theory of a new, relational museological practice.

The 1M moment is considered in the first and second articles. The first article surfaces the dialectic of society and ecology in the museum practice context, an expression of museology's enduring and restrictive philosophical position of human-nature dualism, and overviews the national heritage policy framework from which this practice emerges (Jeffery 2017, 22-24). The first article's analysis is treated retrospectively as an initial exploration of 1M conditions and 2E absences. This is a retrospective DCR perspective because at the time of writing in 2016, the study was in its first year and had not yet developed its focus on critical realist philosophy. Article 2 (Jeffery 2021a) uses the stratified DCR view of reality to elaborate a deeper perspective on Article 1's initial understanding of the context. Article 3 refines the 2E view on absences and absencing that initially emerged at 1M in Article 2, and focuses on 3L totality and 4D potentials for change in practice. Article 4 refines 3L and 4D through a constellational perspective on theoretical potentials, and a case study of two exhibition projects. The use of the relational and reflexive onto-axiological chain thus enables the iterative evolution and deepening of the study through reflexivity across its moments.

The synthesis of the perspectives that were developed through the articles will thus be structured by the moments of the MELD schema rather than by the boundaries of the articles, because the moments overlap those boundaries. The overview will summarize the most important arguments and the conclusions that are drawn in the development of the eco-decolonial mode of museology. It will emphasize the deep, causal and generative mechanisms (1M) of the absence (2E) of relationality between social and ecological museological perspectives, and the ways in which the emergent, relational eco-decolonial museology (3L) makes available potential paths towards transformed and transformative museum practice (4D). An important element of this is the potential for a culture-landscape dialectic to become a practice frame for the situated eco-decolonial museology, thus disrupting the traditional dualist practice frame. Theoretical emphasis will be placed on the 2E absencing potential to be found in the development of constellational interdisciplinarity that is (3L) envisioned for museological theory and 4D practice.

### **3.2. Synthesis as reflexivity**

The philosophical and theoretical frameworks developed in the study emerge in a relational and reflexive manner. The new theoretical positionalities that are developed emerge from the introduction of DCR into museology, and theory thus emerges from philosophy, just as practice emerges from theory. Practice, however, feeds back into theory and theory into philosophy as the eco-decolonial mode embraces the DCR emphasis on relational, reflexive and iterative development,

as is discussed in Article 4 (Jeffery 2021c, 7). Equally, while the synthesis is structured by the 1M to 4D moments, the relational interaction between the moments is a vital part of the dialectical process and the moments should not be regarded as isolated steps in a linear process. The vitality of the emergence that DCR brings about lies in its nature as a messy feedback process, and it is neither possible nor desirable to construct strict analytical divisions between the moments.

The process of synthesis is an act of reflexivity that allows re-vision and iterative development within the study. It clarifies the perspectives developed across the articles and contributes to the crystallization and further development of ideas. That is, revisiting the articles and the course of the development of the study's 1M and 2E ideas allows refinement to the 3L vision and to ideas for its potential 4D implementation. The synthesis process suggested new and expansive possibilities for the eco-decolonial mode of thought, such as the potential for the perspectives on neoliberal ideological influences on the heritage sector to shed light on similar restrictions in other sectors of the social sciences; and for the conception developed in this study of neoliberalism as independent of mathematical economic frameworks (Jeffery 2021a, 54-55) to be linked to Price's (2019) perspective on a transcendental realist approach to science. These and other ideas are considered in the discussion that follows the synthesis.

### **3.3. Synthesis of the articles**

#### ***3.3.1. 1M: A deep ontological perspective on museology and its historical context enabled by the stratified DCR view of reality***

1M reveals the most significant causes of the absence from museology of social-ecological relationality. These are:

1. The implicit neoliberal ontology of museology, which perpetuates the historical dualism of colonial capitalism.
2. The key paradox of emancipatory neoliberalism, which is surfaced as a contradiction between the ideals of heritage policy and the reality of museum practice; or as Bhaskar describes the general condition, an absence of coherence between policy and practice in practice (2008a, 194).
3. Acquisition (collection) as the grounding ontological activity of museology.

These are three principal generative mechanisms, deep structural causes, of the 2E persistence of dualist museology. The persistence of dualist museology is entangled with the historical persistence of capitalist dualism. Figure 2 (page 31) gives an overview of the 1M generative complex.

The reciprocal relationship between structure and agency, which "critical realists designate ... as the key framing device at the ontological level" (Scott 2010, 6; also see Price 2016a, 25 and

Bhaskar 1998, 37) means that the neoliberal ideological separation of ecological justice from social justice may be explored as a material cause of limited agency which dualist museums and museum workers are constrained to reproduce in their work in society (Jeffery 2021a, 58). Surfacing at 1M the deep, structural causes of 2E constraint thus potentially enables 3L agency for the resolution of constraints in the 4D eco-decolonial mode of museology.

The closing part of Article 1 (Jeffery 2017) gives an initial outline of the study's dialectical perspective at the 1M moment. The contextual emphasis is on the ethical implications and absences of the museological drive for social relevance in a time of social-ecological crisis. It considers that the interaction of humanity and human culture with nature goes directly to a dialectical perspective on human relationships with ecosystems, and considers that cultural landscape offers a conceptual toolkit for the treatment of these points of interaction between human culture and the environment (Jeffery 2017, 25). Subsequent articles elaborate this perspective into a dialectic of culture-landscape.

Article 1's conception of an ecological model of heritage practice drawing on the concept of cultural landscapes, and that could see museums as entities with ethical agency embedded within the meeting points of humanity and nature, is thus the starting point for the study's elaboration of the eco-decolonial mode of museology. The perspective on a "human-culture-nature system" of Article 1 (Jeffery 2017, 25) evolves into the eco-decolonial perspective on humanity-in-nature in Article 2 (Jeffery 2021a, 51) with its focus on the policy-practice inconsistencies and ethical failures that characterize museology within a neoliberal ontological frame (Jeffery 2021a, 56).

At the planetary level, Article 1 locates the analysis in the Anthropocene (Jeffery 2017, 19), which has become a popular frame for understanding a geological age in which humanity affects global natural systems (Crutzen 2002, 23) and has gained a lot of traction in museology (Isager, Knudsen & Theilade 2021). As capitalism and neoliberal ideology came to take a central position in the analysis in Article 2 there was a need for a more nuanced perspective on human influences on the environment and the deep causal mechanisms of those influences. The Capitalocene perspective on "a system of power, profit and re/production in the web of life" (Moore 2017, 594) recognizes the profound effects of global systems of capitalism on humanity-in-nature. The mediation of life by acquisition and accumulation underpins an ontological formation in which emancipation is impossible for the majority of humanity and the entirety of the more-than-human (Moore 2017, 601). Capitalocene systems are of colonizing intent (Jeffery 2021a, 54), and a critical, relational Capitalocene positionality can deepen both decolonial and ecological perspectives.

The Capitalocene perspective, with its focus on capitalism's "spaces of vulnerability and contradiction" (Moore 2017, 595), thus becomes the mega-level critical context from 1M onwards,

and it is from the contradictions of capitalism surfaced by this perspective that expansive emancipatory museological strategies such as the eco-decolonial may emerge. The mega-level is thus the moment from which the study develops its critical perspective on international neoliberalism as the root of the persistence of museological dualism.

The study's perspective on neoliberal ideology was deeply influenced by economist Rajesh Venugopal's position that though neoliberalism is widely considered a "ubiquitous, totalizing and epoch-defining phenomenon," it does not actually exist as a formal economic theory or practice (2015, 169). As such there can be no meaningful referents for the critique of the concept by the "rest of" the social sciences (Venugopal 2015, 180), that is, the social sciences that practice outside the mathematical frame of economics. He thus considers neoliberalism to be no more than a rhetorical device, and that "there is for all practical purposes no such thing" (Venugopal 2015, 181). He considers that neoliberalism is a lens through which the "rest of" the social sciences may survey, simplify, label and render economics understandable, while "what emerges ... is inadequate ... sketchy and vague" (Venugopal 2015, 180) because it is not mathematical.

Venugopal's criticism centres on the contradictions he sees in conceptions of neoliberalism (2015, 166). Capitalism, however, is a contradictory system of power relations that is simultaneously anthropocentric and dehumanizing, both historically and today (Jeffery 2021a, 55). The "mutually contradictory ... ontologies of contemporary capitalism" (Rossi 2012, 349) and the "mistaken ontological presuppositions" which do not conceive capitalism as a system of power relations (Palermo 2007, 539) are why, across the landscape of the social sciences, the critical construction of neoliberalism as the capitalist ideology may seem contradictory, and is arguably necessarily so. The positive potential of fluid perspectives on neoliberalism is elaborated in the discussion that follows the synthesis.

The neoliberal construction of "real abstractions" such as Humanity, Nature, Society, the Economy (Moore 2017, 595) can be understood as an architecture of epistemic fallacies that constructs human-nature dualism as a given condition of reality, and operationalizes and legitimates the violence of contradictory capitalism (Moore 2017, 601). De Sousa Santos (2018) emphasizes that such manipulations try to ensure that there is no alternative to the capitalist "cognitive empire". The elevation of epistemology, or ideology, to ontology through the operation of the epistemic fallacy "[takes] away our ability to imagine or propose anything else without being made out to be wishful and irrational" (Rosenberg 2020b, 2).

The eco-decolonial perspective on the capitalist operationalization of the epistemic fallacy enables a critical view on museological dualism as historically emergent from colonial capitalist dualism and perpetuated in the contemporary decolonial context by the dualism of the neoliberal

ideology that is the foundation of policy and practice. The successive historical manifestations of capitalism deeply impact the idea of the museum and the practice of museology, yet remain largely absent from museological criticism.

The mega-level perspective on neoliberalism sheds new light on the initial heritage policy analysis carried out in Article 1 (Jeffery 2017, 22-23), as can be elaborated at the macro-level.

Macro-level heritage policy is focused on a decolonization process – a process of social justice – that is operationalized through neoliberal economic principles. These principles in fact marginalize social as well as ecological justice concerns and generate and perpetuate inequalities and injustices. Emancipatory practices such as decolonization and ecologization cannot be supported by neoliberal ideology, as Article 2 emphasizes (Jeffery 2021a, 56-59). This is the paradox of emancipatory neoliberalism. Neoliberal ideology flows from the mega- to the macro-level and draws through the abstractions of the epistemic fallacy. The rhetorical nature of environmental policy (Jeffery 2021a, 56) illustrates the broad exclusion of social-ecological perspectives from a practice underpinned by neoliberal ideology.

Macro-level decolonial policy thus proposes to counter the inequalities and violence of *colonial* dualist capitalism through the inequalities and violence of *neoliberal* dualist capitalism (Jeffery 2021a, 56). This paradoxical position absents emancipatory decolonial potentials and absents social-ecological relationality. It enables the appropriation of decolonial heritage into the neoliberal set of epistemic fallacies, for instance through the operation of the authorized heritage discourse and official memory, discussed at 2E below. An eco-decolonial mode of practice may begin to resolve museological dualism, and so begin to resolve the contradictions between emancipatory ideals and the oppressive, economically-focused principles of neoliberal practice.

Neoliberal ideology emerges in the meso-level to govern formal practice relations between the institution (institutional policy, and management structures) and employees, and determines the degree of agency workers may have to influence practice. The survey data gathered from key informants (see 2.2. in the introduction) is introduced in the meso-level of Article 2 (Jeffery 2021a, 56). The responses had a clear focus on the 2E structural restrictions that emerge from the macro-level to be felt at the meso-level of practice. The responses surfaced meso-, micro-, individual- and sub-individual-level reactions to the restrictions on practice and agency that emerge from ‘overlying’ levels of power (Jeffery 2021a, 56-61).

The conditions of the meso-level flow into the micro-level of social relations where they affect the degree of agency museum workers may have in interactions with users and which they may transfer to users. The agency of museum workers, as the executors of the museum’s social responsibilities, is the agency of the museum itself. Neoliberal restrictions on workers’ agency thus

restrict the agency of the museum, restrictions which expresses the focus of neoliberalism on the perpetuation of the status quo rather than on emancipatory transformation. The close entanglement of structure and agency is clear in the way that meso-level organizational rules emergent from macro-level ideology impact vital micro-level face-to-face interactions (Jeffery 2021a, 57).

Similarly, the authorized heritage discourse (AHD) is a vehicle through which the paradox of emancipatory neoliberalism passes from the macro- to the meso-level and becomes ingrained as the implicit ontology of museology. The AHD legitimates the values and validated practice of a given heritage context and can be understood as a set of ideological expectations which are, in turn, legitimated by museums themselves when they adopt its values (Herbert 2000, 83; Khan 2000, 50; Vollgraaff 2012, 31; Pendlebury 2013, 709; Jeffery 2017, 22). South African museum practice historically emerged from the mega- and macro-level colonial western modes of traditional dualist practice (Abungu 2004, 4; Rall 2018, 11; Vollgraaff 2018, 374), and this deep dualist structure is perpetuated through the meso-level emergence of the authorized heritage discourse from mega- and macro-level neoliberal ideology.

At the individual or biographical level, the museum worker's sense of their relationship with the institution may be empowering or disempowering, both personally and in relationships with users of the museum. The analysis identified a tension between respondents' individual, progressive social-ecological concerns and the neoliberal ideology of the institutions for which they work (Jeffery 2021a, 59). Individual senses of agency and value are limited (as elaborated in the analysis of positionality in the introduction), but this tension flows through the structure-agency nexus, that is, it is a relational and potentially reflexive moment, and this tension thus generates potential for museum workers to talk back to the contradictions of the overlying levels and disrupt practice constraints. This is generative of potentials for interstitial activism as a transformative pathway at 2E and 3L.

The sub-individual psychological level is the level of a person's emotions (Price 2016a, 27; Togo 2016, 88, 91), and of their sense of their connection to their heritage, to their environment and to other living things. This is the level of personal interest or lack of interest in decolonization and/or ecologization. Interview responses expressed a sense of ineffectiveness which people may feel when confronted with wicked problems such as social-ecological crisis, problems that lack simplistic solutions and straightforward planning responses, and which are complex and ambiguous and often embedded within controversy around what needs to or can be done (Lotz-Sisitka et al., 2015, 73; Colding, Barthel & Sörqvist 2019, 512). This sense of ineffectiveness may be deeper when the person

is embedded within an institutional structure that is rooted in neoliberalism and its quantitative tentacles, which limit individual and collective agency.

### **3.3.2. 2E: Absences and absenting**

The 1M analysis reveals the historical persistence of dualist museology, and its entanglement with the historical persistence of capitalist dualism. At 2E it is possible to identify restrictions on thinking and practice that emerge from these historical conditions to absent social-ecological relationality and emancipatory practice potentials. These include quantitative management practice, the commodification of heritage, a restrictive authorized heritage discourse (AHD), the emergence of official memory as a set of hegemonic narratives, and the structural suppression of museum workers' agency and interest in social-ecological issues (Jeffery 2021a, 57-58; Jeffery 2021b, 8-10).

The neoliberal commodification of heritage practice constitutes a postcolonial reproduction of colonial hegemonies of growth, and constrains sustainability initiatives in favour of profitability (Helland & Lindgren 2016, 433; Togo 2016, 93; Jeffery 2021a, 57). The close association of heritage with tourism may reinforce and exploit cultural stereotypes as these are transformed into a consumable spectacle, while governance structures see museums as tourist sites and not as knowledge-generating institutions (Rassool 2000, 6-10; Witz, Rassool & Minkley 2001, 280; Marschall 2005, 103-104; Soudien 2008, 215; Vollgraaff 2018, 386; Jeffery 2021a, 57).

Several scholars have argued that 'official memory' emerges as meso-level values of political and economic elites morph the AHD into a set of hegemonic narratives, evident in the political manipulation of the practice of memorialization (Abungu 2004, 3; Shoba 2005, 26; Bakker & Müller 2010, 50; Rankin 2013, 79, 90; Zuma 2018, 40; Roux 2018, 408-409). The material interests of politically powerful economic elites instrumentalize the museum in the construction of a specific narrative.

Authorized heritage narratives and official memory can also undermine the crucial role of arts and culture in social critique, and potentially discriminate against niche, experimental or radical programmes (Mahony 2017, 130-131), of which the eco-decolonial mode of museology may be considered an example. Such circumstances impede the development of innovative paths towards broad community connections to a museum.

Quantitative management practice is the strategic focus of museum management on rigid quantitative performance indicators, logistics, administration and Treasury compliance requirements (Vollgraaff 2004, 2; Dubin 2006, 217; Vollgraaff 2018, 373, 384). The demands of compliance to regulatory bodies overshadows museological functions, and energy is placed on economic measurements instead of effective museum services (Vollgraaff 2018, 377-387). Museum and

heritage workers' practice goals and any feedback into the management system are formally limited to the numerical. Qualitative ideals and ideas and potentials for creative, worker-driven expansion of museum practice are absented by the limitations of economically correct practice, while quantitative management thus tends to consolidate dualist thinking and alienates workers (Jeffery 2021b, 12; also see Mahony 2017 on activist interventions in cultural institutions in resistance to capitalist "corporatization" of practice).

Museum governance at the macro- and meso-levels is largely divorced from the museum's (theoretical) meso- and micro-level social obligations, just as neoliberal ideology is largely divorced from the lived reality of a world in social-ecological crisis (see, for instance, Hawkins 2009, 50 on how the brand value of the notorious plastic bag outweighs its ecological impacts).

The reciprocity of the structure-agency relationship at the institutional level is biased towards political and ideological structures that have more power and limit the agency of workers. That is, the restrictions of emancipatory neoliberalism are a structural means through which power<sub>2</sub> constrains the power<sub>1</sub> agency (Bhaskar 2008a, 143) of individuals at the meso- and micro-levels in such a way that they are reproductive rather than transformative of structure (Jeffery 2021a, 58). Such structural limitations on the agency of museum workers and museum users cannot support the emergence of emancipatory social-ecological practice. The paradox of emancipatory neoliberalism thus flows from the overlying levels into practice to neutralize potentials for social-ecological justice (Jeffery 2021a, 58).

Despite emergent international trends towards relationality, dualist practice frames remain firmly entrenched because collection is conserved at the heart of museology (Jeffery 2021a, 58-59). Collection, to which the study also refers as acquisition as a means to emphasize its extractive logic, is thus the grounding ontological activity of museum work. Acquisition is rooted in historical museological dualism, which is emergent from historical capitalism and which the implicit neoliberal ontology both fixes and exploits in contemporary practice. Historical dualism is held in place by practices of collection, which are underpinned by capitalist logic. This is the mechanism for the persistence of human-nature divisions in the work that museums do (Jeffery 2021b, 10).

To reshape museum practice requires a fundamental reimagination of the implicit neoliberal museological ontology, and thus of the grounding ontological activity, collection. This is a crucial element of the emergence of an eco-decolonial form of practice.

### ***3.3.2.1. Surfacing transformative pathways emergent from 2E for a 3L vision***

The idea of a practice driven by neoliberal authority implies the possibility of activist and transgressive discourses and practices. These may exploit epistemic contradictions such as

emancipatory neoliberalism, which are also vulnerabilities, as surfaced in Article 2 (Jeffery 2021a, 61) and discussed above.

Acquisition is the grounding ontological activity of museum work, and is rooted in traditional museological human-nature dualism and the ways in which it orders culture as superior to nature and cultures as similarly hierarchical (Cameron 2015b, 19). Acquisition is exterior to change because it is so fundamental to what a museum is conceived to be, which effectively applies a philosophical shield to the deep ontological roots of museological dualism in historical capitalism (Jeffery 2021a, 61; Jeffery 2021b, 13-14). “Core museum functions and societal responsibilities are not in competition with each other” (Sandahl 2019), but the absence of reflexivity directed at the ontological significance of acquisition generates an absence of coherence between the theoretical social-ecological responsibilities and the actual practice of museum work (Jeffery 2021b, 13). Human-nature dualism thus occupies a deeply embedded positionality as the practice frame for the work that museums do. Without a reflexive and critical focus on deep causal mechanisms, dualism cannot be displaced from this central positionality by the more relational modes that are urgently needed (Jeffery 2021b, 16).

To disrupt the untouchable position of the principle of acquisition may enable the fresh perspectives necessary for deep transformation of museum philosophy, theory and practice and contribute to resolution of the fundamental ontological paradox of emancipatory neoliberalism. This is elaborated at 3L as a refocusing of museum practice away from objects alone and towards a dialectical perspective on the emergence of meaning and agency. Objects are seen as an element of the process through which the museum facilitates the emergence of situated narratives which reflect the social-ecological experiences of individuals and groups, in a process that has a focus on the perspectives of marginalized peoples (Jeffery 2021c, 17).

This is entangled with a second potential transformative pathway, the recalibration of the structure-agency nexus in practice. The reciprocity between workers’ individual, progressive ‘underlying’ positionalities and neoliberal institutional ‘overlying’ positionalities may be operationalized. The sense of limited agency that an individual may feel within an institutional structure rooted in neoliberalism potentially manifests in resistance to its constraints. Workers may assume the agency to conduct activities with potential to change practice and disrupt the implicit neoliberal ontology (Jeffery 2021a, 62; Jeffery 2021b, 16). This is the interstitial activism that was referenced in the introduction, activism from within the ontological formation so that it may be “opened up” from the inside, and which should be seen, to reiterate Mahony’s perspective (2017, 132), “not as an attack on these public institutions for their duplicitous value systems, but as acts of love for what they could be.” It can also be understood as emerging from workers’ frustration with

the inconsistencies and restrictions emergent from the simultaneity of demands for the transformation of museums so that they become more relevant with the imposition of a quantitative bureaucracy that restricts creativity and resources.

Workers' with perspectives on "the living, multi-species connections of humanity-in-nature and the web of life" (Moore 2017, 598) as can be identified in the interviews conducted for this project (Jeffery 2021a, 56-61) may resist the appropriation of museum practice into the neoliberal epistemic architecture. Such resistance may disrupt dualist historical trajectories and focus museology on the ways in which the amelioration of the colonial depredations of the past is entangled with the amelioration of the social-ecological crisis of the present (Jeffery 2021b, 14).

In this way, the eco-decolonial perspective may act as a philosophical and theoretical foundation from which museum practitioners may talk back to powerful overlying forces and their meso-level expression in commodification, official memory and quantitative management practice (Jeffery 2021a, 59). This may facilitate deeper interrogation of the paradox of emancipatory neoliberalism, that is, the paradox of oppressive neoliberal ideology as the driver for emancipatory decolonial and ecological impulses (Jeffery 2021b, 13).

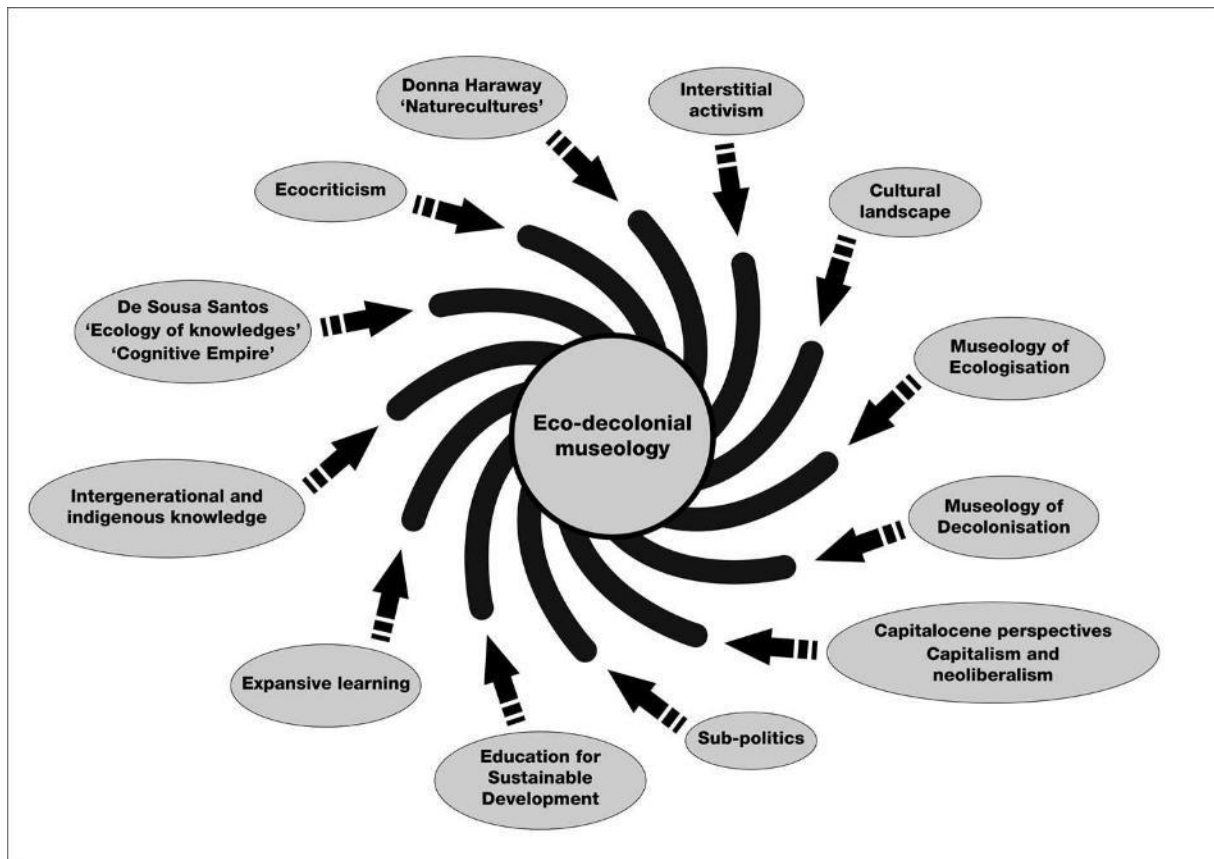
In the relational way of DCR philosophy, these potentials that inhere in an eco-decolonial ontology are also the factors that interventionist researchers using Change Laboratories may use to motivate the development and implementation of eco-decolonial modes of museology. Learning to use the eco-decolonial mode of museology is simultaneously learning what the eco-decolonial may become. The analysis returns to this in the discussion that follows the synthesis.

### **3.3.3. 3L: Vision / Totality**

3L is about exploring possibilities in the newly understood context, the moment of a vision for the world in which social-ecological justice predominates (Schudel 2017, 179). This is the moment of totality, a "differentially charged nexus" (Bhaskar 2008a, 252), the "realm of emergence" which is "fluid and variable," (Bhaskar 2008a, 253) and which relates to the moment of fluidity in the concept of the museum (Jeffery 2021b, 3).

Article 1 initiates the development of the study's 3L relational social-ecological vision for museology. It draws on ecocritical perspectives (Glotsfelty & Fromm 1996; Heise 2006) to conceive an initial "earth-centred" approach to heritage practice (Jeffery 2017, 25). This is developed into the more deeply relational perspective of the eco-decolonial in Article 2. From Article 2 onwards, the fundamental shift the study envisions for museum practice is an ontological shift from traditionalist human-nature dualism to a progressive human-nature dialectic (Jeffery 2021b, 12). A dialectical

approach may enable emergence of “a complex, co-embedded, constellational” (Norrie 2010, 170) practice frame that may bring together a new “ecology of knowledges” (de Sousa Santos, Arriscado & Meneses 2008, xx). Marginalized and dominant epistemologies may combine in new and interesting ways to disrupt the neoliberal cognitive empire. Article 4 (Jeffery 2021c, 6-12) develops the 3L potentials introduced in Article 3 (Jeffery 2021b, 10-13) into a constellational interdisciplinary framework of theoretical potentials from which an eco-decolonial museology may emerge. Figure 3 gives an overview of constellational potentials for an eco-decolonial museology.



**Figure 3. Overview of constellational theoretical potentials for an eco-decolonial museology**

Constellationality is an open-system perspective that may counter museology’s dualist ontology with a dialectic of emancipation (Bhaskar 2008a, 36). The constellational “hiatus of duality” (Bhaskar 2008a, 259) offers potential to move from museological human-nature dualism to a progressive human-nature dialectic. This represents potential for the fundamental ontological shift that is necessary for museum practice if it is to remain relevant to humanity-in-nature. Significantly for the future work in Change Laboratories that is foreseen in the discussion section, Mukute (2016, 191) remarks that the concept of constellationality, “is closely tied to that of interacting activity systems in Cultural Historical Activity Theory (CHAT).” DCR has the potential to provide the stratified

ontological perspective that is missing from CHAT (Engeström, 1987; Engeström & Sannino, 2010; Nunez 2014, 37).

The range of perspectives drawn into the constellation is broad, but neither exhaustive nor definitive. Neither should it be taken that eco-decolonial work should or could use all of these perspectives together all of the time. That is, the constellation is open, as DCR enables philosophical connections between theoretical positionalities that are potentially generative of a dialectical and interdisciplinary practice frame for a dynamic and progressive eco-decolonial museology.

Article 4 charts a pathway through the constellation towards the eco-decolonial mode (Jeffery 2021c, 7-12). The relationality of the constellation means that there is not a specific entry point, but as mentioned above, the emergence of a dialectic of culture-landscape has particular potential to contribute to a transformed and transformative museum practice and reimagination of the museum. The study envisions potential for a culture-landscape dialectic to become a practice frame for the situated eco-decolonial museology (Jeffery 2021b, 15; Jeffery 2021c, 8). As such, this dialectic is taken as the entry point to the constellation. The constellation is relational, so it is also a means for the further development of the dialectic. The following paragraphs overview the path through the constellation and the theoretical positionalities that it draws together.

There is an emerging relationality in cultural landscape approaches to people and place (see, for instance, Crouch 2010) that may be further developed into a dialectic of culture-landscape with a foundational Capitalocene perspective on mediation by capital of “the living, multi-species connections of humanity-in-nature and the web of life” (Moore 2017, 598). This dialectical Capitalocene positionality facilitates a focus on situated knowledge of social-ecological crisis. Narratives of social-ecological relations to place and biodiversity, including both western and marginalized intergenerational perspectives, may be co-curated by museums and communities into exhibitions and co-engaged learning opportunities (Jeffery 2021c, 3).

The emergent strand of postcolonial ecocriticism (Huggan & Tiffin 2015) is potentially particularly significant to an eco-decolonial museology grounded in culture-landscape in this way (Jeffery 2021c, 7). Postcolonial ecocriticism offers a theoretical position from which the eco-decolonial mode of museology may articulate the “mutual entanglement of human and natural history” (Huggan & Tiffin 2015, vii) through its relational perspective on the anthropocentric focus of the postcolonial and the ecocritical focus on place (Huggan & Tiffin 2015, viii). Postcolonial ecocriticism is emerging as a critical interventionist discourse that cultivates a sense of “worldliness” (Huggan & Tiffin 2015, ix). The need to act in the world, to intervene in practical ways in urgent social-ecological contexts, is vital to DCR (Price 2016a, 25) and has parallels with the emergence of an activist mode in museology.

The 2E structural suppression of museum workers' agency and interest in social-ecological issues (Jeffery 2021a, 56-59; Jeffery 2021b, 8-10) delineates a dialectical tension that may be considered a "sub-politics" (Beck 1992, 14) of workers in tension with governance structures. This represents potential external to institutional positionalities (Guivant 2016, 228) for the operationalization of a reflexive and expansive museological "activist and interventionist approach" (Sannino, Engeström & Lemos 2016, 600, and which links to the discussion of CHAT potentials for the eco-decolonial in section 4.6. below). This approach may theorize workers' progressive viewpoints as vital to the museum as a social structure and recalibrate the present power<sub>2</sub> bias of the reciprocity between structure and agency (Jeffery 2021c, 7). The agency of museum workers is the agency of the museum itself (Jeffery 2021a, 57).

Interstitial activism offers a theoretical frame within which to operationalize this sub-politics in practice and to bring change from within the ontological formation of the museum. Interstitial activism occurs outside formal structures and may circumvent neoliberal restrictions and enable museum workers to act with activist intent towards inequality, injustice and environmental crises (Janes & Sandell 2019a, 1). Workers may thus assume the agency to disrupt the constraints of the neoliberal ontology and to initiate a transformative pathway towards social-ecological justice, in a practical application of transformative agency (Jeffery 2021c, 8). This may equally be understood as a moment of expansive learning through the operationalization of the generative force of tensions (Engeström & Sannino 2010, 4).

Within this emerging knowledge ecology, the grounding ontological activity of museum practice becomes collaborative storytelling. Instead of acquiring things, the museum (or rather the museum's agentic force of workers) focuses on facilitating the emergence of the situated social-ecological narrative perspectives of people, who are understood as complex social-ecological entities (Jeffery 2021c, 8). The practice frame of eco-decolonial museum work becomes the culture-landscape in which humanity-in-nature lives and narrates (Jeffery 2021c, 8). This relational positionality is grounded in awareness of interwoven human and non-human ecological communities whose lives and freedoms are equally threatened by forces of inequality (Cameron 2015b, 16; Newell, Robin & Wehner 2017a; Wehner 2017, 87).

The emergence of situated narratives of social-ecological experience through museum programmes of co-engaged learning, with the narratives then foregrounded in public programmes of exhibition, may disrupt the ontological paradox of emancipatory neoliberalism by offering real emancipation through agency. This represents greater coherence between the theoretical social-ecological responsibilities of museums and the actual practice of museum work and generates potential for the disruption of the implicit neoliberal ontology (Jeffery 2021c, 18).

The situated narrative approach has implications for improving museums' relevance through engaging with issues that are important to people in their lived experiences. It also has relevance to the potential for developing a transcendental approach within eco-decolonial museology, as is considered in the discussion that follows the synthesis.

The constellational perspective on theory surfaces potential for “experimental practice” driven by the “recognition that museums not only have the potential to shape a more sustainable, equitable and fair world, but also an obligation to do so” (Janes & Sandell 2019b, xxvii). This is a 4D potential and obligation, which may be fulfilled as the axiology of freedom ontologically nurtures the experimental transformative practice of the emergent eco-decolonial mode.

#### **3.3.4. 4D: Agency in practice**

4D is the moment of change in context, through “the exercising of intentional and ethical human agency” (Mukute 2016, 196). At 4D, the perception of museums as places of dead things and the dust of history (Thomas 2016, 119) may begin to be resolved through engagements with living perceptions of social-ecological belonging and change – situated narratives. Such situated narratives may be curated as evidence for the necessity of structural change. If ‘archives’ are understood, in a dialectical culture-landscape mode, to include land and landscape, natural ecological systems and natural heritage, the world-as-record and the human record of living in the world, this provokes a practical mode of ‘collections management’ that is necessarily simultaneously cultural and ecological, and disruptive of dualism in that it requires multidisciplinary strategies for practice that bridge cultural and ecological studies, the humanities and the sciences. This represents the operationalization of a humanity-in-nature perspective for museum practice. In this co-created practice, it is the communities’ own narratives that form the backbone of the learning opportunities (Jeffery 2021b, 19).

Article 4 conducts a case study of emergent change at Amazwi South African Museum of Literature. Similar to the analysis of Article 1, the 4D analysis in Article 4 (Jeffery 2021c, 9-16) is retrospective. The first exhibition in the study, ‘This Is What I’m Made Of: Landscape in South African Literature’ predates the study as it was developed in 2010, but is nevertheless an example of the emergence of social-ecological relationality in practice, as will be demonstrated. At the time of the development of the second exhibition in the study, ‘Humanature’, over 2017 and 2018, the study was focused generally on potentials for social-ecological relationality in practice, and had not yet got to grips with the complexities of dialectical critical realism. During 2019 and 2020, and the writing of Articles 2 to 4, the study had more fully developed its critical realist perspective, which is thus applied retrospectively in the analysis of the ‘Humanature’ exhibition.

'This Is What I'm Made Of' can be considered an earlier iteration of social-ecological relationality in practice that was further developed in 'Humanature'. The title 'This Is What I'm Made Of' draws on Antjie Krog's (1998, 210) eloquent expression of self and environment as mutually constructive to initiate a dialectic of culture-landscape. This is further illustrated by a photo of the ashes of poet Don Maclennan being scattered by Maclennan's son Ben on the Compassberg Mountain, which the poet asks be done in his poem 'Under Compassberg' (2006, 145). Such examples suggest the interdisciplinary potential for ecocritical perspectives to be generative of a relational museology framed by culture-landscape (Jeffery 2021c, 10).

'Humanature' was conceived and curated in order to emphasize humanature relationality. The red 'n' represents the potential disruption of the binary construction of human-nature dualism. Returning briefly to the development of the 3L constellation, Milstein (2011) and Haraway (2004, 2) use compound terms, "humanature" and "naturecultures" respectively, in a similar impulse to "reflexively engage human and nature ... in integral conversation [in a] turn toward lexical reciprocal intertwining" (Milstein 2011, 21). From a retrospective dialectical critical realist perspective, the curatorial moment of 'Humanature' was an attempt to absent the absence in museological practice of social issues from their ecological context and vice versa, and as initially surfaced in the first article (Jeffery 2017), which was written at the time the exhibition was in development.

This represents a movement towards coherence between the theoretical social-ecological responsibilities of museum work that are absented by neoliberal restrictions and actual dualist practice. The closer coherence of theory and practice in practice may break down the resilience of an inherently unsustainable system (Lotz-Sisitka et al., 2015, 74), such as a museology grounded in the paradox of emancipatory neoliberalism (Jeffery 2021a, 61; Jeffery 2021b, 9).

In-house research and development for 'Humanature' drew on the body of ecocritical creative writing in the museum's collection. The ecocritical perspective on social-ecological relationality thus underpinned the initial emergence at Amazwi of social-ecological relationality in practice, and illustrates the practical effectiveness that is intended to emerge from the constellation towards the emergence of the eco-decolonial mode of museology.

In a new methodology for Amazwi, 'Humanature' contained no interpretive text and focused solely on creative rather than critical writing. The literature and the visual materials selected by curators were allowed to speak for themselves, so that in an act of co-generation of meaning visitors could draw their own interpretations from the materials available. The literary objects were curated with social-ecological relationality in mind, most particularly in the selection of manuscripts of the poet Douglas Livingstone. In Livingstone's work is to be found an early example – he died in 1996 – of the ecocritical sensibility which became more established in South African literature after the end

of apartheid in 1994 (see Wylie 2008, viii-xi for a discussion of this emergence). This ecocritical perspective on humanature entanglement is apparent in the work of all the writers included in the exhibition, and is central to its 'humanity-in-nature' culture-landscape dialectical perspective (Jeffery 2021c, 18).

The social-ecological relationality of the 'Humanature' exhibition thus initially emerges from the exhibition's curators mobilizing their social-ecological commitment through the ecocritical perspectives made available by Amazwi's nature as a museum of literature. The curation of 'Humanature' can thus be seen as curation within the social-ecologically conscious sub-politics of workers. Decolonization was related to ecological perspectives in a move away from the more usual, anthropocentric social focus of the museum's practice, while still answering the demands of inclusivity and representivity but extending these to the more-than-human community in the presence of more-than-human personalities present in much of the writing.

Approximately 50% of the exhibition's content derived from submissions of situated narratives of the social-ecological experience of young people (aged 13-35). The focus ranged widely across relations between poverty, pollution, health and environment, and concerns around water and food security. The contributions universally expressed concern around social-ecological threats that young people witnessed in their daily lives. The emphasis on human-nature entanglement surfaced in these situated and critical narratives of lived experience is significant for the expansion of museum practice towards an eco-decolonial mode (Jeffery 2021c, 14-15).

The curators' assumption of the agency to disrupt the dualism that would ordinarily preclude social-ecological perspectives enabled the museum to offer agency to people who expressed their social-ecological anxieties through the exhibition. This in turn meant that the museum was better able to offer social-ecological agency to visitors to the museum, using the exhibition as a learning resource, and this sequence of agentic movements contributed to an expansion of the museum's practice. 'Humanature' is thus an example of curation focused on people as complex social-ecological entities, and curation that provides people with agency to narrate their social-ecological perspectives.

Everyday people and their personal stories rather than 'things' or objects were the primary focus of the exhibition. This is an initial iteration of the eco-decolonial focus on situated narratives that is significant to the expansion of normalized practice (Lotz-Sisitka 2016, 319), that is, the expansion of dualist museology towards relational modes of thinking and work. The disruption of dualism in practice in 'Humanature' is a first iteration of disruption of the implicit neoliberal ontology. It flowed from the curatorial team's personal social-ecological positionalities and their commitment to developing social-ecological relationality in the museum's practice. That is, workers'

progressive perspectives realigned structure-agency relations and disrupted power<sub>2</sub> structures and dualist historical trajectories. This is a valuable new iteration of transformative practice for Amazwi upon which the museum may reflect and build into future iterations, towards ever more enduring forms of eco-decolonial museology.

The utility of the theoretical constellation in developing the practical eco-decolonial perspective on museology demonstrates the utility of DCR as a philosophical underlabourer. DCR is a means to conceive new ways of thinking and being in theory and in practice, and offers a philosophical position from which to see connections between theoretical positionalities (ecocriticism, sub-politics and interstitial activism, for instance). It generates a progressive dialectical practice frame for the eco-decolonial mode of museology.

## **4. DISCUSSION: DEVELOPING THE ECO-DECOLONIAL MODE OF MUSEOLOGY**

### **4.1. Introduction to the discussion**

The synthesis above overviews the development of the eco-decolonial ontology. The philosophy of dialectical critical realism enables the theorizing of new approaches to museum work that may then be trialled in practice. This is the fundamental movement towards the eco-decolonial mode of museology along the new ontological-axiological chain that is developed in this study, movement which represents potential for transformation from what is, to what ought to be, along a structured chain of being and becoming (Schudel 2016, 260).

In the writing of the articles, the focus had to be sharp in order to ensure that the principal ideas that underpin the eco-decolonial mode were clearly elaborated. This means that there is scope for some further development of ideas here, particularly in the construction of a basis for future work. The discussion below will further elaborate some significant elements, and look towards future work to further develop and implement the eco-decolonial mode of museology. It will refine and add to the perspectives developed in the four articles and outlined in the synthesis, and more fully elaborate pathways towards the development and implementation of the eco-decolonial in policy and practice.

The discussion will first focus on the critical potential of fluid perspectives on neoliberalism. As argued above, while the critical constructions of neoliberalism as the capitalist ideology may seem contradictory across the landscape of the social sciences, this is arguably necessarily so. Contrary to criticism of such fluidity as representative of fatal inconsistency (Venugopal 2015, 171), a fluid perspective on neoliberalism is potentially a useful aspect of the eco-decolonial perspective.

Secondly, the discussion will further explore the situated narrative approach of the eco-decolonial mode of museology. This will include attention to the ways in which a practice focus on situated narratives potentially enables a transcendental realist perspective with a metaphysical element. The value of this lies in the ways in which a transcendental approach adds to the potential to disrupt museological dualism and undermine the idealist, economic perspective that pays lip service to 'indigenous knowledge' but actually continues to marginalize and appropriate intergenerational perspectives (Jeffery 2021a, 57). Some practical implications of the situated narrative approach will be outlined, followed by a closer focus on how this approach may deepen the relevance of museums. The discussion will then consider some policy implications of the study.

The closing part of the discussion will focus on possibilities for future work, with an emphasis on the mutually supportive potential that exists between the Dialectical Critical Realist approach and the Cultural Historical Activity Theory methodology of Change Laboratories. To draw these together

can facilitate the development and implementation of the eco-decolonial mode of museology, and add valuable nuance to its practice.

#### **4.2. The value of a fluid critical perspective on neoliberalism**

To reiterate the strictly economic position outlined above, neoliberalism does not exist as a formal economic theory or practice and is no more than a rhetorical device used by the “rest of” the social sciences to the extent that “there is for all practical purposes no such thing” (Venugopal 2015, 181). Criticism centres on the apparent contradictions in conceptions of neoliberalism, the “terminological dysfunction” (Venugopal 2015, 167) of “an overloaded and unwieldy term that occupies a fluid and growing terrain [and] lacks firm foundations in real world referents” (Venugopal 2015, 171).

Neoliberal ideology, however, is founded on an architecture of epistemic fallacies that underpins the paradox of emancipatory neoliberalism and absents emancipatory and relational potentials (Jeffery 2021a, 61). The critical eco-decolonial perspective underlaboured by dialectical critical realism surfaces the contradictions that characterize neoliberal ideology, and considers that it uses contradiction to protect and perpetuate itself. This is why, across the landscape of the social sciences, the critical construction of neoliberalism as the capitalist ideology may itself seem contradictory.

The critical construction of neoliberalism “is easily one of the most powerful concepts to emerge within the social sciences in the last two decades” (Springer, Birch & MacLeavy 2016, 1). The eco-decolonial mode of museology underlaboured by the stratified perspective of DCR with its focus on tensions and absences has potential to channel and enhance this power, because such fluidity (which can also be understood as turbulence, or contradiction, or tension) is precisely what offers the eco-decolonial the ability to critically engage with neoliberal ideology in a dialectical way. Fluidity, as a location of tension and absence, represents emancipatory potentials. From the eco-decolonial perspective, the fluidity to be found in the social sciences’ conceptualization of neoliberalism is thus the very thing that gives the concept its critical value. The identification of ideological tensions that this fluidity represents, and the identification of constellational interdisciplinary potentials, are processes of the emergence of the eco-decolonial mode of museology.

Capitalism and its neoliberal ideology are a contradictory real-world system of power relations that is simultaneously anthropocentric and dehumanizing, both historically and today (Jeffery 2021a, 55). Venugopal and others (for instance, Jessop 2013), however, view the contradictions they see in the critical construction of neoliberalism in the social sciences from a monovalent economic perspective that ignores the contradictions in neoliberal ideology and the

practice of capitalism. When Venugopal (2015, 171) speaks of the absence from the critique of neoliberalism of “real world referents,” he means “the mathematical sophistication of [economic] theory and empirics” (180). This is the root of the position that neoliberalism does not exist as an economic system and that it is *only* a mode of social critique by disciplines outside economics, “an artifice willed into existence not by its theorists but by its critics” (Venugopal 2015, 181).

The mistake is to assume that the distance between mathematical economic systems and the contradictory, socially constructed critique of neoliberal ideology is meaningful enough to deal a death blow to that critique. The idea that neoliberalism is a “socially constructed term of struggle,” rather than a “rigorously defined concept that can guide research” (Jessop 2013, 65) is precisely where its critical potential lies. Neoliberalism’s critics *are* its theorists, and its theory is *not* the preserve of economics. The theorizing of neoliberalism truly does not exist within economics. It is the site of resistance of the rest of the social sciences to the impacts of Capitalocene economics on the world, on society and ecology. Neoliberalism need not be articulated mathematically because neoliberalism is not numerical in nature. It is philosophical.

Neoliberal critique in the social sciences is a discourse of resistance. It is a critical activist frame for struggle against the obviously untenable impacts of capitalist economics on humanity-in-nature. Fluidity in this context has greater potential than rigorous definition, which is limiting and narrows the vision of the messy complexity that is global capitalism and its social-ecological horrors. If neoliberalism as imagined by the social sciences is a “chaotic concept” (Jessop 2013, 65) this is because it is an emergent struggle against a chaotic force. The contradictory, messy nature of critique of neoliberal ideology signifies this critique as an open systemic approach to a closed economic system.

The construction of neoliberalism is thus the philosophical position from which the social sciences challenge the Capitalocene economic systems that produce injustice and inequality across humanity-in-nature. While the term ‘ideology’ itself has been accused of “semantic promiscuity” (Knight 2006, 619), “it has always denoted sets of attitudes and ways of behaviour which can be observed in the real world” (Selliger 2019, 2). The actual capitalist system and the impacts of its ideology on the real world are observable and the social sciences, whether economists like it or not, construct neoliberalism as a means to understand and critique the fundamentalist capitalist economic state of being that is the cause of those impacts. This discourse of resistance, just like neoliberal ideology, is complex and messy but finds coherence in a dialectical positionality such as that of the eco-decolonial.

The constellationality of the eco-decolonial mode of museology (Jeffery 2021c, 4-5) means that the variety and range of disciplinary insights is not a fatal sign of conceptual inconsistency but

represents sites of dialectical potentials for the emergence of new and progressive perspectives. This is the value of DCR as underlabourer. It provides tools that can cope with ideological manipulations and bring together critical perspectives from diverse fields. The DCR approach is generative of the value of neoliberalism as a fluid critical construct for the eco-decolonial mode of museology. It enables the eco-decolonial to make an approach to the fluid field of critical perspectives on neoliberalism and to generate coherent, cohesive and effective critical responses. An approach of ontological fluidity to neoliberal ideology is a means to answer the need Cameron identifies (2015a, 345) for new ways for museums to become “more relevant in a turbulent world.” Ontological fluidity, or an ontology of fluidity, is a means to surface and to deal with the contradictions of neoliberalism and to engage critically with the turbulent world that it generates.

The ontological potentials of the moment of fluidity in the conception of the museum, as discussed above, are defeated by the philosophical shield applied to acquisition and thus to the dualist, neoliberal implicit museological ontology. To conceive of ontological fluidity in the conception of neoliberalism, however, opens dialectical potentials and thus reinstates the chance for museology to reimagine itself outside the parameters of its traditional and restrictive ideological core. “Museums have traded on certainty ... museums are founded on positivist notions of certainty ... . The elimination of complexity is the preferred route to superior, scientific knowledge,” because “paradoxes and ambiguities ... defy the positivist mindset” (Cameron 2015a, 348). This need for certainty (in an echo of the note above on the trauma of ontological uncertainty) is why museological dualism has endured. The dialectical potentials of a fluid conception of neoliberalism, embedded in an equally fluid critical eco-decolonial perspective, can harness complexity to disrupt tradition, dualism and the implicit ontology of museology.

The apparent contradictions in critique of neoliberalism across disciplinary contexts signal the metamorphic abilities of capital, its trickster nature. The fluidity of critique of neoliberalism represents progressive and emancipatory attempts to grapple with the paradoxical positionalities and practices through which the capitalist cognitive empire “[takes] away our ability to imagine or propose anything else without being made out to be wishful and irrational” (Rosenberg 2020b, 2). These contradictions as sites of dialectical potential enable the eco-decolonial to imagine and propose something else. To challenge such structures may seem wishful given the formidable obstacles involved in bringing deep change (Lotz-Sisitka 2016, 321), but nevertheless, there is real potential for the eco-decolonial vision for change to be realised because it has the dialectical flexibility to adapt reflexively to new information, and is motivated by the underlying eco-decolonial ontology of love for humanity-in-nature.

### **4.3. Further potentials for the situated narrative approach**

#### **4.3.1. *Situated narratives: The perspective so far***

The position on the situated narrative approach that has been developed thus far should be briefly reiterated. One of the recommendations of this study is that South African museum practice should focus on people as complex social-ecological entities rather than on the social *or* ecological aspects of life, which is the norm in the dualist practice frame. To this end, it is argued that museums should focus on situated narratives of the social-ecological experiences of humanity-in-nature. Such a relational perspective grounds the eco-decolonial mode of museology in awareness of interwoven human and non-human ecological communities and embeds it in a dialectic of culture-landscape, which this study understands as the context in which humanity-in-nature lives and narrates. Culture-landscape is envisioned as the practice frame for museology, and one which disrupts dualist philosophy and practice.

Rather than acquisition and interpretation of objects removed from their context, the grounding ontological activity of museum practice in this approach becomes collaborative storytelling. The situated narrative approach thus disrupts acquisition as the grounding ontological activity of museology. A critical perspective on the neoliberal mediation of humanity-in-nature as nothing more than a source of resources emphasizes the experience of Capitalocene injustice. This perspective disrupts the ontological paradox of emancipatory neoliberalism as it offers real emancipation through intentional and co-developed agency. The role of the museum, or rather the museum worker, is initially interventionist and subsequently collaborative.

These ideas are developed with the goal of disrupting the implicit neoliberal ontology of museology for expansion of normalized practice through greater coherence between the theoretical social-ecological responsibilities of museums, which are expansive, and the actual dualist practice frame of museum work, which is restrictive.

#### **4.3.2. *Transcendental potentials***

In order to avoid reinforcing normalized divisions, the situated narrative approach may follow a model of relationality between seemingly opposed perspectives such as “intergenerational practices and the institutional sciences” (O’Donoghue, Sandoval-Rivera & Payyappallimana 2019, 1). That is, a situated turn for museum practice may develop a relational focus on western and intergenerational perspectives on place, ecological change and biodiversity.

Museology in the eco-decolonial mode may thus bring situated narratives of intergenerational knowledge into dialectical dialogue with the “scientific propositions [that] have become the conceptual capital for informing future sustainability” (O’Donoghue, Sandoval-Rivera &

Payyappallimana 2019, 1). Such propositions are limited in their capacity to bring agency and change because of the limitations of the empirical realism of the scientific method (Price 2019). A critical problem that ecological scientists face is that they lack a formal means to take action on issues like the greenhouse effect because their models are limited to closed systems. “Empirical realism ... admits only a narrow part of reality ... into the realm of ontology” (Price 2019, 31). There are compelling reasons to believe in the greenhouse effect, yet “there is no requirement for policy to be designed according to it if it cannot be empirically, experimentally tested and if models based on it cannot reliably predict future events” (Price 2019, 32). Only that which is replicable in a closed experimental system is allowed as part of reality, which impedes action to mitigate the effects of open-system phenomena such as the greenhouse effect and allows denialists to say that the accelerated global warming that is caused by exacerbation of the greenhouse effect by human production of greenhouse gases is not a real phenomenon.

For “people who are interested in ecology,” such as many museum people and certainly in the development of the eco-decolonial mode of museology, “empirical realism is problematic” (Price 2019, 32). For instance, the economic models for transformation to which museums are tied are underpinned by empirical science or simply by the denialism it enables, and thus operate as if the greenhouse effect is not real. These models are disconnected from policy positions from the “rest of” the social sciences on the need for action, positions which can be relegated as idealist in that they have no apparent scientific backing. This deepens the perspective on the rhetorical nature of environmental policy (Jeffery 2021a, 56), as well as the perspective on the implicit neoliberal ontology of museology.

There is a pressing need for “the ontology in mainstream ontological-axiological chains to include that which is nonempirical but also real,” for instance to recognize that “the greenhouse effect is ... real and should be addressed in policy” (Price 2019, 32). Situated narratives are a form of non-verifiable but also real information or evidence, for instance for the greenhouse effect or rather social-ecological impacts that indicate that it is real, that could be included in the ontology of mainstream ontological-axiological chains, the chains that determine the values of being (what is) and becoming (what should be). That is, situated narratives are potentially data that may be used by ecologists in the advent of the transcendental realism that Price sees as antidote to the inability of empirical realist science to cope with open-system phenomena (Price 2019, 32).

Situated narratives are transcendental realist in that they admit the common-sense retroductive interpretations of phenomena that Price emphasizes (2019, 36). They can be considered retroductive evidence of the truth of statements at the level of structure and mechanisms, and of the truth of phenomena such as the greenhouse effect and the consequences of

its disruption at the level of practice. That is, we can say, 'Subsistence farmers struggle ever harder to produce their crops,' and using a dialectic of intergenerational and scientific knowledge in situated narratives, we can then retroduce that the reason farmers struggle to produce crops is change in the climate due to the disrupted greenhouse effect. Such narratives, in Price's common-sense approach to ecology, are narratives of the real experience of the conditions of open systems, and illustrate the truth of open system conditions in ways that formal science at present cannot.

Situated narratives generate evidence of phenomena that can inform retroductive reasoning that demonstrates the truth of ecological phenomena. They also show these to be social-ecological phenomena as the social impacts that are the focus of dualist decolonial museology are causally linked to the ecological phenomena that are generative of those impacts. This should show that economic transformative measures are ineffective as they cannot resolve the deep causal status of, for instance, the greenhouse effect at the planetary level. This potentially disrupts museological dualism and the implicit neoliberal ontology to be transformative of museums as social-ecological structures.

The focus on situated narrative admits marginalized knowledge, in a decolonizing impulse. In so doing, it deepens perspectives on the "real things (structures and mechanisms) that produce the flux of the phenomena of the world" (Price 2019, 37). This is the "realist, common-sense aim ... of scientific understanding" and a potentially ecologizing impulse. Hence, the situated narrative focus is relational in the eco-decolonial sense developed in this study. It is also potentially able to contribute to an emergent transcendental realist mode of scientific practice, as described by Price (2019).

If the scientific endeavour is understood as a transcendental realist rather than an empirical realist undertaking, then all that "the non-experimental scientist" is required to do to make contributions of value "is to identify and describe ... some interesting and significant object of inquiry" (Price 2019, 37; also see Bhaskar 2008b, 132). An eco-decolonial museologist may be considered a form of non-experimental scientist. They may use situated narratives to potentially contribute to transcendental realist ecology as the relational eco-decolonial form of narrative inquiry identifies and describes interesting objects of inquiry.

Eco-decolonial museum workers, in collaboration with communities and ecologists, may thus help generate a body of knowledge that contributes to an "interdisciplinary transcendental realist process of judgemental rationality" (Price 2019, 39). The eco-decolonial can recognize and conduct programmes from the common-sense basis that "knowing about the effect of carbon dioxide on global temperatures is enough to suggest that we should reduce the world's carbon dioxide output if we want humanity as we know it to survive" (Price 2019, 42). This disrupts the dualism that absents scientific perspectives from socially focused museum work and contributes to

the knowledge base that can encourage policy change and facilitate more rapid action on urgent social-ecological issues.

The transcendental is that which exists beyond the empirical (Price 2019, 42). The transcendental realism of the eco-decolonial lies in its retrodution that neoliberal ontology is the deep causal mechanism of the persistence of the dualist ontology of museology, aligned with the retrodution that the greenhouse effect is worsened by the political, social and material conditions of the neoliberal era, the Capitalocene. The eco-decolonial mode of practice is thus transcendently emergent from the causal and relational positionality of the greenhouse effect and neoliberal ideology, and this is the basis for situated eco-decolonial activist practice.

Museum workers may act in a transcendental realist way, in that they may assume the truth of the greenhouse effect, and also an activist way, in that they may assume the agency to take action regardless of the methodological expectations of empirical realist science or the restrictions placed on their practice by neoliberal ontology. This expansion may initially occur through interstitial activism by workers underpinned by emergent philosophical and theoretical developments towards critical perspectives on practice, such as the eco-decolonial. Deeper expansion of practice is possible through the Cultural Historical Activity Theory methodology of the Change Laboratory, as is discussed below.

#### ***4.3.3. Practical implications of the situated narrative approach***

In practical terms, the situated narrative approach will entail museum curators working in the field to facilitate the emergence of narratives of peoples' relations to culture-landscape. The eco-decolonial situated narrative approach differs from traditional museological approaches in that it is not primarily historical, in that it is not focused on the past alone although it has a vital perspective on historical context, and is not primarily archival. It is an activist and interventionist approach, a mode of knowledge co-production in which the museum is a facilitator of interactions between intergenerational and scientific knowledge. This is the ontological change in the object of the activity of the museum that can be understood through Cultural Historical Activity Theory and developed through Change Laboratories, as discussed below.

The oral accounts that will certainly emerge in the situated narrative approach may be recorded but the acquisition (the collection and storage) of intergenerational knowledge by the museum is not a goal of the eco-decolonial mode of museology. In line with the need to disrupt acquisition as an ontological activity, the practical focus is on demarginalizing intergenerational knowledge in a dialectical engagement with scientific knowledge (as elaborated above), towards a deeper understanding of social-ecological crises and potentials for their mitigation. The process is

focused on co-development of emergent perspectives between museums and representatives of scientific and intergenerational knowledge. Writing, drawing, sculpture, performance or other such creative expressions (some of which were employed in the development and run of the 'Humanature' exhibition, as elaborated in Article 4) can be facilitated by the museum and co-curated to bring the emergent perspectives into active use in exhibition programmes and co-engaged learning opportunities.

The primary aim of the situated narrative approach is thus not to gather and archive but to generate new dialectical perspectives on urgent social-ecological issues, so that the museum as social-ecological structure may live up to its social-ecological responsibilities towards humanity-in-nature. The narratives are the core of an active process of knowledge co-production that potentially offers the custodians of intergenerational knowledge active agency in a context, social-ecological crisis, that is normally, or normatively, the preserve of ecological science.

Museological projects focused on intergenerational or 'indigenous' knowledge usually focus on "management and preservation ... through providing resources and expertise in collection, organization, storage and retrieval" (Stevens 2008, 25). Recording may be an element of the eco-decolonial situated narrative approach, but the philosophy behind the process and the goal changes. Narratives are not merely stored, conserved and perhaps reproduced in a dualist exhibition with a social focus. They are operationalized for agency in a dialectical agentive act of social-ecological co-production. The relational way of working that draws in scientific perspectives means that the process is not knowledge transfer or knowledge archiving alone, but is a process of situational, dialectically relational knowledge generation in response to a crisis context, that of the social-ecological crisis. This is representative of a new ecology of knowledges (de Sousa Santos, Arriscado and Meneses 2008: xx) for museums and museum practice, suited to the revitalisation of relevance that is discussed below.

#### **4.3.3.1. Collecting and situated narratives: A dialectical mode of collections practice**

The most likely objection to the eco-decolonial perspective on situated narratives, and to the eco-decolonial philosophy and its critique of the acquisitive ontology of museology, is the traditionalist perspective that it is a museum's primary purpose to collect and preserve things. That is, the most likely objection to the new ontology proposed here is to be an invocation of the old ontology and the sacrosanct position of acquisition in defining the museum. This can be answered from the position that if the museum is to improve peoples' lives then the focus of museology must become agency. As discussed above, however, acquisition is not to be abandoned, but to be conducted from a reflexive ontological positionality that enables collections to become agentive. The idea here is *not*

to do away with collections or collecting but to encourage reflexivity on the ontological foundation of the practice of collecting, or acquisition, and to find new ways for the practice of collecting to enable museums to facilitate the mitigation of social-ecological risk.

More specifically, in the eco-decolonial mode of museology the collection and the practice of collecting enter into a dialectical relationship with social-ecological reality and the practice of facilitating situated narratives. That is, the eco-decolonial mode of museological practice will be centred on a dialectical relationship between collections and situated narratives. For example, such a dialectic was the core of the practice that took place in the *Humanature* exhibition that is discussed in Article 4 as an example of 4D practice (Jeffery 2021c). The situated narratives that were curated into the exhibition entered into a dialectical relationship with the objects from the museum's collections, the manuscripts of poet and marine biologist Douglas Livingstone.

Figure 4 (page 74) models the emergence of the eco-decolonial mode of museology from the onto-axiological chain, with an emphasis on the centrality of the new, dialectical relationship between collections and situated narratives. This figure also illustrates the overall movement of the study through the four articles, which carry out the progressive development of the eco-decolonial mode of museology through the onto-axiological chain (also see the 'Ladder Plan' in Appendix 1). In the eco-decolonial mode, practice emerges from the dialectical relationship between collections and situated narratives. Practice in effect becomes a dialectical act, the dialectic in action.

As well as revitalizing the agency of the museum through processes of co-production, the dialectic between collections and situated narratives thus also offers potential to revitalize the impact and care of collections. Collections in South African museums have in many cases become neglected for reasons that include a "lack of standardised policies and procedures for all aspects of collections, as well as a lack of national strategy" and which is "symptomatic of ... underlying problems of governance and human capital" (Hamer et al., 2011, 39-40). The failure of care for collections, particularly natural science collections though Hamer et al. (2011, 76) note the relevance of their concerns for all types of collection, stems from dualism. Natural science collections fall under the care of the Department of Arts and Culture, but "the perceptions of the collection staff are that this governance structure is inappropriate because the collections have no relevance to arts or culture, and their primary function is for scientific research" (Hamer et al., 2011, 77).

The eco-decolonial brings collections into a new, dialectical relationship with situated narratives, with the lived experience and intergenerational memory of individuals and communities. This is a way to reimagine the dualist museum by reimagining the collection and the relationship between collections and society. Collection is the grounding ontological activity of museology, as elaborated above, and collection must thus be part of the new relational, dialectical ontology for

museology that is envisioned in this study, if collection is not to become part of a new dualism of collection versus situated narratives, or collection versus the eco-decolonial. The relational eco-decolonial mode of museology must not set up new ‘either-or’ situations, but be generative of new and relational ways of thinking that are emergent from dialectical positionalities.

#### **4.3.3.2. *Situated narratives and the relevance of museums***

The situated narrative approach is a means for museums to become more relevant to society by engaging with issues that are important to people in their lived experiences. Museums as mainstream social structures, with an audience typically wealthy and educated (Burton & Scott 2003, 57), are particularly distant from marginalized people.

The situated narrative approach includes a recognition of the irony in the contemporary western environmentalist tendency to ‘discover’ ideas inherent to marginalized intergenerational knowledge (see, for instance, Murdock 2020, 38). The DCR 1M lamination ensures a historical perspective on the continuum of such restrictive social conditions, which is underpinned by colonial and then neoliberal capitalist influences (Jeffery 2021a, 61, and see the problem statement in the introduction). Historical depth is a crucial element of the dialectical character of the eco-decolonial mode of museology and of its potential to generate relevance for museums.

Marginalization is the experience of “the dynamic process of being shut out, fully or partially, from any of the social, economic, political and cultural systems which determine the social integration of a person in society” (Sandell 2003, 47). It is the process through which “persons are peripheralized on the basis of their identities,” and is associated with an absence of access to resources and representation that is a product of structural barriers that diminish agency (Butler & Adamowski 2015, 154). The facilitation of the emergence of the situated narratives of marginalized people, in the process illustrated in the ‘Humanature’ exhibition project, is potentially an “anti-oppressive practice ... a means of opening up discourse ... around structural barriers [in] practice” (Butler & Adamowski 2015, 154). That is, this is potentially a means to absent the absenting of freedom by oppressive discourses and practices such as those of neoliberalism.

Marginalized people are arguably the people most in need of the agency that eco-decolonial museological practice potentially offers. To focus on people who are most in need of agency, the people who continue to suffer from the effects of the injustices that are perpetuated by colonialism’s neoliberal successor, potentially gives museums the relevance and legitimacy they need as social structures. This relates back to the foundation of the eco-decolonial in the construction of relationality between decolonial and ecological positions (Jeffery 2021a, 48-49).

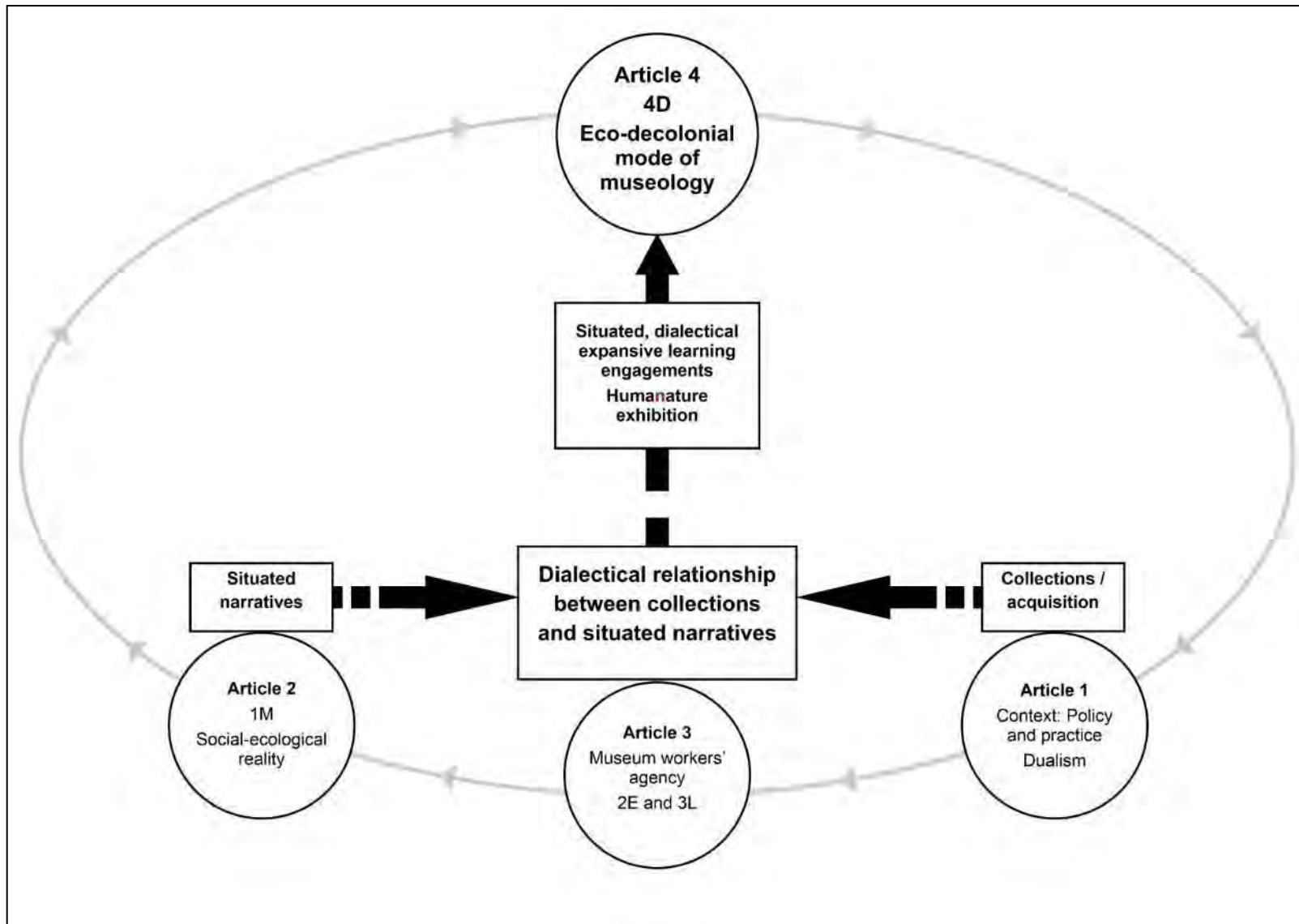


Figure 4. Modelling the emergence of the eco-decolonial mode of museology from the onto-axiological chain

It is possible to further develop the eco-decolonial position on marginalization. The introduction raises the position that neoliberal exploitation is not confined to indigenous peoples but has spread to encompass the entirety of the societies that live under the material conditions of modern democracy (Pichler, Brand & Görg 2020). As neoliberal ideology flows through the 1M lamination, as discussed above and explored in detail in Article 2 (Jeffery 2021a, 54-61), so does marginalization. It is structural, and fundamental to neoliberalism. Alienation is a form of marginalization, and the situated narrative approach is one in which alienated workers (Jeffery 2021a, 58) may collaborate with marginalized people to resist the material conditions caused by neoliberal ideology.

It is not possible to disrupt marginalization without a perspective on the deep structural causal mechanisms and on the pervasive nature of marginalization. This is why it is important that those doing the eco-decolonial work in museums do so with a critical eye on their own positionality and on the restrictions on their practice and the causal mechanisms of those restrictions. Hence, the strong focus on positionality in the introduction. The eco-decolonial work of demarginalization – of people, of the more-than-human, of humanity-in-nature – emerges from this relational perspective on the pervasive nature of marginalized positionalities.

#### ***4.3.4. Reflexivity on the development of critical ideas around collecting and situated narratives***

The value of a thesis supervisor is in the depth of the experience that guides their critical eye on the work that is in development. During a final read-through, my supervisor pointed out the danger of constructing a new dualism between the situated narrative approach of the eco-decolonial and the practice of acquisition, or collection. It became clear that it was necessary to more fully emphasize the intention that the eco-decolonial mode of museology should include a dialectical relationship between these elements.

It is clear to me, on reflection, that I at least to some extent allowed my personal focus on the eco-decolonial critique of neoliberal ontology to dull my critical perspective on the relationship between the eco-decolonial mode of practice and modes of practice already in place, and that in doing so, I risked generating a new dualism and thus undermining the emphasis that is placed on relationality in this study. This is illustrative of the danger for one's passion to cloud the critical, reflexive positionality that is outlined in the introduction as vital to the value of the work. This is also why students working on PhD studies absolutely need a supervisor.

#### **4.4. Some policy implications of the study**

Three initial implications for policy emerge from this study. First, there is a need to properly implement the existing environmentally sensitized policy, which is often rhetorical as it is absented by neoliberal economic imperatives (Jeffery 2021a, 56).

Secondly, there is a need to modify existing policy to develop the relational perspectives that are necessary for transformation. This is so in the case of the National Heritage Resources Act (NHRA) (South African Government 1999), the Act that governs museum practice, and which has a social focus allied to the economic focus on emancipatory potentials (Jeffery 2017, 22). That is, the NHRA is underpinned by the emancipatory neoliberalism that is a focus of critique in this study. Relational policy potentials could emerge from a critical dialectical study of the NHRA and other heritage policy documents in relation to, for instance, the National Environmental Management Act (NEMA) (South African Government 1998). This is potentially a means to generate relational, eco-decolonial policy thinking, bearing in mind the emergence of all policy from the neoliberal ideological context. (This relates to the exploration of this study's potential applicability across the social sciences, discussed below.)

Finally, there is a need for new heritage policy that is developed to be explicitly relational and to explicitly emphasize the social-ecological crisis as the context for practice.

The challenge to the successful implementation of these policy developments is the power of the neoliberal ideology. A further challenge is to inculcate a sense of the urgency and value of relational eco-decolonial perspectives in policy-makers. To this end it is necessary to convince those in the heritage sector who have the potential to influence policy-makers that there is value in the eco-decolonial approach. These include, for example, the boards and membership of the two associations of museum professionals in South Africa, the South African Museums Association (SAMA) and the South African branch of the International Council of museums (ICOM-SA). I have sat on the boards of these associations before, and hope to do so again in the future and to bring the eco-decolonial agenda to their tables.

To change policy or to develop new policy and to bring about policy-practice consistency is a deep challenge, ultimately on the level of transforming the unjust systems of capitalism. Lotz-Sisitka (2016, 321) outlines the ways in which transformation in environmental education is deeply challenging because of the depths at which its goals must take effect. This depth perspective similarly applies to the transformation of museum practice. Absenting the dualism of museology ultimately requires absenting the restrictive, violent dualism of neoliberal ideology and its deeply entrenched position in modern society. It requires the absenting of the capitalist economic system

and its emphasis on quantitative performance measurement and individualism, and its tendencies towards exploitative labour relations and exploitative human-nature relations.

Ultimately, the transformation of policy and of museology is part of a movement towards a new society, one “based on ... social-ecological justice where the flourishing of one is related to the flourishing of all life forms” (Lotz-Sisitka 2016, 321; also see Bhaskar 2008a, 91). The development of policy and of policy-practice consistency can be equated with the resolution of the paradox of emancipatory neoliberalism. While there is potential for such change through micro- and meso-level interstitial activism, and the reciprocity of structure and agency notwithstanding, this is change that must ultimately occur at levels that are more difficult to reach and to influence, the macro- and the mega-levels. This implies a long process of work specifically targeted at policy development at overlying levels for the development of practical change potentials.

#### **4.5. Possibilities for future work**

##### ***4.5.1. The potential applicability of the eco-decolonial perspective across the social sciences***

The perspectives on neoliberal ideological influences on the heritage sector potentially shed light on similar restrictions in other sectors of the social sciences (see Jessop 2013 for an overview of responses to neoliberalism across various disciplines). The development of the eco-decolonial perspective surfaces the paradox that decolonial policy proposes to counter the inequalities and violence of colonial dualist capitalism through the inequalities and violence of neoliberal dualist capitalism, the paradox of emancipatory neoliberalism. The need this implies for a deeper level of historical reflexivity and critique into the post-apartheid context of practice is likely to hold true across the decolonial social sciences. Economist Kate Raworth (2017) explores the pervasive nature of the challenges emergent from persistent, outdated modes of economic practice, challenges towards the resolution of which the eco-decolonial may contribute.

Although the conditions and specifics will naturally vary across fields, the disciplines of the social sciences emerge from the same mega- and macro-level ideological and policy generation networks as museology (Jeffery 2021a, 54-56) and operate within the same neoliberal focus on economics as both the source and the measure of transformation (Jeffery 2017, 22-23). They all carry out their practice within the same neoliberal economic context and practice frame that Raworth (2017) critiques. If the social sciences broadly suffer from many of the same restrictions, contradictions and inconsistencies and the same absence of social-ecological relationality caused by the same or similar mechanisms as those that have been identified in the museological context, it is thus likely that future work will demonstrate that the eco-decolonial mode of philosophy, theory and practice has potential applicability in other fields.

The development of the eco-decolonial way of thinking, underlaboured by dialectical critical realist philosophy, has thus developed a relational, critical and reflexive perspective on deep causal mechanisms of restrictions on theory and practice that is potentially valuable across the social sciences. The work done in the museological sphere can be considered an example or illustration of eco-decolonial potentials across disciplines.

The dialectical critical realist approach may be used in future work to explore this potential. For instance, the constellational potentials explored in Article 4 (Jeffery 2021c, 7-12) surface interdisciplinary links between the museological perspective and other disciplines in the social sciences and thus potentially offer a conduit through which the eco-decolonial positionality may flow across disciplinary boundaries.

#### ***4.5.2. Developing museological perspectives on the more-than-human***

The inclusion of more-than-human populations in the concept of humanity-in-nature demands a critical perspective on the treatment of animals or plants as legitimate museum objects, that is, as things rather than beings (see, for instance, Wehner 2017, 85-100). This raises the issue of who speaks for these populations, who has the *right* to speak for them, and what decisions can be taken to ensure that their right to representation is observed. It also underpins development of a critical perspective on the museum science practice of killing living things for specimen collections.

This practice is legitimated by the inadequate empirical realist scientific model (Price 2019). As discussed above, this bears no relation to real world open-system conditions, which calls into question the legitimacy of claims of the need for specimens for scientific data sets (see, for instance, Suarez & Tsutsui 2004, 66), because such sets can never constitute information from which meaningful action in open systems may follow, that is, action generative of policy-level transformation. The transcendental realist model for science that Price describes can counter this situation. However, the transcendental eco-decolonial perspective will include ethical metaphysical perspectives (Price 2016b, 340) that will counter the outdated scientific rationalism that legitimates the killing of living things for anthropocentric purposes of inquiry grounded in the neoliberal ontological positionality that “biological collections provide direct financial and social benefits to society” (Suarez & Tsutsui 2004, 72).

The rationalism that in this way treats living things as resources is an expression of illegitimate dualist philosophy, and an element of the implicit neoliberal ontology that governs museum practice. The eco-decolonial perspective includes the liberation of the more-than-human from the status of resources, just as it includes the liberation of humanity-in-nature from the status

of resources. Future work will develop the eco-decolonial ethical positionality on animals-as-objects through the DCR perspective on metaReality (Price 2016b).

#### **4.5.3. Situated narrative potentials: Service delivery protest and Covid-19**

The study positions situated narratives of humanity-in-nature as vital to the eco-decolonial mode of museology. The eco-decolonial mode of thinking offers a new, social-ecological focus for museology and its situated narrative approach has implications for improving museums' relevance through engaging with social-ecological issues that are important to people in their lived experiences. Examples of such issues may be found in service delivery protest, and in the experience of living during the Covid-19 pandemic.

A social-ecological perspective on service delivery protest as grounded in ecological concerns was introduced in the first article (Jeffery 2017, 25) and briefly developed in the fifth (Jeffery 2019, 33). These noted that service delivery protest is often about issues that relate to both social and ecological justice, or to social-ecological justice in the relational mode, for instance water security, food security, sanitation, housing, health, energy and land.

The Covid-19 pandemic is an equally significant example of potential for a situated narrative approach that highlights social-ecological issues. As was noted in the introduction, the global pandemic has highlighted justice issues (see, for instance, Manderson & Levine on the inequities evident in personal capacities to respond to Covid-19) which already inform an emergent body of museological work (see, for instance, Tully 2020; Samaroudi, Echavarria & Perry 2020). The pandemic has further emphasized the social-ecological inequalities that are also at the root of service delivery protest, and the pandemic thus offers a recontextualization of those issues. The pandemic is a new, emergent reality within which to reconsider and reframe social-ecological issues. This fluid character is also relevant to the dynamic approach outlined in the 'Transcendental Potentials' section above.

The first step in future work to develop these ideas will be to elaborate on the idea of service delivery protest as a social-ecological phenomenon. A 1M analysis will give a deep ontological perspective on the context and causes of such protest, and the pandemic can be considered in tandem with this. For instance, it is recognized that the lockdown during the pandemic has caused a drop in the number of protests, but this is not a realistic picture of service delivery or of community satisfaction (Stoddard 2020). It is merely a temporary and circumstantial suppression of activism, and the persistence of injustice is illuminated by the inequalities in the ability to isolate from the virus, in the risk of contracting it and in the ability to recover from the virus, as well as in access to any potential antivirus treatments (Manderson & Levine 2020, 368).

A museological focus on the causes of service delivery protest and potentials for their mitigation is relevant to museology's focus on relevance and impact and the need to have positive effects on people's lives. This focus may help to absent the absence of social-ecological relationality and relevance from museology, and may be framed within the eco-decolonial situated narrative approach.

Such connections potentially position museums to interrogate inequalities that arise from or are perpetuated by the neoliberal systems that underpin these initiatives, and thus to support communities' demands for accountability (Alexander 2010; Managa 2012). The social-ecological perspective on service delivery protest may be linked to the need for deeper connections between critical museum practice and the material conditions of democracy (conditions elucidated by, for instance, Pichler, Brand & Görg 2020), a need which emerges in the study's discussion of neoliberal ideology and its positionality as a deep causal mechanism of restrictions on practice. Links between poverty, protest and the material conditions of democracy, for instance the structural resistance to change in the foundational position of fossil fuel consumption (Pichler, Brand & Görg 2020, 194), may be explored in the eco-decolonial mode of museology.

These potentials inhere in the idea of a situated narrative approach to museum practice focused on people and their stories of social-ecological crisis. These are stories which surely will surface the frustrations that are expressed in service delivery protest, and the fears and challenges experienced during the Covid-19 pandemic and how the experience of material conditions influences the ability or absence of ability to respond to the threat posed by the virus.

#### **4.6. Change Laboratories for the iterative development and implementation of the eco-decolonial mode of museology**

This study positions the eco-decolonial as a means to surface and to absent the absence of the social-ecological relationality that is vital to museology in this time of social-ecological crisis. The implementation of the eco-decolonial mode of museology will be challenging as it critiques and seeks to disrupt the foundational principles of museology, dualism and acquisition, and implicates these in historical and ongoing injustice. It must thus be developed and implemented carefully, clearly and with sensitivity.

The principal challenge for future work is thus to create a path along which there is potential to move towards the implementation of an eco-decolonial mode of museology. It remains to be seen to what extent the eco-decolonial concept may be positively received in the museum sector as a way of thinking about and practicing museum work. Nevertheless, the progressive social-ecological positionalities of museum workers suggested by the interviews conducted as part of this study

(Jeffery 2021a, 56-60) suggest that there is potential for the eco-decolonial mode of practice to be welcomed.

The initial iteration of the eco-decolonial mode that is developed in this thesis, which is itself an expansive activity (Jeffery 2021c, 7), may be further developed through deep engagement with museums, museum workers and the people whose lives museums do or should improve through opportunities for increased agency. The eco-decolonial is an example of the potential emergent from DCR for museums to learn to work in new ways, to expand their practice and their emancipatory potentials. This can be further developed using the Cultural Historical Activity Theory (CHAT) methodology of Change Laboratories.

The Change Laboratory (henceforth CL) methodology offers potential for introducing the eco-decolonial mode into museology, developing it iteratively, and bringing philosophical, theoretical and practical change to museum practice through a dialectical process. The practical, transformative framework of the CL “facilitates both intensive, deep transformations and continuous incremental improvement” (Engeström et al., 1996, 10). The CL is a mechanism used to design new practice (Engeström & Sannino 2010, 10), such as the eco-decolonial mode of museology. CL interventions generate expansive learning cycles and learning actions, typically on a time scale of weeks to months (Engeström & Sannino 2010, 12), in a “reflexive framework and methodological process for engaging with the contradictions and absences” (Baloi 2016, 215) that the DCR perspective makes visible.

“Dialectical critical realism effectively underlabours CHAT” (Mukute 2016, 191) because DCR, with its stratified and historical perspective, provides the ontological depth that counters the danger of CHAT operating with an implicit ontology (Mukute 2016, 191; also see Nunez 2014, 44-47). Lotz-Sisitka and Price (2016, 10) elucidate the way in which DCR, with its dialectical perspective, can “help to deepen the ontological dynamics of CHAT.” “Learning is a passage through the dialectic” (Lotz-Sisitka & Price 2016, 9), and a DCR foundation brings this dialectical perspective to expansive learning in CLs. DCR situates the work historically, and together with CLs, can generate the emergence of transformative agency.

Through its symbiosis with DCR the collaborative CL is potentially a good means to develop the eco-decolonial mode and move towards a form or forms that might be implemented. The CL is motivated by an “interventionist researcher’ with “explicit emancipatory ... objectives, with the project participants [engaged in] a dialogical process of mutual learning” (Baloi 2016, 215). CLs led by this study’s author as interventionist may be used to help museums to learn to work in an eco-decolonial mode, or rather, to help museum workers to learn to work in this way. Again, as discussed in Article 2 (Jeffery 2021a, 57) and demonstrated in practice in Article 4 (Jeffery 2021c,

11), the agency of museum workers is the agency of the museum. Through the CLs, museum workers can learn how the eco-decolonial is conceived and more importantly, help to shape iterations of it that suit their museum's needs or the needs of museums more broadly.

The CLs can find sensitive ways to invite marginalized communities to participate, people who can help to shape the eco-decolonial mode in practice and help museum workers to learn to implement it to the benefit of both museums and communities. As outlined above, marginalized people are the people to whom museums have the least relevance. A blended DCR and CL approach, through a "process of collective factualizing leading to democratic decisions" (Price 2016a, 22), potentially brings marginalized people and knowledge out of their subaltern position and into dialectical interaction with dominant epistemologies, as discussed in the 'Transcendental Potentials' section above. Drawing on the "distributed cognition" and reflexivity of all those involved in the CL (Mukute 2016, 198) reasserts the integrity of marginalized knowledge. It also generates the cooperative development of knowledge in a "mutual learning process" (Sabai 2016, 186) from which may emerge the new ecology of eco-decolonial knowledge.

The CL is thus a powerful means towards co-engaged learning in the museum context, and a means to bring the practical potentials of DCR philosophical perspectives into active, iterative development and use in museology. This is a way to move forward into future work in development of the eco-decolonial mode of museology. CL work will develop the eco-decolonial expansion of practice through the generation of constellations of theoretical perspectives and various practical pathways for their implementation.

The position of this study is that change in the museum can come about first and foremost through the actions of workers in museums, as shown in the Article 4 case study (Jeffery 2021c, 12-23). Hence, the focus on the idea of interstitial activism as a transformative pathway, that is, on the potential for activist, transformative and agentic action from within the ontological formation of the museum. The CL is a potential forum for interstitial activism. It is a space in which museum workers may voice their concerns and desires and help to implement new modes of thinking and practice that are absented by the current ontological regimes that absent workers' values and agency.

Change brought about or envisioned by workers in CLs can potentially filter upwards through the relational structure of the levels of the 1M lamination. Further CLs in the series will be necessary to achieve this flow of change to overlying levels, first to museum management and then to governance levels. This process, which moves beyond the confines of a single museum, could be facilitated through the capacity of the two professional museum bodies, SAMA and ICOM-SA. These

bodies' links with government-level policymakers may be operationalized to set up CLs that include policymakers.

CLs can help the new, relational museology take a leading role in promoting action to mitigate the social-ecological impacts of the greenhouse effect. They can introduce the eco-decolonial mode, develop it collaboratively and from a range of perspectives, and implement it. Change Laboratories are potentially an enhanced, expansive approach to what was done in Article 4, and offer further means for 4D trials and iterative development of the eco-decolonial mode of practice.

#### **4.7. A proposed (re)definition of the museum**

The introduction explains why this study largely ignores the formal definition of the museum. A new definition is proposed here, in the light of the perspectives developed in this study on the need for awareness of deep causal mechanisms of restrictive ontology and the need for social-ecological relationality underpinned by dialectical positionalities.

This is a response to the definition that was proposed by ICOM at the organisation's 2019 Conference in Kyoto, and which was rejected amid the controversy discussed above. This rejected definition is repeated here for ease of reference. To engage in a moment of personal reflexivity, the rejected definition seems inadequate if for no other reason than its transparent and clumsy attempt to be first and foremost a politically correct statement.

Museums are democratizing, inclusive and polyphonic spaces for critical dialogue about the pasts and the futures. Acknowledging and addressing the conflicts and challenges of the present, they hold artefacts and specimens in trust for society, safeguard diverse memories for future generations and guarantee equal rights and equal access to heritage for all people. Museums are not for profit. They are participatory and transparent, and work in active partnership with and for diverse communities to collect, preserve, research, interpret, exhibit, and enhance understandings of the world, aiming to contribute to human dignity and social justice, global equality and planetary wellbeing.

This is the proposed definition:

Museums aspire to be inclusive and critical spaces in which historical, relational perspectives on the deep entanglement of humanity with nature are foundational to a responsibility to elucidate and mitigate the social-ecological crisis that is the most pressing and urgent threat

to life on Earth in the twenty-first century. Acknowledging the implication of the museum and its traditional dualist philosophy and practices of collection in historical trajectories of inequality, injustice and the exploitation of human and more-than-human life, the museum aspires to draw on a diversity of perspectives and positions in order to evolve towards a relational and collaborative mode of philosophy, theory and practice that may help to ensure the right to happiness and flourishing of all living things.

#### **4.8. Reflexivity: A personal, eco-decolonial perspective on capital and capitalism that has emerged during this study**

Capital does not think it needs a healthy environment. It only 'cares' about people and other living beings insofar as they are defined as resources, in the same sense as fossil fuels, to be used within its own ontological and practical systems. It does not factor in the external context of these systems, that is, its resources' own ontologies and practicalities, and it does not factor in its impacts on these resources because it denies any such external context. That is, it denies the intrinsic, independent ontological worth of humans and non-humans. This separation is foundational to capitalist ontology and practicality. Capital justifies its use of resources by separating itself from them hierarchically and using that separation to define resources as having no meaningful existence outside the systems of capital.

While denying resources any other ontological state and subsuming them into itself, capital simultaneously separates itself from the impacts its processes have on the resources upon which it relies. This blindness to its self-destructive tendencies is the deepest and most dangerous level of the paradox of emancipatory neoliberalism. Capital cannot see the external impacts caused by capitalism's ontological positionality and practical activities on the resources that do in fact exist outside the capitalist ontological cage.

Capitalism cannot see how it causes the changes that will wear away the resources upon which capitalism itself relies. Capital cannot see external forces such as the greenhouse effect, and cannot see that it is its own blinkered vision that is causing the greenhouse effect to disrupt global climate in dangerous ways. It cannot see states of being other than its own. Mere availability for consumption is the value that the capitalist perspective attaches to being. There is thus a desperate need for a more compassionate governing perspective for the world that will replace mere availability with inherent potential for flourishing. My hope is that the eco-decolonial is a contribution towards this.

## **5. CONCLUSION**

### **5.1. Review of how the problem statement has been addressed**

This study has demonstrated the proposition that in the postcolonial era the historical dualism that set up human-nature hierarchies in museology is perpetuated by and through neoliberal governance systems, which implicate museums in an intensifying global pattern of injustices and inequalities. The study has shown that emergent museological perspectives that are tentatively critical of dualism have not developed a perspective on the deep causal positionality of neoliberal ontology and its reliance on dualism. This means that there is an equal absence of perspective on the way the alignment of neoliberal ontology with museological dualism appropriates museology's emancipatory potentials into unjust neoliberal systems.

It is thus this study's position that the implicit neoliberal ontology of museology, which was surfaced using the seven laminations of scale, is the principal challenge that museums face today. The implicit neoliberal ontology is hidden by the absence of a museological perspective on deep causal mechanisms. This absence is absented in the eco-decolonial mode of museology that is underlaboured by DCR philosophy. The analysis moved through the dialectical critical realist onto-axiological chain of being and becoming towards eco-decolonial transformational potentials in philosophy, theory and practice.

The relationality of the eco-decolonial mode of museology locates South African museological perspectives at the forefront of international thinking. It offers a pathway along which both South African and international museums may prepare philosophically and theoretically for practice in a context of social-ecological crisis, and offers a dialectical practice frame to displace the outdated and restrictive dualist frame.

### **5.2. Synthesis of the answers to the research questions**

The research questions are as follows:

1. Persistent museological dualism restricts the emancipatory impacts of museology. What are the deep, structural causal mechanisms of museological dualism?
2. How can those mechanisms, and thus dualism, be disrupted in order to progress towards a mode of museology suited to contemporary contexts and needs?
3. What philosophical and theoretical developments are possible to better enable South African and international museology to achieve the demands of transformation in a time of social-ecological crisis?

The answers that are proposed are as follows:

1. The causal mechanisms of museological dualism were identified as historical Cartesian rationality, and a historical continuum of capitalist reliance on dualism for the ontological rationality that classified nature and indigenous peoples as resources. This continuum flows from colonial capital into neoliberal capital, which is reliant on the perpetuation of the ontological conditions set up by colonial capital. The historical emergence of the museum is closely tied to the historical development of capitalist systems, and the museum thus reflects capitalist dualism and is also appropriated as a tool for its perpetuation. This appropriation is achieved through the operation of the paradox of emancipatory neoliberalism at the ontological level, and perpetuated by the absence of capacity to reimagine the museum at the ontological level, as is apparent in the formal process of redefinition of the museum by the International Council of Museums.
2. Dualism may be disrupted at deep, ontological levels through the use of dialectical critical realism. DCR and its onto-axiological chain of being and becoming, or 'MELD' schema, is the philosophical underlabourer that has, in this study, enabled the development of a new, relational, social-ecological mode of museology. The ecological-decolonial or eco-decolonial mode of museology has potential to absent the absences of contemporary museology and to reimagine the museum at the ontological level. The critical realist dialectical 'pulse of freedom' is thus generative of a new agentic, and potentially emancipatory form of museology suited to this time of social-ecological crisis.
3. In this study, the use of DCR offered a substantive philosophical development towards the emergence of emancipatory museology. As shown in the study, DCR enables the development of theoretical positionalities through, for instance, the constellational perspective that opens potentials for interdisciplinary interactions. Transcendental realism opens further potentials for the eco-decolonial to generate relationships between opposed perspectives such as western science and intergenerational knowledge. These, together with the situated narrative approach, generate new ecologies of knowledge and fresh approaches to social-ecological problems and their impacts on humanity-in-nature.

### **5.3. Recommendations**

The recommendations that emerge from this study are as follows:

1. South African decolonial museology's present focus on social justice can be developed further through reflexivity on dualism towards a relational focus on social-ecological justice.
2. An emergent decolonial museological focus on social-ecological justice should be rooted in the contradictions of capital and its neoliberal ideology in order to develop a deep

ontological understanding of the emergence of absences in practice and potentials for the absenting of absences. This is potentially true across the decolonial social sciences because these emerge from the same mega- and macro-level ideological and policy networks and thus suffer the same absences of social-ecological relationality as museology.

3. South African museology should further develop its philosophical and theoretical frameworks. South African perspectives, while being situated and emergent from local reality, may also be developed by locating them in the international context so that they may draw on progressive international perspectives and contribute to those in turn. This will contribute to the emergence of international perspectives and philosophical and theoretical frameworks.
4. In order to disrupt the persistent museological dualism that is rooted in an implicit neoliberal ontology and that limits the emancipatory potentials of museology:
  - i. There should be coherence between theory and practice to resolve the paradoxical and hopeless reliance on emancipatory neoliberalism to bring about deep emancipatory change. This implies a need for policy-level reflexivity on the deep causal positionality of neoliberal ideology and the ways in which the perpetuation of colonial dualism and its injustices and inequalities is inherent to postcolonial neoliberal capitalism.
  - ii. Museology should develop reflexivity at the ontological level, particularly towards the position of acquisition (collection) as the grounding ontological activity of museology.
  - iii. Decolonial South African museum practice should develop an eco-decolonial focus on people as complex social-ecological entities rather than on the social aspect alone, and on community as comprised of entangled human-more-than-human populations with equal rights of citizenship.
  - iv. To this end, South African museums should focus first and foremost on a dialectical interaction between situated narratives of social-ecological experiences and practice traditionally centred on collections, rather than only on acquisition and interpretation of objects removed from their context.
  - v. The social-ecological agency of museum workers, and thus of the museum itself, should be developed through structural changes towards the relational eco-decolonial mode of practice. This mode could be developed through an iterative process of expansive learning and Cultural Historical Activity Theory methodologies such as Change Laboratories in conjunction with the dialectical perspective of DCR. This could bring practical development towards more emancipatory forms of museology, such as the eco-decolonial.

- vi. Whatever new forms of museology may emerge, these must be social-ecologically relational if they are to be relevant in this time of social-ecological crisis.

#### **5.4. Contribution to knowledge**

This study uses DCR philosophy to elucidate the deep, causal structures of restrictions on museum practice. This is an engagement with museology at the ontological level that generates a new philosophical and theoretical framework capable of emancipatory transformation of practice in a context of social-ecological crisis. This framework is called the ecological-decolonial, or eco-decolonial. The eco-decolonial is a new, relational social-ecological perspective generative of potential to disrupt the persistent dualism of museology and its restrictions on practice. Such a relational perspective is vital for the museum as a social structure if it is to be relevant.

The contribution to knowledge of this study is thus a new perspective on the deep, causal mechanisms of the restrictions on museology and the elucidation of new transformative pathways away from restrictive dualist modes of museology and towards a more emancipatory, relational mode of being and becoming for both South African and international museums. The eco-decolonial emphasizes the entanglement of the social and ecological areas of museums' work, which at present are separated philosophically, theoretically and practically despite emergent perspectives. The eco-decolonial thus absents the absences of outdated but persistent dualism.

The eco-decolonial mode of museum philosophy, theory and practice offers new potentials for agency for museums, museum workers, and people who visit or otherwise interact with the museum. The eco-decolonial is thus a museology with social-ecological transformative agency and agentive power that will enable museums to more effectively contribute to the critical elucidation and mitigation of the social-ecological crisis.

Through its dialectical perspective on culture-landscapes in which humanity-in-nature lives and acts, the eco-decolonial enables museology to have a deeper and more meaningful relationship with the complex and turbulent world than is available in the positivist rationalism of the dualist mode of museology. The eco-decolonial can thus potentially contribute to greater flourishing and happiness for humanity-in-nature.

The eco-decolonial mode of museology offers museum workers a philosophy and theory that is generative of structured but reflexive and relational perspectives on their work context. Museum workers are guided by policy and the authorized heritage discourse to focus on marginalized peoples and on marginalized cultures, and this is certainly important. While the interviews that were carried out do demonstrate awareness of the condition, neither the deep reasons for the persistence of marginalization nor the systemic and pervasive nature of

marginalization beyond historically marginalized peoples are considered in any systematic way in practice. The museological focus is solely on colonialism as the historical causal mechanism of contemporary injustices, without a focus on contemporary generative mechanisms that are equally powerful. These mechanisms are encapsulated here in the paradox of emancipatory neoliberalism, and are inherent to the structures within which museological work is conducted. The eco-decolonial illuminates these structural mechanisms and conditions, and thus illuminates potentials for their disruption. That is, the eco-decolonial mode of museology illuminates new potentials for the transformation of the museum as a social structure.

### **5.5. Conclusion of the Conclusion, or, Not Quite the End**

The deeper and more effective philosophical and theoretical framework for South African museology developed here potentially absents the historical dualism that could not be absented by the theories to which museology continues to resort: modernist and postmodernist anthropocentric pluralism. This study shows that dialectical critical realism is a suitable philosophical underlabourer for the emergence of new theoretical frameworks for South African and international museum practice. The development of the eco-decolonial mode is hopefully an illustration of this. Future work to develop the eco-decolonial through expansive learning will continue the development of this new philosophical and theoretical framework and use these to continue the revitalization of museum practice.

The poem 'The Broken String' by the /Xam poet Diä!kwain has become something of a figure for the dispossession of people from land, and of the disconnection of people from the biosphere. It is used as such in the permanent exhibitions of the Amazwi South African Museum of Literature, for instance. The idea of the broken string, however, equally suggests potentials for reconnection. The sense of disconnection in the figure of the broken string may begin to be healed in the dialectical reconnection of humans with nature, in both figurative and literal senses. The eco-decolonial mode offers potentials for retying the string, for forming new knots or a knotwork of connections between humanity and nature, new ways of imagining and of tying together humanature. The string that was broken through dispossession may be retied by a situated eco-decolonial museology.

#### **Song of the Broken String**

Because  
of a people,  
because of others,  
other people  
who came  
breaking

the string for me,  
the earth  
is not earth,  
this place is  
a place now  
changed for me.  
Because  
the string is that which  
has broken for me,  
this earth  
is no longer  
the earth to me,  
this place  
seems no longer  
a place to me.  
Because  
the string is broken,  
the country feels  
as if it lay  
empty before me,  
our country seems  
as if it lay  
both empty before me,  
and dead before me.  
Because  
of this string,  
because of a people  
breaking the string,  
this earth, my place  
is the place  
of something –  
a thing broken –  
that does not  
stop sounding,  
breaking within me.

**Stephen Watson's reworking of Diä!kwain's poem, 1991.**

## REFERENCES

Department of Arts and Culture. (2017). *Revision of the Department of Arts And Culture 1996 White Paper*. <http://www.dac.gov.za/white-papers>

Department of Arts and Culture. (2019). *Protection, Promotion, Development and Management of Indigenous Knowledge Act*.

[https://www.gov.za/sites/default/files/gcis\\_document/201908/4264719-8act6of2019protectpromodevelopmanagementindigenouknowledgeact.pdf](https://www.gov.za/sites/default/files/gcis_document/201908/4264719-8act6of2019protectpromodevelopmanagementindigenouknowledgeact.pdf)

Department of Sport, Arts and Culture. (2021). *Annual Performance Plan*.

<https://www.srsa.gov.za/sites/default/files/APP%20DSAC%202021%20V22.pdf>

International Council of Museums-South Africa. (2016). *Declaration on museums and cultural landscapes*. [http://network.icom.museum/fileadmin/user\\_upload/minisites/icom-south-africa/pdf/Declaration\\_on\\_Museums\\_and\\_Cultural\\_Landscapes\\_FINAL\\_2.0.pdf](http://network.icom.museum/fileadmin/user_upload/minisites/icom-south-africa/pdf/Declaration_on_Museums_and_Cultural_Landscapes_FINAL_2.0.pdf)

International Council of Museums. (2020a). *Museum definition*.

<https://icom.museum/en/resources/standards-guidelines/museum-definition/>

International Council of Museums. (2020b, 19 June). *Resignation of President Suay Aksoy*.

<http://comcol.mini.icom.museum/wp-content/uploads/sites/9/2020/07/Resignation-of-President-Suay-Aksoy.pdf>

South African Cultural Observatory. (2018). *Minister Mthethwa interaction with the creative industries*. <https://www.southafricanculturalobservatory.org.za/article/minister-mthethwa-interaction-with-the-creative-industries>

South African Government. (1998). *National Environmental Management Act*.

<https://www.gov.za/documents/national-environmental-management-act>

South African Government. (1999). *National Heritage Resources Act*.

<https://www.gov.za/documents/national-heritage-resources-act>

South African Government. (2011). *Mzansi's Golden Economy: Contribution of the Arts, Culture and Heritage Sector to the New Growth Path*. <https://www.gov.za/documents/mzansis-golden-economy-contribution-arts-culture-and-heritage-sector-new-growth-path>

United Nations Development Programme. (2021). *Sustainable Development Goals*. <https://tinyurl.com/rrvnbdur>

World Intellectual Property Organization. (2001). *Intellectual property needs and expectations of traditional knowledge holders: WIPO Report on Fact-Finding Missions on Intellectual Property and Traditional Knowledge (1998-1999)*. <https://www.wipo.int/publications/en/details.jsp?id=283&plang=EN>

Abungu, G. (2004). Democratising museums and heritage ten years on. *South African Museums Association Bulletin*, 40(1), 3-5.

Abram, D. (1996). *The spell of the sensuous: Perception and language in a more-than-human world*. New York: Vintage.

Adams, G.K. (2019, 22 August). *Rift emerges over ICOM's proposed museum definition*. Museums Association. <https://www.museumsassociation.org/museums-journal/news/22082019-rift-over-icom-definition>

Adams, G.K. (2019, 18 September). *News: What is a museum in the 21<sup>st</sup> century?*. Museums Association. <https://tinyurl.com/tbmcn82b>

Adams, G.K. (2021, 2 March). *Ideological rift persists as ICOM restarts museum definition consultation*. Museums Association. <https://tinyurl.com/h79j96by>

Adams, W.M. & Mulligan, M. (2003). Introduction: Conservation and decolonization. In W.M. Adams & M. Mulligan (Eds.), *Decolonizing nature: Strategies for conservation in a post-colonial era* (pp. 1-15). Earthscan.

Alexander, P. (2010). Rebellion of the poor: South Africa's service delivery protests – a preliminary analysis. *Review of African Political Economy*, 37(123), 25-40. DOI: 10.1080/03056241003637870

Allen, F. (2015). The state of the climate justice movement in South Africa. *Capitalism Nature Socialism*, 26(2), 46-57. DOI: 10.1080/10455752.2015.1017731

Alonso, M.F. (2008). Can we protect traditional knowledges?. In B. de Sousa Santos, (Ed) *Another knowledge is possible: Beyond northern epistemologies* (pp.249-271). Verso.

Ambrose, T. & Paine, C. (2006). About museums. In T. Ambrose & C. Paine (Eds.), *Museum basics* (pp. 4-5). Routledge.

Anderies, J.M., Janssen, M.A. & Ostrom, E. (2004). A framework to analyze the robustness of social-ecological systems from an institutional perspective. *Ecology and Society*, 9(1), 1-17.

<https://www.ecologyandsociety.org/vol9/iss1/art18/>

Bakker, K.A. & Müller, L. (2010). Intangible heritage and community identity in post-apartheid South Africa. *Museum International*, 62(1), 48-56.

Baloi, A. (2016). Community learning as a passage through the dialectic? Engaging with absences in an irrigation scheme in Mozambique. In L. Price and H. Lotz-Sisitka (Eds.), *Critical realism, environmental learning and social-ecological change* (pp. 212-229). Routledge.

Beck, U. (1992). *Risk society: Towards a new modernity*. Translated by Mark Ritter. Sage.

Bennett, T. (1995). *The birth of the museum: History, theory, politics*. Routledge.

Berkovic, D., Ayton, D., Briggs, A.M. & Ackerman, I.N. (2020). The view from the inside: Positionality and insider research. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 19, 1-4.

DOI:10.1177/1609406919900828

Bhaskar, R. (1998). *The possibility of naturalism: A philosophical critique of the contemporary human sciences*. Routledge.

Bhaskar, R. (2008a). *Dialectic: The pulse of freedom*. Routledge.

Bhaskar, R. (2008b). *A realist theory of science*. Routledge.

Bhaskar, R. (2010). Contexts of interdisciplinarity: Interdisciplinarity and climate change. In R. Bhaskar, C. Frank, K.G. Høyer, P. Næss and J. Parker (Eds.), *Interdisciplinarity and climate change: Transforming knowledge and practice for our global future* (pp. 1-24). Routledge.

Bhaskar, R. & Parker, J. (2010). Introduction. In R. Bhaskar, C. Frank, K.G. Høyer, P. Næss and J. Parker (Eds.), *Interdisciplinarity and climate change: Transforming knowledge and practice for our global future* (pp. vii-xii). Routledge.

Burton, C. & Scott, C. (2003). Museums: Challenges for the 21<sup>st</sup> century. *International Journal of Arts Management*, 5(2), 56-68.

Butler, C. & Adamowski, J. (2015). Empowering marginalized communities in water resources management: Addressing inequitable practices in participatory model building. *Journal of Environmental Management*, 153(1), 153-162.

Cameron, F. (2015a). The liquid museum: New institutional ontologies for a complex, uncertain world. In A. Witcomb & K. Message (Eds.), *The international handbook of museum studies: Museum theory* (pp. 345-361). John Wiley & Sons.

Cameron, F. (2015b). Ecologizing experimentations: A method and manifesto for composing a post-humanist museum. In F. Cameron & B. Neilson (Eds.), *Climate change and museum futures* (pp. 16-33). Routledge.

Cameron, F.R. & Neilson, B. (2015). Introduction: Climate change, museum futures. In F.R. Cameron & B. Neilson (Eds.), *Climate change and museum futures* (pp. 1-8). Routledge.

Chavez, C. (2008). Conceptualizing from the inside: Advantages, complications, and demands on insider positionality. *The Qualitative Report*, 13(3), 474-494.

<https://nsuworks.nova.edu/tqr/vol13/iss3/9>

Chersich, M.F., Swift, C.P., Edelstein, I., Breetzke, G., Scorgiel, F., Schutte, F. & Wright, C.Y. (2019). Violence in hot weather: Will climate change exacerbate rates of violence in South Africa? *South*

*African Medical Journal*, 109(7), 447-449.

[http://www.scielo.org.za/scielo.php?script=sci\\_arttext&pid=S0256-95742019000700001](http://www.scielo.org.za/scielo.php?script=sci_arttext&pid=S0256-95742019000700001)

Colding, J., Barthel, S. & Sörqvist, P. (2019). Wicked problems of smart cities. *Smart Cities*, 2, 512-521. doi:10.3390/smartcities2040031

Corsane, G. (2004). Transforming museums and heritage in postcolonial and post-apartheid South Africa: The impact of processes of policy formulation and new legislation. *Social Analysis*, 48(1), 5-15.

Crouch, D. (2010). Flirting with space: Thinking landscape relationally. *Cultural Geographies* 17(1), 5-18. doi.org/10.1177/1474474009349996

Crutzen, P.J. (2002). Geology of Mankind. *Nature*, 415, 23.

Das, S. & Kramer, A. (2013). Self-censorship on Facebook. *Proceedings of the Seventh International AAAI Conference on Weblogs and Social Media*. 120-127.

<https://www.aaai.org/ocs/index.php/ICWSM/ICWSM13/paper/view/6093/6350>

De Sousa Santos, B., Arriscado, J.N. & Meneses, M.P. (2008). Introduction: Opening up the canon of knowledge and recognition of difference. In B. de Sousa Santos (Ed) *Another knowledge is possible: Beyond northern epistemologies* (pp. xix-lxii). Verso.

De Sousa Santos, B. (Ed.). (2008). *Another knowledge is possible: Beyond Northern epistemologies*. Verso.

De Sousa Santos, B. (2018). *The end of the cognitive empire: The coming of age of epistemologies of the South*. Duke University Press.

Detert, J.R. & Edmondson, A.C. (2011). Implicit voice theories: Taken-for-granted rules of self-censorship at work. *Academy of Management Journal*, 54(3), 461-488.

Dondolo, L. (2005). Museums and communities: The reconstruction of museums and their practices in post-apartheid South Africa. *South African Museums Association Bulletin*, 31(1), 68-71.

Dubin, S.C. (2006). *Transforming Museums: Mounting Queen Victoria in a democratic South Africa*. Palgrave Macmillan.

Duggan, J. (2011, September 13). *Ten reflections on heritage in a time of change*. Archive and public culture. [http://www.apc.uct.ac.za/apc/projects/archival\\_platform/ten-reflections-heritage-time-change](http://www.apc.uct.ac.za/apc/projects/archival_platform/ten-reflections-heritage-time-change)

Engeström, Y. (1987). *Learning by expanding: An activity theoretical approach to developmental research*. Cambridge University Press.

Engeström, Y., Virkkunen, J., Helle, M., Pihlaja, J. & Poikela, R. (1996). The Change Laboratory as a tool for transforming work. *Lifelong Learning in Europe*, 1(2), 10-17.

Engeström, Y. & Sannino, A. (2010). Studies of expansive learning: Foundations, findings and future challenges. *Educational Research Review*, 5(1), 1-24. doi:10.1016/j.edurev.2009.12.002

Fletcher, A.J. (2017). Applying critical realism in qualitative research: Methodology meets method. *International Journal of Social Research Methodology*, 20(2), 181-194.

DOI:10.1080/13645579.2016.1144401

Frank, C. (2010). Global warming and cultural/media articulations of emerging and contending social imaginaries: A critical realist perspective. In R. Bhaskar, C. Frank, K. G. Høyer, P. Næss and J. Parker (Eds.), *Interdisciplinarity and climate change: Transforming knowledge and practice for our global future* (pp. 100-115). Routledge.

Glotfelty, C. & Fromm, H. (Eds). 1996. *The ecocriticism reader: Landmarks in literary ecology*. University of Georgia Press.

Greene, M.J. (2014). On the inside looking in: Methodological insights and challenges in conducting qualitative insider research. *The Qualitative Report*, 19(29), 1-13.

<http://nsuworks.nova.edu/tqr/vol19/iss29/3>

Guivant, J.S. (2016). Ulrich Beck's legacy. *Ambiente y Sociedad*, 29(1), 227-237.

Hamer, M., Raath, M., Rourke, J., Oliver, T., Mandiwana-Neudani, T., Mwale, M., Bartels, P. & Marasas, W. (2011). *Collecting now to preserve the future*. South African National Biodiversity Institute.

Haraway, D. (2004). *The Haraway reader*. Routledge.

Hartwig, M. (2008). Introduction. In R. Bhaskar, *Dialectic: The pulse of freedom* (pp. xiii-xxxii). Routledge.

Hawkins, G. (2009). More-than-human politics: The case of plastic bags. *Australian Humanities Review*, 46, 41-54.

Heise, U. (2006). The hitchhiker's guide to ecocriticism. *Publications of the Modern Language Association*, 121(2), 503-516.

Helland, L.E.F. & Lindgren, T. (2016). What goes around comes around: From the coloniality of power to the crisis of civilization. *Journal of World-Systems Research*, 22(2), 430-462.

Herbert, D.G. (2000). Natural science in museums: Life between a rock and a hard place. *South African Museums Association Bulletin*, 24(1), 80-84.

Hernandez, I. & Preston, J.L. (2013). Disfluency disrupts the confirmation bias. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, 49, 178-182. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.jesp.2012.08.010>

Hirst, M. (2002). Critically engaging indigenous knowledge systems: Throwing the baby out with the bathwater. *South African Museums Association Bulletin*, 28(1), 3-7.

Huggan, G. & Tiffin, H. (2015). *Postcolonial ecocriticism: Literature, animals, environment*. Routledge.

Hyland, K. (2002). Authority and invisibility: Authorial identity in academic writing. *Journal of Pragmatics*, 34, 1091-1112.

Isager, L., Knudsen, L.V. & Theilade, I. (2021). A new keyword in the museum: Exhibiting the Anthropocene. *Museum and Society*, (19)1, 88-117. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.29311/mas.v19i1.3585>

Janes, R.R. & Sandell, R. (2019a). Posterity has arrived: The necessary emergence of museum activism. In R.R. Janes & R. Sandell (Eds), *Museum activism* (pp. 1-22). Routledge.

Janes, R.R. & Sandell, R. (2019b). Preface. In R.R. Janes & R. Sandell (Eds.), *Museum activism* (pp. xxvii-xxviii). Routledge.

Jeffery, T. (2017). Future-proofing South Africa's cultural museums: Climate change, heritage discourse and cultural landscapes. *South African Museums Association Bulletin*, 39, 19-28.  
<https://journals.co.za/doi/10.10520/EJC-c85c01dee>

Jeffery, T. (2019). Decolonial museums in a time of social-ecological crisis: Cultural landscape and the revitalisation of museological theory. *South African Museums Association Bulletin*, 41, 29-36.  
<https://journals.co.za/doi/10.10520/EJC-1ce765a02d>

Jeffery, T. (2021a). Critical realist philosophy and the possibility of an eco-decolonial museology. *Museum and Society*, (19)1, 48-70. <https://journals.le.ac.uk/ojs1/index.php/mas/article/view/3231>

Jeffery, T. (2021b). *Towards an eco-decolonial museology: A critical realist perspective on the crises of South African Museums*.

[https://www.researchgate.net/publication/348930647\\_Towards\\_an\\_Eco-decolonial\\_Museology\\_A\\_Critical\\_Realist\\_Perspective\\_on\\_the\\_Crises\\_of\\_South\\_African\\_Museums](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/348930647_Towards_an_Eco-decolonial_Museology_A_Critical_Realist_Perspective_on_the_Crises_of_South_African_Museums)

Jeffery, T. (2021c). *Humanature: Critical Realism and the Possibility of an Eco-decolonial Museology*.  
[https://www.researchgate.net/publication/348930651\\_Humanature\\_Critical\\_Realism\\_and\\_the\\_Possibility\\_of\\_an\\_Eco-decolonial\\_Museology](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/348930651_Humanature_Critical_Realism_and_the_Possibility_of_an_Eco-decolonial_Museology)

Jessop, B. (2013). Putting neoliberalism in its time and place: A response to the debate. *Social Anthropology*, 21(1), 65-74. [doi.org/10.1111/1469-8676.12003](https://doi.org/10.1111/1469-8676.12003)

Kamga, S.A.D. & Heleba, S. (2012). Can economic growth translate into access to rights? Challenges faced by institutions in South Africa in ensuring that growth leads to better living standards. *International Journal on Human Rights*, 9(17), 83-106.

Keene, S. (2006). All that is solid? Museums and the postmodern. *Public Archaeology*, 5(3), 185-198.

Khan, F. (2000). Environmentalists, museologists and communities: Partners in the conservation of heritage. *South African Museums Association Bulletin*, 24(1), 50-54.

Knapp, M.S. (2016). The practice of designing qualitative research on educational leadership: Notes for emerging scholars and practitioner-scholars. *Journal of Research on Leadership Education*, 12(1), 1-25. DOI: 10.1177/1942775116647365

Knight, K. (2006). Transformations of the concept of ideology in the twentieth century. *The American Political Science Review*, 100(4), 619-626.

Krog, A. (1998). *Country of my skull*. Penguin Random House.

Latham, K.F. (2007). The Poetry of the museum: A holistic model of numinous museum experiences. *Museum Management and Curatorship*, 22(3), 247-263. DOI:10.1080/09647770701628594.

Latham, K.F. (2013) Numinous experiences with museum objects. *Visitor Studies*, 16(1), 3-20. DOI:10.1080/10645578.2013.767728.

Levitz, C. & Mathers, K. (2000). A poverty of theory, a wealth of activity: Museology and South African museums. *South African Museums Association Bulletin*, 24(1), 18-21.

Lotz-Sisitka, H. (2016). Absenting absence: Expanding zones of proximal development in environmental learning processes. In L. Price & H. Lotz-Sisitka (Eds.), *Critical realism, environmental learning and social-ecological change* (pp. 318-339). Routledge.

Lotz-Sisitka, H. and Price, L. (2016). Why critical realism, environmental learning and social-ecological change? Introducing the book. In L. Price & H. Lotz-Sisitka (Eds.), *Critical realism, environmental learning and social-ecological change* (pp. 1-17). Routledge.

Lotz-Sisitka, H., Wals, A.E.J., Kronlid, D., & McGarry, D. (2015). Transformative, transgressive social learning: Rethinking higher education pedagogy in times of systemic global dysfunction. *Current Opinion in Environmental Sustainability*, 16, 73-80. doi.org/10.1016/j.cosust.2015.07.018

Lotz-Sisitka, H., Rosenberg, E. & Ramsarup, P. (2020). Environment and sustainability education research as policy engagement: (Re-)invigorating 'politics as potentia' in South Africa. *Environmental Education Research*, 25(12), 1-29. DOI: 10.1080/13504622.2020.1759511

Macdonald, S. (2015). Is 'difficult heritage' still difficult? Why public acknowledgment of past perpetration may no longer be so unsettling to collective identities. *Museum International*, 67(1-4), 6-22.

Maclennan, D. (2006). Under Compassberg. In D. Maclennan, *Selected poems* (p. 145). Snailpress.

Mahony, E. (2017). Opening spaces of resistance in the corporatized cultural institution: Liberate Tate and the Art Not Oil Coalition. *Museum & Society*, 15(2), 126-141.

Managa, A. (2012). Unfulfilled promises and their consequences: A reflection on local government performance and the critical issue of poor service delivery in South Africa. *Policy Brief*, 76, 1-8.

Manderson, L. & Levine, S. (2020). COVID-19, risk, fear, and fall-out. *Medical Anthropology*, 39(5), 367-370. DOI: 10.1080/01459740.2020.1746301

Marschall, S. (2005). Making money with memories: The fusion of heritage, tourism and identity formation in South Africa. *Historia*, 50(1), 103-122.

Martin, M. (2000). Theory into practice, practice into theory. *South African Museums Association Bulletin*, 24(1), 11-17.

Masipa, T. (2017). The impact of climate change on food security in South Africa: Current realities and challenges ahead. *Jàmbá: Journal of Disaster Risk Studies*, 9(1), 1-7. DOI:

<https://doi.org/10.4102/jamba.v9i1.411>

McGhie, H. (2019). 'Why museums need the SDGs'. In H. McGhie, *Museums and the sustainable development goals: a how-to guide for museums, galleries, the cultural sector and their partners* (pp. 34-35). Curating Tomorrow. <http://www.curatingtomorrow.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/museums-and-the-sustainable-development-goals-2019.pdf>

Mdanda, S. (2016). Museums and democratic education: How museums were transformed after the 1994 elections in South Africa. *South African Museums Association Bulletin*, 38(1), 47-57.

Meskill, L. (2012). *The nature of heritage: The New South Africa*. Wiley-Blackwell.

Milner, H.R. (2007). Race, culture, and researcher positionality: Working through dangers seen, unseen, and unforeseen. *Educational Researcher*, 36(7), 388-400. DOI: 10.3102/0013189X07309471

Milstein, T. (2011). Nature identification: The power of pointing and naming. *Environmental Communication*, 5(1), 3-24. DOI: 10.1080/17524032.2010.535836

Moore, J.W. (2017). The Capitalocene, Part I: On the nature and origins of our ecological crisis. *The Journal of Peasant Studies*, 44(3), 594-630. DOI: 10.1080/03066150.2016.1235036

Mosely, E. (2007). 'Visualizing' apartheid: Contemporary art and collective memory during South Africa's transition to democracy. *Antipoda*, 5, 97-119.

Mukute, M. (2016). Dialectical critical realism and Cultural Historical Activity Theory (CHAT): Exploring and expanding learning processes in sustainable agriculture workplace contexts. In L. Price & H. Lotz-Sisitka (Eds.), *Critical realism, environmental learning and social-ecological change* (pp. 190-211). Routledge.

Munnik, V. (2016). Steel Valley and the absence of environmental justice in the New South Africa: Critical realism's kinship with environmental justice. In L. Price & H. Lotz-Sisitka (Eds.), *Critical realism, environmental learning and social-ecological change* (pp. 293-317). Routledge.

Murdock, E.G. (2020). Troubling ecological citizenship: Expanding our minds and hearts to see the more-than-human world as our relations. *Minding Nature*, 13(2), 36-41.

Newell, J., Robin, L. & Wehner, K. (2017a). Introduction. In J. Newell, L. Robin & K. Wehner (Eds.), *Curating the future: Museums, communities and climate change* (pp. 1-16). Routledge.

Newell, J., Robin, L. & Wehner, K. (Eds.). (2017b). *Curating the future: Museums, communities and climate change*. Routledge.

Nielsen, J.K. (2015). The relevant museum: Defining relevance in museological practices. *Museum Management and Curatorship*, 30(5), 364-378. DOI: 10.1080/09647775.2015.1043330

Nixon, R. (2011). *Slow violence and the environmentalism of the poor*. Harvard University Press.

Nixon, R. (2017). The Anthropocene and environmental justice. In J. Newell, L. Robin & K. Wehner (Eds.), *Curating the future: Museums, communities and climate change* (pp. 23-31). Routledge.

Norrie, A. (2010). *Dialectic and difference: Dialectical critical realism and the grounds of justice*. Routledge.

Nunez, I. (2014). *Critical Realist Activity Theory: An engagement with critical realism and Cultural-Historical Activity Theory*. Routledge.

O'Donoghue, R. (2016). Working with critical realist perspective and tools at the interface of indigenous and scientific knowledge in a science curriculum setting. In L. Price & H. Lotz-Sisitka (Eds.), *Critical realism, environmental learning and social-ecological change* (pp. 159-177). Routledge.

O'Donoghue, R., Sandoval-Rivera, J.C.A. & Payyappallimana, U. (2019). Landscape, memory and learning to change in changing worlds: Contemplating intergenerational learning and traditional knowledge practices within social-ecological landscapes of change. *Southern African Journal of Environmental Education*, 35(1), 1-34.

Palermo, G. (2007). The ontology of economic power in capitalism: Mainstream economics and Marx. *Cambridge Journal of Economics*, 31(4), 539-561. doi.org/10.1093/cje/bel036

Pendlebury, J. (2013). Conservation values, the authorised heritage discourse and the conservation-planning assemblage. *International Journal of Heritage Studies*, 19(7), 709-727.

Phillips, R.B. (2019). 'Making fun' of the museum: Multi-disciplinarity, holism, and the 'return of curiosity'. *Museum and Society*, 17(3), 316-341.

Pichler, M., Brand, U. & Görg, C. (2020). The double materiality of democracy in capitalist societies: Challenges for social-ecological transformations. *Environmental Politics*, 29(2), 193-213. DOI: 10.1080/09644016.2018.1547260

Plumwood, V. (2002). Decolonising relationships with nature. *Philosophy Activism Nature*, 2, 7-30.

Potter, G. (2001). Truth in fiction, science and criticism. In J. Lopez and G. Potter (Eds.), *After postmodernism: An introduction to critical realism* (pp. 183-195). Athlone Press.

Price, L. (2007). *A transdisciplinary explanatory critique of environmental education (volume 1): Business and industry*. (Doctoral dissertation, Rhodes University, Makhanda, South Africa).  
[http://vital.seals.ac.za:8080/vital/access/manager/Repository/vital:1804?site\\_name=GlobalView&view=null&f0=sm\\_creator%3A%22Price%2C+Leigh%22&sort=null](http://vital.seals.ac.za:8080/vital/access/manager/Repository/vital:1804?site_name=GlobalView&view=null&f0=sm_creator%3A%22Price%2C+Leigh%22&sort=null)

Price, L. (2016a). Key critical realist concepts for environmental educators. In L. Price & H. Lotz-Sisitka (Eds.), *Critical realism, environmental learning and social-ecological change* (pp. 18-39). Routledge.

Price, L. (2016b). Some implications of metaReality for environmental educators. In L. Price & H. Lotz-Sisitka (Eds.), *Critical realism, environmental learning and social-ecological change* (pp. 340-352). Routledge.

Price, L. (2019). A return to common-sense: Why ecology needs transcendental realism. *Journal of Critical Realism*, 18(1), 31-44. DOI: 10.1080/14767430.2019.1580178

Price, L. & Martin, L. (2018) Introduction to the special issue: Applied critical realism in the social sciences. *Journal of Critical Realism*, 17(2), 89-96, DOI:10.1080/14767430.2018.1468148.

Rall, M. (2018). Across time of three South African San exhibitions: Reflecting on colonialism, apartheid and decolonisation. *South African Museums Association Bulletin*, 40(1), 11-22.

Ramos, F. (2015). *Reflections on methodology: Dilemmas in a research project about the educational experiences of refugee background youth*. Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Australian Association for Research in Education (AARE), Fremantle, Western Australia, November 29 to December 3.

<https://eric.ed.gov/?q=Reflections+on+methodology%3a+Dilemmas+in+a+research+project+about+the+educational+experiences+of+refugee+background+youth&ft=on&id=ED593845>

Rankin, E. (2013). Creating/curating cultural capital: Monuments and museums for post-apartheid South Africa. *Humanities*, 2, 72-98. doi:10.3390/h2010072

Rassool, C. (2000). The rise of heritage and the reconstitution of history in South Africa. *Kronos*, 26(1), 1-21.

Raworth, K. (2017). *Doughnut economics*. RH Business Books.

Rosenberg, E. (2020a). Synthesis and elaboration of critical realist methodology for green skills research. In E. Rosenberg, P. Ramsarup & H. Lotz-Sisitka (Eds.), *Green skills research in South Africa: Models, cases and methods* (pp. 192-207). Routledge.

Rosenberg, E. (2020b). Special issue: Education for sustainability in a time of crises. Editorial Part 1. *Southern African Journal of Environmental Education*, 36, 1-7. DOI 10.4314/sajee.v36i1.1

Rossi, U. (2012). On the varying ontologies of capitalism: Embeddedness, dispossession, subsumption. *Progress in Human Geography*, 37(3), 348-365.

Roux, N. (2018). 'A house for dead people': Memory and spatial transformation in Red Location, South Africa. *Social & Cultural Geography*, 19(4), 407-428. DOI: 10.1080/14649365.2017.1280614

Sabai, D. (2016). Indigenous knowledge and critical realism on the eastern coast of Tanzania. In L. Price and H. Lotz-Sisitka (Eds.), *Critical realism, environmental learning and social-ecological change* (pp. 178-189). Routledge.

Samaroudi, M., Echavarria, K.R. & Perry, L. (2020). Heritage in lockdown: Digital provision of memory institutions in the UK and US of America during the COVID-19 pandemic. *Museum Management and*

*Curatorship*, 35(4), 337-361. DOI: 10.1080/09647775.2020.1810483

Sandell, R. (2003). Social inclusion, the museum and the dynamics of sectoral change. *Museum and Society*, 1(1), 45-62.

Sandahl, J. (2018, 19 June). *Report and recommendations*. International Council of Museums Standing Committee for Museum Definition, Prospects and Potentials. [https://icom.museum/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/MDPP-report-and-recommendations-adopted-by-the-ICOM-EB-December-2018\\_EN-2.pdf](https://icom.museum/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/MDPP-report-and-recommendations-adopted-by-the-ICOM-EB-December-2018_EN-2.pdf).

Sandahl, J. (2019, 5 December). *Definitions are dynamic, not static*. Museums Association. [www.museumsassociation.org/museums-journal/comment/01122019-definitions-are-dynamic-not-static?utm\\_campaign=1644717\\_12122019&utm\\_medium=email&utm\\_source=Museums%20Association&dm\\_i=2VBX,Z92L,7AK7Z8,3PDZT,1](http://www.museumsassociation.org/museums-journal/comment/01122019-definitions-are-dynamic-not-static?utm_campaign=1644717_12122019&utm_medium=email&utm_source=Museums%20Association&dm_i=2VBX,Z92L,7AK7Z8,3PDZT,1)

Sannino, A., Engeström, Y. & Lemos, M. (2016). Formative interventions for expansive learning and transformative agency. *Journal of the Learning Sciences*, 25(4), 599-633.

DOI:10.1080/10508406.2016.1204547

Schudel, I.J. (2016). Exploring critical realist insights into transformative environmental learning processes in contexts of social-ecological risk. In L. Price and H. Lotz-Sisitka (Eds.), *Critical realism, environmental learning and social-ecological change* (pp. 231-254). Routledge.

Schudel, I.J. (2017). Modelling dialectical processes in environmental learning: An elaboration of Roy Bhaskar's onto-axiological chain. *Journal of Critical Realism*, 16(2), 163-183. DOI:

10.1080/14767430.2017.1288061

Scott, C. (2003). Museums and impact. *Curator*, 46(3), 293-310. doi.org/10.1111/j.2151-6952.2003.tb00096.x

Scott, C. (2006). Museums: Impact and value. *Cultural Trends*, 15(1), 45-75.

DOI:10.1080/09548960600615947.

Scott, D. (2010). *Education, Epistemology and Critical Realism*. Routledge.

Scott, D. & Oelofse, C. (2005) Social and environmental justice in South African Cities: Including 'invisible stakeholders' in environmental assessment procedures. *Journal of Environmental Planning and Management*, 48(3), 445-467. DOI:10.1080/09640560500067582

Selliger, M. (2019). *Ideology and politics*. Routledge.

Shoba, N. (2005). Community museums: An insight into the socio-economic, environmental and cultural impacts on community museums in the Eastern Cape. *South African Museums Association Bulletin*, 31, 26.

Smith, C. (2014). Post-modernising the museum: The Ration Shed. *Historical Encounters*, 1(1), 32-49.

Soudien, C. (2008). Emerging discourses around identity in new South African museum exhibitions. *Interventions*, 10(2), 207-221. DOI:10.1080/13698010802145119

Springer, S., Birch, K. & MacLeavy, J. (2016). An introduction to neoliberalism. In S. Springer, K. Birch & J. MacLeavy (Eds.), *The handbook of neoliberalism* (pp. 1-14). Routledge.

Stevens, A. (2008). A different way of knowing: Tools and strategies for managing indigenous knowledge. *Libri*, 58, 25-33.

Stoddard, E. (2020, 24 August). *Municipal IQ data shows lockdowns stifled SA social unrest this year — but 2020 is not over yet*. <https://www.dailymaverick.co.za/article/2020-08-24-municipal-iq-data-shows-lockdowns-stifled-sa-social-unrest-this-year-but-2020-is-not-over-yet/>

Suarez, A. & Tsutsui, N.D. (2004). The value of museum collections for research and society. *BioScience*, 54(1), 66-74. doi.org/10.1641/0006-3568(2004)054[0066:TVOMCF]2.0.CO;2

Thomas, N. (2016). *The ascendancy of the museum*. Reaktion.

Togo, M. (2016). Underlabouring systems thinking with critical realism in understanding Rhodes University's response to the sustainability imperative. In L. Price & H. Lotz-Sisitka (Eds.), *Critical realism, environmental learning and social-ecological change* (pp. 85-97). Routledge.

- Tully, G. (2020). Are we living the future? Museums in the time of Covid-19. In F. Burini (Ed.), *Tourism facing a pandemic: From crisis to recovery* (pp. 229-242). University of Bergamo.
- Venugopal, R. (2015). Neoliberalism as concept. *Economy and Society*, 44(2), 165-187. DOI: 10.1080/03085147.2015.1013356
- Viela, R.A. de Gouveia. (2014). The Change Laboratory as a tool for collaborative transforming work activities: An interview with Jaakko Virkkunen. *Saúde e Sociedade* 23(1), 182-189. DOI 10.1590/S0104-12902014000100027
- Vollgraaff, H. (2004). Editorial. *South African Museums Association Bulletin*, 30(1), 2.
- Vollgraaff, H. (2012). Museum practice: Rooted in social space. *South African Museums Association Bulletin*, 35, 31-35.
- Vollgraaff, H. (2018). Revitalising the South African museum sector: New museological trends. In P. Ngulube (Ed.), *Handbook of research on heritage management and preservation* (pp. 372-395). IGI Global.
- Walker, B., Holling, C. S., Carpenter, S.R. & Kinzig, A. (2004). Resilience, adaptability and transformability in social-ecological systems. *Ecology and Society*, 9(2), 1-9. <https://www.ecologyandsociety.org/vol9/iss2/art5/>.
- Watson, S. (1991). *Song of the broken string: After the /Xam Bushmen. Poems from a lost oral tradition*. Sheep Meadow Press.
- Wehner, K. (2017). Towards an ecological museology: Responding to the animal-objects of the Australian Institute of Anatomy collection. In J. Newell, L. Robin & K. Wehner (Eds.), *Curating the future: Museums, communities and climate change* (pp. 85-100). Routledge.
- Witz, L., Rassool, C. & Minkley, G. (2001). Repackaging the past for South African tourism. *Daedalus*, 130(1), 277-296.

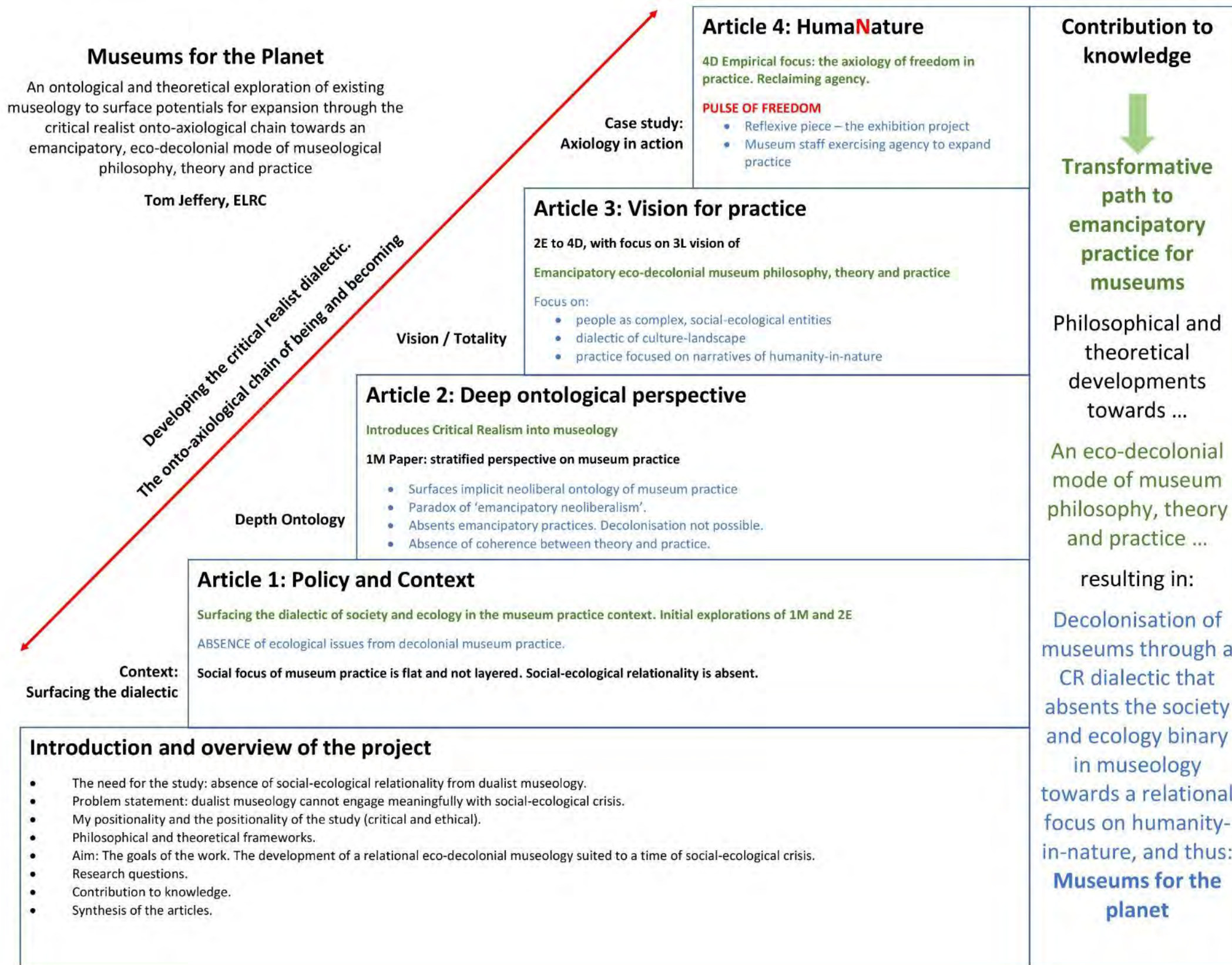
Wray, L. (2019). Taking a position: Challenging the anti-authorial turn in art curating. In R.R. Janes & R. Sandell (Eds.), *Museum Activism* (pp. 315-325). Routledge.

Wylie, D. (2008). Preface. In Wylie, D. (Ed.), *Toxic belonging? Identity and ecology in southern Africa* (pp. vii-xi). Cambridge Scholars Publishing.

Zuma, B. (2018). The extent to which South African museums surrendered to political undertones. *Museum International*, 70(3-4), 38-47. doi.org/10.1111/muse.12208

APPENDIX 1

Ladder Plan



## APPENDIX 2

### Interview schedule

*My research on museums, decolonisation and the ecological crisis is undertaken in my personal capacity as a PhD candidate at Rhodes University. This survey will inform my PhD research and an academic article. The purpose of the study is to identify problems which the museum sector faces, and propose solutions. All comments and information will be treated as confidential and you will not be identified in my work.*

1. What do you think is/are the goal(s) or outcomes of the decolonisation of museums?
2. What do you feel are the implications of decolonisation for museum practice?
3. What achievements do you think South Africa's cultural museums have made in transformation/decolonisation?
4. In what ways do you feel that cultural museums still need to transform/decolonise?
5. What threats or challenges do you think South Africa's cultural museums presently face?
6. Can you predict any threats or challenges that South Africa's cultural museums may face in the future?
7. Do you feel that there are any links between the work of cultural museums and that of natural science museums, or any areas of practice in which the two might cooperate and learn from each other?  
Yes / No/Maybe (circle the applicable answer)
8. Please explain your answer.
9. Do you feel that South Africa's cultural museums should address ecological issues (such as climate change, water scarcity, loss of biodiversity and plastic pollution)?  
Yes / No/Maybe (circle the applicable answer)

10. Please explain your answer.
  
11. If you feel that South Africa's cultural museums should address ecological issues, then what methods do you think they should use to go about doing so? In other words, in what ways do you think cultural museums might contribute towards a stronger connection between ecology and culture?
  
12. Has your museum conducted any projects that relate ecology to culture? If so, please describe the project(s) and its outcomes.
  
13. Do you feel that ecological issues have any impact on the transformation/decolonisation of cultural museums, or that they may do so in the future?  
Yes / No/Maybe (circle the applicable answer)
  
14. Please explain your answer.
  
15. Do you agree with the following statement: 'The world is presently in a state of ecological crisis'?  
Yes / No/Maybe (circle the applicable answer)
  
16. Please explain your answer.
  
17. Are there any other comments you would like to make?

Please indicate whether you are willing to participate in a follow-up interview, which may be conducted face-to-face, over Skype or telephonically.

Yes/No (circle the applicable answer)

**Please tell me about yourself**

Year of birth:

Institution at which you work:

Job title:

## FUTURE-PROOFING SOUTH AFRICA'S CULTURAL MUSEUMS: CLIMATE CHANGE, HERITAGE DISCOURSE AND CULTURAL LANDSCAPES

TOM JEFFERY

Curator of Exhibitions, National English Literary Museum  
t.jeffery@nelm.org.za

### ABSTRACT

*The paper addresses the question of why South Africa's cultural museums and the South African Museums Association (SAMA) should take action on climate change. What is the relevance of climate change to the future of cultural museums and to SAMA? A literature survey of research on the predicted impacts of climate change on South Africa demonstrates its sociocultural effects. Museological work is considered in support of the argument that museums are social institutions with a social responsibility at the core of their mission. These premises motivate the argument that cultural museums have a responsibility to engage with the impacts of climate change in their public programmes and that to do so is crucial to their social sustainability of museums in the medium to long term. The article considers why climate change has so little presence in the work of South Africa's museums, and concludes that this is due to what Pendlebury (2013) calls the "authorised heritage discourse". This paper contends that the development of an ecological model of heritage practice is an appropriate means through which to adapt the authorised heritage discourse to encompass climate change work. To do so is concomitant with the present socially-oriented goals of the heritage sector, and is in fact crucial to the success of the sector's transformation project. The broad character of such a model to be developed in future work is outlined in the final part of the article, drawing on the ecocritical work that has been done in cultural studies and on the concept of cultural landscapes.*

**Keywords:** Museums; climate change; heritage policy; transformation; cultural landscapes.

### INTRODUCTION

We live in the Anthropocene, the age in which humanity is the most significant influence on the Earth and its ecological systems. This is an age characterised by radical anthropogenic climate change, i.e. climate change which is driven by the pollutants from the industrial processes that are at the heart of humanity's modern global culture. Climate change is at the core of the present concern for the environment and it is prominent in public dialogue across many forums. Although it is often viewed as purely a science issue, and while natural scientists working in museums do take cognisance of climate science in their research, and exhibits on climate change are to be found in science-oriented museums, climate change has cultural roots. The cultural roots of climate change are the location at which we find the responsibility for climate action on the part of cultural museums and the South African Museums Association. This paper will consider why South Africa's cultural museums should take action

on climate change, and suggests a basis from which the heritage policy framework and particularly the conceptual framework that structures heritage work may be adapted to permit them to do so.

### CLIMATE SCIENCE AND THE IMPACTS OF CLIMATE CHANGE ON SOUTH AFRICA

Before considering the social impacts of climate change on South Africa, it is important to emphasise the position of the vast majority of the scientific community; that anthropogenic climate change is a reality and that it is a profound threat to the ecology of the Earth, to humanity and to all forms of life with which we share the planet. This emphasis is needed because, the long history of antagonism between climate change adherents who accept the reality and seriousness of human-induced climate change and the contrarians that doubt or deny its existence does not promise to disappear anytime soon (Greenberg, Knight & Westersund 2011:66).

Despite the overwhelming evidence there are still those, including influential politicians, who deny the reality of anthropogenic climate change. Greenberg et al. make particular mention of the oil industry and its employment of public relations professionals who use dubious tactics to cloud the climate issue. Oreskes (2004) describes the broader reality in which corporations, while trying to protect their revenues from the requirements of control on carbon dioxide emissions, spread the suggestion that there might be a degree of disagreement in the scientific community about the reality of anthropogenic climate change while in truth there is a broad scientific consensus on the subject. Ban Ki-moon, Secretary General of the United Nations, describes climate change as perhaps the greatest threat to the global community (Ki-Moon 2013). Anthropogenic climate change is a reality and, as stated by Midgley and Barnard (2009:1), there is more than enough proof of this reality to expect that action should be taken by governments, communities and organizations such as SAMA.

One of the greatest threats posed by climate change to South African society is a decrease in the availability of water to the extent that the demand for water is expected to exceed available resources by 2025 (Joubert 2009:18). Large-scale agriculture will be heavily affected, notably in the maize industry. Maize is the staple food of the majority of the South African population and production is predicted to decrease by 30 per cent by 2030 (Stadler 2012:76). South Africa's Financial and Fiscal Commission elaborates as follows on the impacts of water scarcity:

*Climate change will have a significant impact on ... smallholder farmers [who] are expected to be more vulnerable, as they lack the means for adaptation. The effect of climate change on agricultural output will directly affect rural communities, through reduced income and employment, and knock-on effects for rural economies as a whole. The result will be to put considerable strain on rural local governments, which provide services and promote development at a local level (The impact of climate change on South Africa's rural areas 2013:65).*

Although the South African Constitution states that everyone has the right to have access to sufficient water, Fobosi (2013) estimates that 16 million people do not have access to adequate sanitation, while 3,5 million do not have access to safe drinking water. This situation will worsen as climate change impacts on rainfall. It is thus linked to food security, economic stability, social

development and health through its impacts on water availability alone.

Many of South Africa's unique biomes will not be able to cope with the changed climate. In short, South Africa's biodiversity will suffer, especially the grasslands, fynbos and succulent Karoo, where a high level of extinction is predicted (Effects of Climate Change on South Africa 2014). Loss of species to anthropogenic climate change would be a tragedy in itself. These ecosystems, however, must be understood as part of a cultural landscape. There are systems of cultural identity and indigenous knowledge rooted within them, systems which can constitute long term data sets which have relevance to the prevention of the very crisis by which they are threatened (Gadgil, Berkes & Folke 1993:151). There is a danger that these epistemologies will become obituaries rather than celebrations and that the opportunity for other cultures and climate policymakers to learn from them will be missed. Furthermore, tourism is a primary area of economic growth and the fastest growing industry in South Africa (Akinboade & Braimoh 2010:154; Binns & Nel 2002:236), growth that is put at risk by the loss of cultural landscapes and species threatened by climate change.

The destabilised climate system will bring about an increase in the frequency and severity of extreme weather events. Damage costs due to extreme weather-related events (flooding, fire, storms and drought) have already been conservatively estimated at roughly R1 billion per year between 2000 and 2009 (Effects of Climate Change on South Africa 2014). Such costs will increase as the climate is altered. In practical terms the cost of such damage is measured in people losing their possessions, even their lives, or being displaced to become the latest kind of refugee, i.e. climate refugees. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees is already dealing with large numbers of people who have been displaced by climate change, and predictions are for the forcible displacement of between 250 million to a billion people by 2050 (Johnstone 2008:1).

Some of South Africa's present circumstances leave the country and her people particularly vulnerable to the effects of climate change. First among these is poverty: over 78 per cent of South Africans are poor (Madzwamuse 2010:vii). Poverty-stricken people often lack the resources to mitigate or adapt to changes in climate, and experience a heavy burden of disease which the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) predicts will be exacerbated by climate change:

*An increasing number of people [will suffer] death, injury and disease from heatwaves, floods, storms, fires and droughts. Heart and lung illnesses will most likely increase as ground-level ozone (a toxic gas), smoke and airborne dust increase in response to warmer temperatures. Higher temperatures may also lead to the spread of malaria ... onto the South African highveld. Dengue fever, also carried by mosquitoes, may also spread into areas of southern Africa where it previously did not occur. Diminished food availability, food access and nutrient content will result in more malnutrition and starvation (Climate Systems Analysis Group n.d.).*

The truth of the situation is that poor people, who are the most minor contributors to the causes of climate change, are the most vulnerable to its consequences. The World Bank has estimated that a quarter of the population of developing countries will bear approximately 75 per cent of the costs of damage caused by climate change (Salazar 2011:123).

A good indicator of the time scale over which these changes can be expected is to reiterate that due to climate change in South Africa, the production of maize is predicted to decrease by 30 per cent by 2030 (Stadler 2012:58). At the time of writing (2017), this is a mere thirteen years away. Immediate action is thus needed to move away from a business-as-usual approach, mitigate and adapt to climate change, and prevent an irrecoverable climate crisis. Here cultural museums, as multidisciplinary social institutions and centres of informal education, have the potential to play an important role which SAMA could kick-start by virtue of its status as the organisation which represents those museums and is their voice to policymakers.

#### MUSEOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVES

The relevance and the social impact of museums, i.e. the role of the museum in society, are key themes in current museology and museum practice, informed by the social museology that characterises museological work today. The fundamental questions are, 'What are museums for?' and 'What should museums be doing?' in the context of a world that must find ways to mitigate anthropogenic climate change.

Since about the middle of the twentieth century there has been a radical change in museum practice predicated on a similarly radical shift in the perception of the museum's role in society. As Fleming (2005:1)

describes it, museums have changed their attitude towards their audiences, with a focus on inclusivity and on serving sectors that were previously neglected. Elsewhere Fleming writes, "Without social value the museum is nothing" (Fleming 2006:1). Museum programmes today are expected to have a focus on social and political issues (Freudenheim 2014:288) and to have a significant positive influence in communities through outreach and education programmes that take the museum's knowledge and resources to people in need of them. Tichmann (2010) writes that, rather than collections, it is the needs of communities that are now central to the priorities of museums. Ballantyne and Uzzel (2011:87) agree that the museum object has been displaced from its central position in museum work by a focus on public service and the provision of engaging public programmes. Weil expresses this shift in his important article, 'From Being About Something to Being For Somebody' (Weil 1999). Ultimately, if they are to be seen as valuable institutions, museums can no longer have a passive social role but must become actors with agency in the lives of their constituents (Buoro & Porto 2017). Writing of a project grounded specifically in an enactment of social museology, Querol and Sancha (2013:89) describe their desire to develop, "an inter-relational Museology ... [designed] to debate new forms of museological participation, its causes and effects ... where culture constitutes an important factor of social and economic equilibrium and the museum plays a central role in the access to knowledge."

That museums have social responsibilities is thus unquestionable although there has been some debate as to the extent of those responsibilities and the sacrifices that may have to be made in other areas of museum work to accommodate them. In particular, fears have been expressed that collections may become neglected, and that the traditional, past-oriented character of the museum might be threatened (Harris 2013:11). A collection is the heart of a museum, but museums can no longer be mere repositories; neither can they be purely past-oriented. Museums can manage and curate their collections in such a way to ensure that both the collection and the museum are relevant to contemporary issues and fulfil the needs of modern society (Arinze 1999:2). A future-orientation, surely implicit in any attempts to benefit the collective good, is particularly relevant in the context of climate change. The Draft National Museums Policy is explicit with regard to museums working towards future-oriented goals, even if the national heritage policy framework lacks environmental awareness (elaborated on below):

*South African museums have a role to play in contributing to national government imperatives such as social cohesion and socio-economic development. ... there is a move towards museums acting as agents of social change, specifically to increase social tolerance, appreciation for diversity and working towards social harmony* (Draft National Museums Policy 2014:11).

Given that climate change is predicted to have a range of serious social impacts on South Africa, and given that museums, both at home and abroad, are now generally recognised as having a future-oriented social responsibility as one of their core functions, it seems clear that museums and SAMA have a responsibility to respond meaningfully to climate change.

That climate change is not on the agenda of, most particularly, South Africa's cultural museums, is clear when we consider the range of papers presented at the two most recent national SAMA conferences. Both of these conferences had themes with broad potential for the treatment of climate change issues: 'Museums and Sustainability' in 2015 and 'Museums and Cultural Landscapes' in 2016. At the 2015 conference there were only two papers that made any mention of environmental sustainability and none that considered the potential impacts of climate change on society or on the work of museums in society. In 2016, no mention was made of climate change and its impacts on the environment, culture and society other than in the reading of the ICOM-SA Declaration on Museums and Cultural Landscapes, which recognises the cultural roots of anthropogenic climate change as well as its present and future impacts on South Africa's environment and society, and thus on the nation's cultural landscapes (Declaration on Museums and Cultural Landscapes 2016:3). If museums are to remain relevant to society, if they are to ensure their social sustainability, SAMA and the cultural museums and museum workers which it represents must become aware of the significance of climate change to their work.

#### THE ABSENCE OF CLIMATE CHANGE IN CULTURAL MUSEUMS

Some significant steps have been taken, such as the construction by the Department of Public Works of a building for the National English Literary Museum which has achieved a five star rating from the Green Building Council of South Africa and which is a benchmark for future museum construction projects in the country. However, given the prominence of climate change and other ecological issues in contemporary culture,

a prominence which is powerful enough to drive such construction projects, why is it that they have so little presence in South African museology and cultural museum practice?

Pendlebury (2013:709) describes an authorised heritage discourse as one which legitimates the values and validated practice of a given heritage context. This discourse emerges from the heritage policy framework and constitutes a set of expectations, largely political in nature in the post-apartheid South African context, about the stories that museums tell and the activities they conduct. The authorised heritage discourse is in turn legitimated by museums themselves when they adopt its values, values which then constitute the ideology of museum practice. Duggan (2011) affirms the ways in which museums are ideological spaces that reinforce a particular set of values. The absence of climate change issues from South Africa's authorised heritage discourse, as identified through the following analysis of the national heritage policy framework, and the necessary replication of this discourse in museum practice, are the principal factors that limit climate change work in South African museums, most particularly in cultural museums. In order to demonstrate this, we will first consider what presence environmental issues, and climate change in particular, have in the heritage policy framework.

Section 31(2) of the National Heritage Resources Act (NHRA), the principal guiding document for heritage practice in South Africa, describes "heritage areas" as "any place of environmental or cultural interest" but in section 38(8) the NHRA defers to the authority of the Environment Conservation Act (Act No. 73 of 1989), or the integrated environmental management guidelines issued by the Department of Environment Affairs and Tourism, or the Minerals Act of 1991 (National Heritage Resources Act, Act 25 of 1999:66). The NHRA makes no mention of the National Environmental Management Act (NEMA), the preamble of which firmly links the social with the environmental (National Environmental Management Act, Act 107 of 1998:1). Section 3(2)d of the NHRA includes landscapes and natural features of cultural significance as part of the national estate, but further brief mentions of natural heritage are not contextualised within the realm of any concern for the environment or the impact of climate change on heritage or society.

The Revised White Paper on Arts, Culture and Heritage (Department of Arts and Culture 2016) states that the Department intends to position the sector to

respond creatively to environmental challenges and takes the position that environmental sustainability is of relevance to “the cultural and creative industries,” but this is not explored further. The term “cultural landscape” (the significance of this concept to climate change in the museum context is introduced below) is listed in the document’s glossary but does not appear in the main body of the document.

The National Heritage Council Position Paper on Ethics and Professional Standards Discussion Document says, “The South African heritage sector is mandated to conserve and protect our natural and cultural environment within a human rights oriented environment” (National Heritage Council 2011:3); and that “Heritage organisations and practitioners have an obligation to ... value and protect natural and human environments”. This is contextualised as a sensitivity to the environmental impact of activities and a concern for the responsible use of resources. Of the limited presence of environmental concerns in the heritage policy framework, this has perhaps the greatest potential to address climate-related issues but is not developed beyond the context of the conservation of collections in which it is presented.

The Draft National Museums Policy has little to add with only a mention of the need to preserve the environment embedded in a call for a code of ethics for museums (Draft National Museums Policy 2014:24) despite the fact that such codes have been formulated by both SAMA in the form of the Professional Standards and Transformation Indicators document (South African Museums Association 2006), the development of which was funded by the Department of Arts and Culture, and ICOM (International Council of Museums 2006). Climate change receives no mention at all despite its clear status as an ethical issue with profound and urgent social consequences.

Generally then, it is apparent that climate change has little or no presence as an imperative in the heritage policy framework that constitutes the foundation of the authorised heritage discourse. That discourse is one with which museum workers are familiar. It is characterised by a focus on issues of equity and redress, and (more recently) on the economic potential of heritage. Former Minister of Arts and Culture Paul Mashatile wrote that arts and culture have a crucial role to play in economic empowerment and skills development (Mashatile 2011:6). South African heritage is:

*... thus called upon to labour, not only in the service of the state but also as a palliative for the nation’s poor and historically oppressed and their reintegration into new civic and economic spheres (Meskell 2012:30).*

The Revised White Paper on Arts, Culture and Heritage describes the significance of the cultural and creative industries to social and economic development, and refers to them as a key economic growth sector (Department of Arts and Culture 2016:12). The very phrasing “cultural and creative industries” expressly connects culture to the economy and embodies the commitment of the Department of Arts and Culture to ensuring that culture plays a role in growth (Department of Arts and Culture 2016:14). The connection between culture and economy is clearly expressed in the Mzansi Golden Economy Strategy (Department of Arts and Culture 2011). In this heritage context, museum practice functions “as therapy, as a strategy for socio-economic empowerment and development in the particular social and governmental processes of post-apartheid South Africa” (Meskell 2012:4).

Social cohesion, economic growth, empowerment and nation building are thus at the core of the authorised heritage discourse. These are goals defined by a forward-looking, future-oriented character which, by its nature if not yet expressly, offers the potential to address the ecological issues that will impact on the future of South African society. The social agenda of museum practice, however, remains firmly on rehabilitating the misrepresented past, on the agenda of inclusivity, representivity and relevance (Corsane 2004:6). The big question museums are expected to address is, “How might the depredations of the colonial and apartheid eras be ameliorated?” (Meskell 2012:6). This has driven a programme of development of new and redevelopment of old museums, monuments and sites (Bakker & Müller 2010:48). The authorised heritage discourse thus recognises the crucial role that heritage plays in cultural identity as well as in the treatment of nation-building (Corsane 2004:10) and underpins museums’ (re)telling of the stories that were repressed or distorted under apartheid, as part of the broad project of helping those who were dispossessed of their past reclaim and reinvigorate their identity. On a practical level, this is a massive undertaking that has demanded the focus of the museum sector as a whole, but we can gain further insight into South Africa’s preoccupation with the heritage and memorialisation of apartheid and colonialism through the idea of “difficult heritage” as described by MacDonald (2015) and others.

Mosely (2007:101) writes of the ways in which:

*...whether by way of war crimes trials, truth commissions, or the creation of monuments and museums – or some combination of these approaches – the public articulation of memory, specifically with regard to trauma, has come to occupy a privileged position within national efforts to deal with and make sense out of the past.*

Thus, despite a future-oriented heritage policy framework, the focus of cultural museums is firmly past-oriented, focused on the traumatic memory and memorialisation of colonialism and apartheid, while the impacts of climate change remain a peripheral concern, or of no concern at all. A principal complicating factor here is that the global realisation of the climate crisis in the mid to late 1990s overlapped with the advent of South African democracy, and the rehabilitation of our society was an issue with far more prominence and urgency than the voices that warned of the climate crisis. This remains the case primarily because the effects of apartheid are still readily apparent and impact all South Africans on a daily basis, while climate change remains effectively invisible at a practical, everyday level because its effects are cumulative and only truly apparent through an understanding of the impact of greenhouse gases on the environment, while the early, physical impacts of a changing climate have been noticeable only in relatively remote environments where few people live (Moser 2010:33-34). Now though, these impacts are being felt more broadly and we are at a point where the urgency of the climate crisis demands that museums consider how they might make a contribution to climate change mitigation through the influence they can have on their communities (Salazar 2011:127). Museums must begin to engage with the opportunities the future-oriented elements of the heritage policy framework offer to address the climate crisis, as well as to search for new opportunities to contribute to ecological issues.

From the above discussion of the predicted social and economic impacts of climate change, and that of the characteristics of South Africa's authorised heritage discourse, it is apparent that there are important intersections between the two: climate change is going to have a profound impact on those same social issues that the future-oriented national heritage policy framework seeks to address. Thus my position is that climate change work can be complementary to the work that is already being done towards the

transformation of museums and the heritage sector. Climate change adds further layers of complexity to the challenges we already face, but to implement this new facet to museums' activity will in turn have a positive effect on their long-term social sustainability. The moral imperative to address our apartheid heritage finds its counterpart and, I would argue, the next phase of its development in the moral imperative to address climate change.

Looking to the future, how then might space be created for climate change work in South Africa's cultural museums and the work of SAMAA? The heritage policy framework might be adapted, for instance through greater integration of the National Heritage Resources Act and the National Environmental Management Act, and to take greater cognisance of the national policy framework on climate change which is quite comprehensive. Practice is determined by policy. In order to change the practice, we must change the policy. But then, what methodology of practice are we talking about? What should we be aiming for? The model of heritage practice is determined by the transformation agenda that emerges from the authorised heritage discourse. I suggest that there is potential for the development of an ecological model for heritage practice, informed by the eco-critical approach to literary studies and translated into the heritage context through the conceptual lens of cultural landscapes which constitutes an ecologically sensitised meeting point of culture, heritage and environment. Such a model for heritage practice will by its nature have a focus on climate change as one of the principal ecological issues of our time.

#### CULTURAL LANDSCAPES AND AN ECOLOGICAL MODEL FOR HERITAGE PRACTICE

The development of a model for practice is too complex and detailed a process for the space available here, but I would like to introduce the idea and lay out some initial principles.

The concept of ecocriticism was developed in the field of literary studies relatively recently, in the late 1990s. The ground breaking work is generally regarded as Glotfelty and Fromm's 1996 *Ecocriticism Reader*, in which ecocriticism is defined as the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment, as an "earth-centred" approach to literary studies. The questions with which it is concerned include:

*In what ways do highly evolved and self-aware beings relate to nature? What roles [does culture] play in this relation? How have modernization and globalization processes transformed it? Is it possible to return to more ecologically attuned ways of inhabiting nature, and what would be the cultural prerequisites for such a change? (Heise 2006:503)*

Heise goes on to define the ecocritical impulse as one that seeks to “reground human cultures in natural systems” and “[investigate] the relation between nature and culture”. The intersection of ecocriticism with heritage is readily apparent as Heise discusses the ways in which ecocriticism is concerned with cultural representation, and the ecocritical preoccupation with the politics of implementing sustainability (Heise 2006:505-506). This is a genre of politics that will find resonance in the struggle to integrate climate change work with the work of social transformation in South Africa, not least through the environmental issues that often, even if not overtly, underpin service delivery protest. Service delivery protests, and social movements that operate on the margins, are often about environmental issues, i.e. water, food, sanitation, housing, health, energy, land, all of which relate to climate change in some way.

An ecological heritage practice would thus be one with an earth-centred approach, one which takes cognisance of and prioritises environmental issues as they relate to heritage work. In other words, an ecological heritage practice constitutes the environment explored from a heritage perspective, or heritage explored and practiced from an environmental perspective. This is an approach which can be fruitfully applied to heritage studies and practice through the lens of cultural landscapes.

The concept of cultural landscape is prevalent in international heritage studies and practice (Taylor & Lennon 2011:539). In South African heritage studies however, and particularly museology, it is a relatively new and emergent perspective. The ICOM-SA Declaration on Museums and Cultural Landscapes of 2016, which can be regarded as a foundational document in this regard, conceptualises cultural landscapes as:

*... spaces where there is an interaction between human culture and places. This approach considers ... the relationship between ecological and cultural systems. It acknowledges that people impact on nature and that the natural environment provides a framework within which culture evolves.*

We can consider that cultural landscapes are to be found:

*... at the interface between nature and culture, tangible and intangible heritage, biological and cultural diversity. They represent a closely woven net of relationships, the essence of culture and people's identity . . . they are a symbol of the growing recognition of the fundamental links between local communities and their heritage, humankind and its natural environment (Rössler 2006:334).*

In a future-oriented heritage environment such as that which we experience today, the interaction of humanity and human culture with nature and the environment goes directly to a dialectical interaction between human rights and human responsibilities which constitutes the wellspring of the ethics of human interaction with ecosystems. Cultural landscapes offer a conceptual toolkit for the treatment of these points of interaction, the points at which human culture and the environment meet. An ecological model of heritage practice drawing on the concept of cultural landscapes will see museums as entities with ethical agency embedded within these meeting points, which become the arena in which museums, as expressions of human culture, play a role with a definitive link to ecological concerns.

There are thus clear links between the theory of cultural landscapes and the theory of ecocriticism in the ways in which both are concerned with the human-culture-nature system. These links are fertile ground from which to explore the environmental responsibilities of museums in the Anthropocene and form a basis for the development of an ecological model for heritage practice, a model which I intend to develop in future work.

## CONCLUSION

The cultural roots of climate change open the door for museums, as cultural institutions, to take action on climate change. Despite the fact that the heritage sector recognises the social responsibility of South African cultural museums, the social impacts of climate change and other ecological issues have not been integrated into the transformation project. This shortcoming is a significant threat, perhaps even the principal threat, to the sustainability of South Africa's cultural museums.

A model for an ecological heritage practice, proposed here and to be developed in future work, can spread awareness throughout the museum community and address this threat. Given the impacts that climate change will have on the social issues that are presently the focus of the heritage sector, the development of an ecological heritage practice with the capacity to respond to those impacts, and the assimilation of the principles that underpin that practice into the authorised heritage discourse, is ultimately essential if the transformation project is to continue to be successful in the long term. An ecological model will broaden, complement and enhance heritage practice and further the present goals of the heritage sector while simultaneously enabling museums to address climate change.

#### REFERENCES

- Akinboade, O. & Braimoh, L. 2010. International tourism and economic development in South Africa. *International Journal of Tourism Research*, 12: 149-163.
- Arinze, E. 1999. The role of the museum in society. Public lecture at the National Museum, Georgetown, Guyana. Available at [http://www.maltwood.uvic.ca/cam/activities/past\\_conferences/1999conf/CAM'99-EmmanuelArinze.GuyanaFinal.pdf](http://www.maltwood.uvic.ca/cam/activities/past_conferences/1999conf/CAM'99-EmmanuelArinze.GuyanaFinal.pdf) (accessed on: 13 March 2017).
- Bakker, K. & Müller, L. 2010. Intangible heritage and community identity in post-apartheid South Africa. *Museum International*, 62(1&2): 48-56.
- Ballantyne, R. & Uzzel, D. 2011. Looking back and looking forward: The rise of the visitor-centered museum. *Curator*, 54(1): 85-92.
- Binns, N. & Nel, T. 2002. Tourism as a local development strategy in South Africa. *The Geographical Journal*, 168 (3): 235-247.
- Buoro, A. & Porto, C. 2017. The known dilemma. ICOM News Magazine January. Available at <http://icom.museum/media/icom-news-magazine/the-known-dilemma/> (accessed on: 31 March 2017).
- Corsane, G. 2004. Transforming museums and heritage in postcolonial and post-apartheid South Africa: The impact of processes of policy formulation and new legislation. *Social Analysis*, 48(1): 5-15.
- Climate Systems Analysis Group. n.d. Climate change in southern Africa and the associated impacts, University of Cape Town. Available at [http://media.csag.uct.ac.za/faq/qa\\_3impacts.html](http://media.csag.uct.ac.za/faq/qa_3impacts.html) (accessed on: 10 March 2017).
- Declaration on Museums and Cultural Landscapes. 2016. International Council of Museums – South Africa. Available at <http://network.icom.museum/icom-sa/> (accessed on: 14 March 2017).
- Department of Arts and Culture. 2011. Mzansi's golden economy: Contribution of the arts, culture and heritage sector to the New Growth Path. Available at <https://www.gov.za/documents/mzansi-golden-economy-contribution-arts-culture-and-heritage-sector-new-growth-path> (accessed on: 13 September 2017).
- Department of Arts and Culture. 2016. Revised white paper on arts, culture and heritage. Available at <http://www.dac.gov.za/sites/default/files/WHITE%20PAPER%20Revised%20Second%20Draft%20Nov%202016.pdf> (accessed on: 14 March 2017).
- Draft National Museums Policy. 2014. Department of Arts and Culture. Available at <https://www.dac.gov.za/sites/default/files/Draft-National-Museum-Policy-Framework-version13accepted.pdf> (accessed on: 13 March 2017).
- Duggan, J. 2011. Ten reflections on heritage in a time of change. The Archival Platform, 13 September. Available at <http://www.archivalplatform.org/blog/entry/reflections/> (accessed on: 15 September 2011).
- Effects of climate change on South Africa. 2014. Available at <http://devterms.co.za/2014/10/11/effects-of-climate-change-on-south-africa/> (accessed on: 16 March 2017).
- Fleming, D. 2005. Managing change in museums. Keynote Address at the Museum and Change International Conference, 8-10 November 2005. Available at <http://www.intercom.museum/conferences/2005/> (accessed on: 23 January 2017).

- Fleming, D. 2006. The museum as social enterprise. The First Stephen E. Weil Memorial Lecture, INTERCOM Annual Meeting, Taipei, 2 November. Available at <http://www.intercom.museum/Taiwan2006a.html> (accessed on: 13 March 2017).
- Fobosi, S. 2013. Rural areas in the Eastern Cape Province, South Africa: The right to access safe drinking water and sanitation denied? 24 January. Available at <http://www.polity.org.za/article/rural-areas-in-the-eastern-cape-province-south-africa-the-right-to-access-safe-drinking-water-and-sanitation-denied-2013-01-24> (accessed on: 10 March 2017).
- Freudenheim, T. 2014. Going green in Nepal. *Curator*, 57(3): 281-293.
- Gadgil, M., Berkes, F. & Folke, C. 1993. Indigenous knowledge for biodiversity conservation. *Ambio*, 22 (2-3): 151-156.
- Glotfelty, C. & Fromm, H. (Eds.). 1996. *The ecocriticism reader: Landmarks in literary ecology*. Atlanta: University of Georgia Press.
- Greenberg, J., Knight, G. & Westersund, E. 2011. Spinning climate change: Corporate and NGO public relations strategies in Canada and the United States. *International Communication Gazette*, 73 (65): 65-82. DOI:10.1177/1748048510386742.
- Harris, G. 2013. Social justice body launches. *Museums Journal*, November: 11.
- Heise, U. 2006. The hitchhiker's guide to ecocriticism. *PMLA*, 121(2): 503-516.
- International Council of Museums. 2006. Code of Ethics for Museums. Available at <http://archives.icom.museum/ethics.html#intro> (accessed on: 14 September 2017).
- Johnstone, L. 2008. The climate change future is now. Address by Mr. L. Craig Johnstone, United Nations Deputy High Commissioner for Refugees, April 29. Available at <http://www.unhcr.org/afr/protection/environment/4901e8e82/address-mr-l-craig-johnstone-united-nations-deputy-high-commissioner-refugees.html?query=climate%20refugees> (accessed on: 10 March 2017).
- Joubert, L. 2009. Case study: Emptying the bread basket (Pp 17-18). *Climate change, development and energy problems in South Africa: Another world is possible*. Johannesburg: Earthlife Africa.
- Ki-Moon, B. 2013. Tackling climate change is good for business. Pacific Climate Change Portal. Available at <https://www.pacificclimatechange.net/news/tackling-climate-change-good-business> (accessed on: 07 March 2017).
- Macdonald, S. 2015. Is 'difficult heritage' still difficult? Why public acknowledgment of past perpetration may no longer be so unsettling to collective identities. *Museum International*, 67(1-4): 6-22.
- Madzwamuse, M. 2010. *Climate change vulnerability and adaptation preparedness in South Africa*. Cape Town: Heinrich Boll Stiftung.
- Mashatile, P. 2011. Revised White Paper on Arts, Culture and Heritage. Available at <http://www.dac.gov.za/sites/default/files/WHITE%20PAPER%20Revised%20Second%20Draft%20Nov%202016.pdf> (accessed on: 14 March 2017).
- Meskel, L. 2012. *The nature of heritage: The new South Africa*. Sussex: Wiley-Blackwell.
- Midgley, G. & Barnard, P. 2009. Climate change and biodiversity (Pp 1-2). In M. de Villiers (Ed.). *Birds and environmental change: Building an early warning system in South Africa*. Pretoria: South African National Biodiversity Institute.
- Mosely, E. 2007. 'Visualizing' apartheid: Contemporary art and collective memory during South Africa's transition to democracy. *Antipoda*, 5: 97-119.
- Moser, S. 2010. Communicating climate change: History, challenges, process and future directions. *WIRE's Climate Change*, 1(1):31-53.
- National Environmental Management Act, 107 of 1998. Available at [https://www.environment.gov.za/sites/default/files/legislations/nema\\_amendment\\_act107.pdf](https://www.environment.gov.za/sites/default/files/legislations/nema_amendment_act107.pdf) (accessed on:14 March 2017).
- National Heritage Resources Act, 25 of 1999. Available at <http://www.dac.gov.za/sites/default/files/Legislations%20Files/a25-99.pdf> (accessed on: 14 March 2017).

- National Heritage Council. 2011. National Heritage Council position paper on ethics and professional standards discussion document. Available at [http://www.archivalplatform.org/images/resources/Ethics\\_policy\\_position\\_paper\\_jan2011.pdf](http://www.archivalplatform.org/images/resources/Ethics_policy_position_paper_jan2011.pdf) (accessed on: 14 March 2017).
- Oreskes, N. 2004. Beyond the ivory tower: The scientific consensus on climate change. *Science* 3, December, 306 (5702): 1686. Available at <http://www.sciencemag.org/content/306/5702/1686.full> (accessed on: 07 March 2017).
- Pendlebury, J. 2013. Conservation values, the authorised heritage discourse and the conservation-planning assemblage. *International Journal of Heritage Studies*, 19 (7): 709–727.
- Querol, L. & Sancho, E. 2013. On the trail of social museology: Inclusion and diversity in the museum of São Brás (Pp. 89–102). *Resilient territories: Innovation and creativity for new modes of regional development*. Portugal: University of Algarve.
- Rössler, M. 2006. World heritage cultural landscapes. *Landscape Research*, 31(4): 333–353.
- Salazar, J. 2011. The Mediations of climate change: Museums as citizens' media. *Museum and Society*, 9(2): 123–135.
- South African Museums Association. 2006. Professional standards and transformation indicators. Available at <http://sama.za.net/homepage/samab-journal/> (accessed on: 14 September 2017).
- Stadler, T. 2012. Assessing household assets to understand vulnerability to HIV/Aids and climate change in the Eastern Cape, South Africa. Unpublished Master of Science dissertation, Rhodes University, Grahamstown.
- Taylor, K. & Lennon, J. 2011. Cultural landscapes: A bridge between culture and nature? *International Journal of Heritage Studies*, 17(6): 537–554.
- The impact of climate change on South Africa's rural areas. 2014. Financial And Fiscal Commission Technical Report 2013/14. Available at <http://www.ffc.co.za/index.php/reports/technical-reports/technical-report-chapters> (accessed on: 20 November 2013).
- Tichmann, P. 2010. The changing role of museums. Available at [http://www.maltwood.uvic.ca/cam/publications/other\\_publications/Tichmann\\_Paul\\_Changing%20role%20of%20museum.pdf](http://www.maltwood.uvic.ca/cam/publications/other_publications/Tichmann_Paul_Changing%20role%20of%20museum.pdf) (accessed on: 13 March 2017).
- Von Maltitz, G. & Scholes, R. 2004. *Vulnerability of southern African fauna and flora to climate change*. Washington: AIACC.
- Weil, S. 1999. From being about something to being for somebody: The ongoing transformation of the American museum. *Daedalus*, 128 (3): 229–258.

## Critical Realist Philosophy and the Possibility of an Eco-decolonial Museology

Tom Jeffery

---

### Abstract

New forms of museum practice that explore the dynamics of social and ecological processes as interlinked systems are increasingly urgent. Critical realist philosophy is used to consider the emergence of tensions between museological processes of decolonization and ecologization, and potentials for their resolution into a new form of practice, which is conceptualized as eco-decolonial. The analysis is focused on South African museums, but is contextualized within international theory and practice.

An exploration of the ontology of museum work surfaces a core tension in that trends towards a relational and emancipatory practice are paradoxically embedded within neoliberal ideology. Neoliberalism depends on and perpetuates the problematic human-nature dualism of the colonial era, and constrains the development of progressive social-ecological forms of museum practice. The analysis explores potentials for the resolution of this tension, in a contribution towards the transformation of the philosophical and theoretical frameworks of museum practice.

**Key words:** Museum practice; critical realism; decolonization; dualism; neoliberalism

This paper builds on an initial investigation into an absence of ecological issues from the practice of South African cultural museums (Jeffery 2017). Social responsibility is at the centre of the contemporary museum's mission, which implies the development of public programmes that engage with the cultural roots and social impacts of social-ecological crisis (Jeffery 2017: 20-1). Forms of museum practice with potential to explore the dynamics of social and ecological processes as interlinked systems seem increasingly urgent (Anderies *et al.* 2004: 2; Walker *et al.* 2004: 1; Jeffery 2017: 25).

Decolonization and ecologization of practice are current museological trends that seem to have particular relevance to this. The ecologization of museology refers to emergent transformative pathways that connect socially responsible practice to urgent ecological contexts. These emphasize fresh ways of thinking and being in order to disrupt the persistence of museological human-nature dualism, and to expand practice to emphasize the relationship between humanity and the environment as mutually constructive (Cameron 2015a: 16; Newell *et al.* 2017; Jeffery 2017: 21).

Generally, decolonization is about the empowerment and rehabilitation of marginalized peoples, knowledge and traditions (Dondolo 2005: 68-9; Alonso 2008: 249; Mdanda 2016; Newell *et al.* 2017: 11). The focus of South African museological decolonization is the vital amelioration of the depredations of the colonial and apartheid eras, an agenda of inclusivity, representivity and relevance, and the memorialization of trauma and difficult heritage (Corsane 2004: 6, 10; Mosely 2007: 101; Bakker and Müller 2010: 48; Meskell 2012: 6; MacDonald 2015; Jeffery 2017: 23). Emergent international museological perspectives demonstrate an awareness of the entanglement of social and environmental justice, and some individual museums are engaged in progressive and creative practices that critique and transgress dualist museology in order to find ways to engage with crucial social-ecological issues (Plumwood 2002; Scott

and Oelofse 2005; Allen 2015: 49; Nixon 2017; Phillips 2019). Such perspectives are largely absent from the South African decolonial museological programme (Jeffery 2017: 22). This article explores the emergence of tensions between decolonization and ecologization that seem to result in their separation in South African museum practice. It looks for potentials for their resolution towards a progressive form of practice suited to a global context of social-ecological crisis. Such a form may be conceptualized as eco-decolonial.

The focus will be on South African national and provincial government-funded museums. These principal museological entities express the standards for national museum practice that emerge from ideology and policy. Connections will however be drawn between South African and international museum theory and practice, so that the South African may be expanded through the integration of emergent social-ecological perspectives, and may in turn contribute to international developments.

### Surveys and data analysis methodology

The analysis is augmented through the input of key informants. Workers at national and provincial government-funded South African museums with at least five years experience in exhibition or education programming were selected for their potential insights into practice. 49 surveys were sent out and 15 were returned completed. Respondents were promised anonymity, and are referred to as Respondent 1, Respondent 2, etc. They answered a set of 13 open-ended questions that explore decolonial and ecological issues in museum practice. Similar to Vollgraaff's research (2018: 384), though the respondents cannot be considered representative of the museum sector, the consistency of the responses is indicative of challenges that South African museums face.

The survey data were analyzed through abduction, induction and retroduction. Abduction refers to the recontextualization of existing knowledge (Togo 2016: 89), in this instance drawing in themes, or codes, from a contextual analysis conducted in earlier work (Jeffery 2017). This initial exploration of policy and practice identified an absence of ecological issues from museum practice, generated by their absence from the policy framework, and a need to link ecological and decolonial concerns for meaningful transformations of museum practice. These constituted abductive codes for exploring the survey data here.

Induction refers to the identification of new codes from the data at hand, 'a process that ... helps us to [move] from a set of observations to a theory' (Sabai 2016: 182). Inductive analysis surfaced further codes as the survey data were analyzed. For instance, a number of respondents noted the alienating influence of quantitative management practice, so it is possible to induce that quantitative management practice is generative of alienation. Such general premises may inform changes to practice (Sabai 2016: 183). Other induced codes were commodification of practice, a restrictive authorized heritage discourse, and the suppression of staff agency and interest in social-ecological issues, as elaborated below.

These abducted and induced categories suggested the need for a new way of analyzing the emerging information that could offer a deep perspective on historical and structural causes. There was a need to bring the various experiences related in the survey data together with the information emerging from the literature review, and a critical realist laminated view (elaborated below) became useful for doing this in a way that allowed coherence and relationality (see, for instance, Munnik 2016: 307 on this 'constellational' critical realist perspective on open systems such as museum practice). This deepened the interpretation and analysis of these abducted and induced codes and provided a tool to consolidate a depth ontology analysis through retroduction.

Retroduction refers to 'inferential judgements from the analysis of indirect evidence' (Lotz-Sisitka and Price 2016: 6; Price 2016: 29). Drawing on O'Donoghue's insights (2016: 170), retroduction can be seen to offer a historical perspective on how practice changed over time to have the impacts and characteristics that it does today, with a focus on deep, generative, structural causes that offer 'a better explanatory grasp' of the research context (O'Donoghue 2016: 173).

The survey responses generally expressed resistance to structural restrictions on practice, such as the authorized heritage discourse and quantitative management, as elaborated

below. There was a clear sense of frustration with the slow pace of transformation, and with the limitations on agency that emerge from the current governance structures of museum practice. Many survey respondents were critical of the focus on economic performance, surfaced below as emergent from an implicit neoliberal ontology, and the ways in which this in fact limits the processes of decolonization that governance structures claim to champion.

The responses had a clear focus on issues that relate to macro-level ideology and meso-level practice, which is to be anticipated as these are the levels at which the structural restrictions on practice emerge and are felt by the workers responding to the surveys. This is why the survey responses begin to appear at the meso-level, relatively late in the analysis below, and subsequently surface micro-, individual- and sub-individual-level perspectives on practice.

### Why critical realism?

Progressive international perspectives and philosophies may enable deep theorizing about what a museology of social-ecological crisis might look like, and offer opportunities to deepen understanding of the links between social and ecological justice. The goal of this paper is to contribute to the philosophical and theoretical frameworks of South African and international museum practice. To this end, the philosophy of critical realism is proposed as 'underlabourer' for the theoretical development of an eco-decolonial museological practice.

Critical realism is notoriously complex, but valuable to the understanding of social structures and phenomena such as museums, and the mechanisms that steer practice in particular directions (Price 2016: 18; Lotz-Sisitka and Price 2016: 1). The philosophy of critical realism (henceforth CR) offers 'explanatory tools and forms of reasoning that allow for making the complexities found in our contexts more visible and open for dialogue, engagement, learning and reflexivity' (Lotz-Sisitka and Price 2016: 5). Some key principles of CR philosophy that will be used in the analysis will be introduced below. Hopefully, their effectiveness in exploring the separation of decolonization and ecologization in South African museum practice (henceforth referred to as the D-E separation) will demonstrate that critical realism has potential to contribute to the emergence of progressive modes of museological theory and practice.

Fiona Cameron writes that the contemporary museum, with its persistent dualist foundation, is easily perceived as operating separately from society, focused too much on the past, and 'ill-equipped philosophically and ontologically' to face the challenges of a 'messy and turbulent world' (Cameron 2015b: 345). Given the philosophical and ontological challenges Cameron notes, the application of critical perspectives to the museum context is vital if museums are to remain socially relevant (Vergo 1989: 3; Smith 2014: 33). Vollgraaff's comprehensive survey of the content of South Africa's peer-reviewed museological journal, the *South African Museums Association Bulletin* (SAMAB), identifies no social-ecological themes, and concludes that South African perspectives are underdeveloped and lag behind international museological thinking (Vollgraaff 2018: 382-4; also see Levitz and Mathers 2000: 20; Martin 2000: 13). Bluntly put, the intellectual foundation of South African museum practice has received little attention, while the term 'decolonization' is poorly understood in terms of what it means in practice.<sup>1</sup> This implies a need to clarify and develop the philosophical and theoretical perspectives that underpin and shape decolonial practice.

In the international context, the influential 'New Museology' and its 'radical re-examination of the rôle of museums within society' (Vergo 1989: 3) was founded on postmodern principles of anthropocentric cultural pluralism (Cameron 2015a: 20). While the postmodern wariness of authority has been useful for museum work (Smith 2014: 33), critical theory has become disillusioned with the project of neoliberal postmodernity, its insistently relativist position, which has undermined curatorial articulation of visions for alternative futures (Wray 2019: 319), and its endless language games that have absented crucial environmental action (Martin 2000: 13-4; Potter 2001: 184; Keene 2006; Lotz-Sisitka and Price 2016: 6; Rosenberg 2020a: 203).<sup>2</sup> The International Council of Museums' (ICOM) redefinition of the museum, furthermore, does not appear to be grounded in any particular philosophical or theoretical perspective.<sup>3</sup> While South African museology lags international trends, there is equally a need for a revitalized

philosophy for international museological theory and practice, one which may better support important emergent perspectives such as ecologization.

CR is, at least in part, a reaction to the ways in which postmodern relativism undermined potentials for the development of the concepts necessary for the understanding of vital, complex, open-systemic phenomena, such as climate change (Bhaskar 2010: 22). CR was developed to act as a philosophical 'underlabourer' for emancipatory social sciences (Bhaskar 2008: 335). Here it will be used to contribute to an emergent museology that is shedding fresh light on persistent, restrictive dualist structures (Cameron 2015a; Cameron 2015b; Newell et al. 2017). The analysis will use CR philosophy to explore museological human-nature dualism, and to surface new potentials to disrupt its constraints on practice and to contribute to an emancipatory museology that may bring greater freedom to 'humanity-in-nature' (Moore 2017: 598).

#### Critical realism as underlabourer

Underlabouring can be understood as 'the process of clarifying ... ontological and epistemological confusions and uncertainties [to support] a transformative research intent', or the practice of philosophy for real social-ecological change (Bhaskar 2008: 335; Bhaskar and Parker 2010: vii; Price 2016: 18; Rosenberg 2020a: 192). Through its capacity to elaborate a new level of ontological structure (Bhaskar 2008: 30), CR may help develop progressive museological perspectives suited to the practice context of social-ecological crisis.

CR specifically looks to the 're-vindication of ontology ... the philosophical study of being, as distinct from and irreducible to epistemology' (Bhaskar 2010: 1) to the extent that it 'stresses the crucial role that being (ontology) plays in our ... efforts to understand the way things are' (Norrie 2010: 7). As such, it has potentials to equip museums to meet the philosophical and ontological challenges that Cameron references, and further the museological goal of transformation towards the betterment of peoples' lives (Weil 1999; Ballantyne and Uzzel 2011: 87). CR is here proposed as underlabourer, as a philosophical support system, to the exploration and development of potentials for an eco-decolonial ontology, with the capacity to move museum practice from its persistent dualist framework and to resolve tensions such as those between decolonization and ecologization.

#### Dialectical critical realism and the 'MELD' schema

The CR oeuvre developed from basic critical realism to dialectical critical realism and later meta-reality (Lotz-Sisitka and Price 2016: 11). Basic critical realism became 1M, the First Moment of the 'MELD' framework that structures dialectical critical realism. The present analysis will use basic critical realism to understand the *initial emergence* of the D-E separation and to surface potential transformational pathways to be developed in future work.

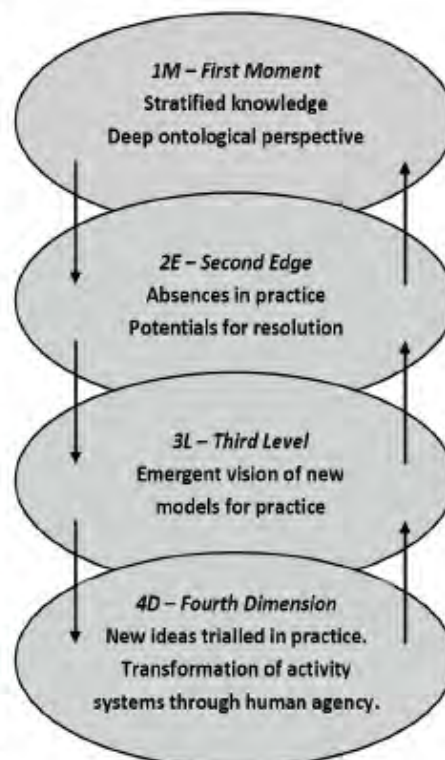


Figure 1. 'MELD' overview, Tom Jeffery

'MELD' is 'a robust schema for investigating ... research contexts concerned with societal transformation', and a means through which normalized practice can be expanded reflexively (Hartwig 2008: xiii; Lotz-Sisitka 2016: 318; Schudel 2017: 163). It is a dialectical process that potentially removes constraints on transformation towards social-ecological justice (Bhaskar 2008: 38; Lotz-Sisitka 2016: 324; Mukute 2016: 196; Schudel 2017: 174, 179). MELD stands for first Moment (1M), second Edge (2E), third Level (3L) and fourth Dimension (4D) (Hartwig 2008: xiii). 1M enables a deep understanding of the status-quo (Bhaskar 2008: 196), and is elaborated below.

2E is concerned with identifying absences in practice visible after the initial 1M analysis, and with the emancipatory agenda of the resolution of such absences towards the expansion of practice (Bhaskar 2008: 38; Lotz-Sisitka 2016: 324; Schudel 2017: 170). 3L develops the emergent vision of social-ecological justice in the open system that is being studied (Schudel 2017: 179). 3L imagines new models for practice, in this case, an eco-decolonial form of museum practice. 4D is the moment of real change, as the new ideas are tried in practice and human agency brings transformation to social structures through active resolution of social ills (Bhaskar 2008: 8; Mukute 2016: 196; Schudel 2017: 174). Figure 1 gives an overview of the MELD process, and the bidirectional arrows show its relational nature.

### 1M and depth ontology

1M explores 'the intrication of a multiplicity of explanatory mechanisms' that delineate the activities of social structures and agents (Bhaskar 2010: 6; Fletcher 2017: 181). 1M is focused on surfacing the deep mechanisms that drive the phenomenon that is being studied, in this case the emergence of the D-E separation and the ways it constrains potential for social-ecological forms of museum practice.

CR initially conceives three levels of being, or 'ontological domains': the real (that which exists independent of human experience), the actual (the moment at which human experience 'discovers' the real and interacts with it), and the empirical (cultural mediation of the real and the actual) (Bhaskar 2010: 2; Price 2016: 18-9; Rosenberg 2020a: 197).

Higher [domains] of being are emergent from lower [domains]. ... [For] instance ... society [is] 'a real thing', emergent from the activities of people, but irreducible to the people who daily reproduce it, in the same way that climate is a 'real thing' that is emergent from the activities of the molecules of the atmosphere, but is not reducible to those molecules. We ... cannot fully explain [real] society by reducing it to the [actual] collective activities of empirical individual agents (Price 2016: 19).

The epistemic fallacy is the reduction of the domain of the real to the domain of the actual, and the reduction of ontology to epistemology, which 'functions merely to cover the generation of an implicit ontology' (Bhaskar 2008: 4; Bhaskar 2010: 1). That is, a powerful epistemology may take on or be given an ontological position. To disambiguate ontological and epistemological questions is to identify instances of the epistemic fallacy (Bhaskar 2010: 2). This can focus attention on deeper ontological issues that may underpin tensions such as that of the D-E separation and museological dualism, as will be explored below in the context of capitalist dualism and its neoliberal ideology.

CR views the world as constituted by open systems in which knowledge is always fallible (Bhaskar 2010: 3). This implies that causality cannot be reduced to constant conjunctions, but rather, 'phenomena are generated ... by a multiplicity of causal structures, mechanisms, processes or fields ... at different, including emergent, levels of reality' (Bhaskar 2010: 4-5). Real, open systems are thus characterized by stratification, or lamination, in which social structures (e.g. culture, traditions, heritage) and organizations (e.g. museums, governmental entities) operate in intersecting levels that interact in emergent ways (Bhaskar 1998: 8; Bhaskar 2010: 5; Lotz-Sisitka 2016: 320). Bhaskar created a model to guide researchers through these strata, which he called the seven laminations of scale, as follows:

1. The planetary (or cosmological) level concerned with the planet (or cosmos) as a whole...

2. The mega-level of the analysis of whole traditions and civilizations, such as the South African trajectory from pre-colonialism, to colonialism, to apartheid, to independence...
3. The macro-level, orientated to understanding the way that whole societies or their regions function, such as the British economy...
4. The meso-level, studied by sociologists, which concerns the relations between functional roles such as manager and employee...
5. The micro-level [of production of social order between individuals], studied by ethnomethodologists and others...
6. The individual or biographical level, studied by existentialists and others.
7. The sub-individual psychological level, studied by psychologists and psychiatrists.

(Bhaskar 2010: 9; Price 2016: 26).

The 1M lamination model enables a careful and structured approach to what is being revealed and helps researchers to avoid relativism through its perspective on the interconnected nature of the world (Rosenberg 2020a: 197). The lamination elucidates the generative mechanisms from which most social phenomena in open systems emerge (Bhaskar 2010: 3, 11; Frank 2010: 102), phenomena such as museum practice and its relations to society and ecology. This perspective avoids the reductive, linear, cause and effect philosophy of dualism (Cameron 2015a: 29) and enables a deep, retroductive understanding of emergence of phenomena through complex interactions (Bhaskar 2010: 8; Price 2016: 19; Mukute 2016: 192). Such a deep, ontological and reflexive perspective is just what seems to be needed in the museum context.

Figure 2 gives an overview of the seven levels and their elucidation of the 1M generative complex of the D-E separation, which is the focus of the remainder of this paper.

**1M emergence of the separation of decolonization and ecologization**

The seven levels express 'a hierarchy of scale, that is of more macroscopic or overlying and less macroscopic or underlying mechanisms' (Bhaskar 2010: 9). The levels, however, are relational, as each level is emergent from but also influences those previous to it (Bhaskar 2010: 16; Price 2016: 26). The levels are not necessarily sequential, and influences can 'skip' levels, or surface from or shape more than one simultaneously. The vitality of emergence lies in its nature as a messy feedback process, and the strata should not be seen as a rigid structure of isolated steps and things that happen within each step. This analysis enters the lamination at the cosmological level and the 'overlying' level of natural systems and will try to express such relational complexities in the emergence of the D-E separation. Relational movement is indicated by the dual-directional arrows in the main structure of Figure 2.

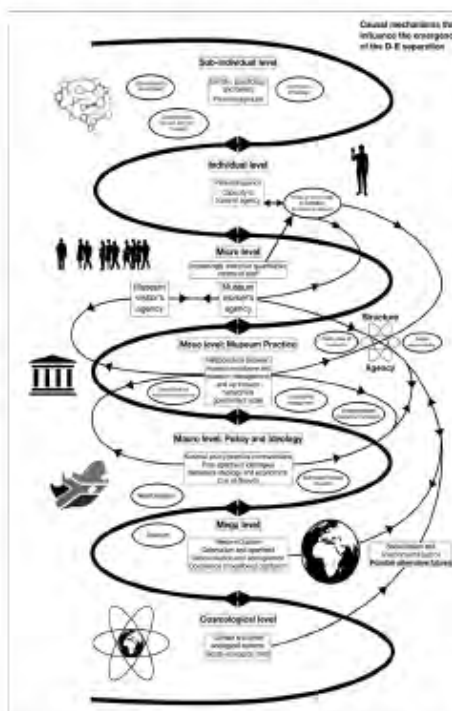


Figure 2. Generative Complex, Tom Jeffery

'Critical realists designate the relation between structure and agency as the key framing device at the ontological level' (Scott 2010: 6), indicated by the flow of influences through the structure-agency nexus. Social structure pre-exists individuals, 'but is nevertheless emergent from agency (interactions) and is thus only relatively enduring', while individuals (agents) are born into pre-existing structure, and can then be either transformative or reproductive of that structure (Price 2016: 25). Society is thus 'both the ever-present ... material cause and the continually reproduced outcome of human agency' (Bhaskar 1998: 37). The D-E separation, the ideological separation of ecological justice from social justice, may be explored as a material cause of limited agency, which dualist museums and museum workers may be constrained to reproduce in their work in society. If the deep, structural causes of constraint are surfaced, this may enable agency for resolution of the constraints and transformation of the structure.

### 1. The planetary (cosmological) level

The Anthropocene has become a popular frame for understanding a geological age in which humanity affects global natural systems (Crutzen 2002: 23). The profound effects of global systems of capitalism, however, persuade some theorists to conceive the present age as the Capitalocene. This is 'a system of power, profit and re/production in the web of life ... [a] historical era shaped by ... a system that not only accumulates capital, but drives extinction' (Moore 2017: 594-7). Global capitalism is conceived as an ontological formation in which emancipation is impossible for the majority of humanity and the entirety of the more-than-human (Moore 2017: 601). The Capitalocene systems are of colonizing intent which, like their historical-colonial progenitors, 'vast and cool and unsympathetic, [regard] this earth with envious eyes' (Wells 1898: 1).

The Anthropocene perspective is embedded in the dualist logic that separates humanity from nature, while environmental justice concerns around unequal access to resources and unequal exposure to risk remain incidental (Nixon 2017: 24; Moore 2017: 595). The idea of the Anthropocene has been deeply valuable in popularizing understanding of human impacts on the planet, including in the emergent museological approach to ecological issues (see for instance Fox 2017; and Robin *et al.* 2017), but the idea of the Capitalocene surfaces capitalism's 'spaces of vulnerability and contradiction', (Moore 2017: 595) and may thus enable emancipatory strategies.

### 2. The mega-level: Civilization

This level offers a view of the historical context of international museum work, and of museological philosophy, theory and practice. An emergent critique of the dualist museological epistemology and the emancipatory potentials of new thinking and practices is grounded in awareness of interwoven human and non-human ecological communities, whose lives and freedoms are equally threatened by forces of inequality (Cameron 2015a: 16; Newell *et al.* 2017; Wehner 2017: 87; Jeffery 2017: 21).

The concept of neoliberalism as the primary organizing principle of international systems of governance, which then inform macro-level ideology and policy, may be elucidated at the mega-level. Economist Rajesh Venugopal argues that, despite its portrayal as a 'ubiquitous, totalizing and epoch-defining phenomenon', neoliberalism does not exist as a formal economic theory or practice, and as such there can be no meaningful referents for the critique of the concept by the 'other' social sciences (Venugopal 2015: 168-9, 180). He considers neoliberalism to be a rhetorical device, and that

there is for all practical purposes no such thing ... it is an artifice willed into existence ... by its critics ... outside mainstream economics [to] attach moral sensibility to a range of contemporary economic, social, political, spatial and cultural phenomena (Venugopal 2015: 181-2).

His criticism centres on the contradictions he sees in conceptions of neoliberalism (Venugopal 2015: 166). The only real access to economic theory and practice is through 'the mathematical sophistication of its theory and empirics', and neoliberalism is a lens through which the 'rest

of the social sciences may survey, simplify, label and render economics understandable, while 'what emerges ... is inadequate ... sketchy and vague' (Venugopal 2015: 180-1). In other words, capitalist economic 'empirics' are self-enclosed and inaccessible to the supposedly 'less sophisticated' social sciences.

The mathematical technicalities of capitalist economics may not be a part of the mental toolkit of the 'other' social sciences, but the visible impacts of an ethically bankrupt system of unequal exchange and accumulation in the real world certainly are, and it is these impacts that are the focus of their expression and critique of neoliberalism. Mathematical economic theory may be precise, but it bears little relation to the messy and violent practices of capitalism, which are inconsistent beyond the generation of maximum income for very few people in the short term (see for instance von Weizsäcker and Wijkman 2018: 63).

Venugopal's position can perhaps be understood in relation to 'the inability of... economic theory to understand power because of its mistaken ontological presuppositions', which do not conceive capitalism as a system of power relations (Palermo 2007: 539). That capitalism is indeed a violent and contradictory system of power relations can be seen in that it is *simultaneously* anthropocentric and dehumanizing, both historically and today. Colonialism was a system of simultaneous capitalist division and exploitation of people and nature. Humanity was separated from and classed as superior to Nature in order to allow Nature's exploitation by capital. Simultaneously, great numbers of people were classified as 'of Nature', rather than human, in order to allow their exploitation by capital. These violent dualist contradictions remain true in the era of neoliberalism (see for instance Plumwood 2002: 8 on 'our current failures and blindspots in relationships with nature'; Plumwood 2002: 9 and Moore 2017: 611-2 on cheap nature and labour, and who counts as 'human'; Nixon 2017). Rossi (2012: 349) considers that 'we arguably now lack understandings of ... capitalism as a totality [that] is constitutively multifaceted', because of the 'mutually contradictory ... ontologies of contemporary capitalism'. Contradiction characterizes capitalist ontology and practice, and this is why, across the landscape of the social sciences, the critical construction of neoliberalism as the capitalist ideology may seem contradictory, and is arguably necessarily so.

Neoliberalism is not merely a rhetorical device. In the present analysis it is taken to mean the ideology emergent from the contradictory ontology and the actual practices and impacts of dualist capitalism on the real world. This is potentially a conceptual basis for a social-ecological activist position for museum work, with capacity to directly challenge the neoliberal construction of 'real abstractions' such as Humanity, Nature, Society, the Economy (Moore 2017: 595). These construct human-nature dualism as a given condition of reality, and operationalize the violence of contradictory capitalism (Moore 2017: 601). They can be understood as instances of the epistemic fallacy, a broad treatment of epistemology as ontology that generates a screen of things that are 'obviously' or 'plainly' true and obscure neoliberal violence and injustice.

Venugopal's denial of the existence of neoliberalism can thus be read as an attempt to neuter the 'other' social sciences' critique of capitalism. Rosenberg (2020b: 2) echoes De Sousa Santos' (2018) position that such manipulations try to ensure that there is no alternative to the capitalist 'cognitive empire' that elevates its contradictory and violent epistemology to ontology in order to 'take away our ability to imagine or propose anything else without being made out to be wishful and irrational' (Rosenberg 2020b: 2). A critical eco-decolonial perspective will understand capitalist dualism as an epistemology elevated to the position of ontology, and neoliberalism as its global ideology. This enables a critical view on museological dualism as historically emergent from colonial capitalist dualism and perpetuated in the decolonial context by the contemporary dualism of neoliberal ideology. This offers a perspective on how these successive historical manifestations of capitalism impact the idea of the museum, are generative of the D-E separation, and restrict potentials for emancipatory museum practice.

### 3. The macro-level: policy and ideology

The macro-level South African heritage policy framework has a social justice focus on decolonization, but does not consider the social impacts of ecological crisis or potential synchronicities with environmental justice (Jeffery 2017: 22-4). This may be more deeply

understood through mega-level neoliberal influences on the macro-level of ideology and policy. Attempts to 'forge a more social-democratic and co-ordinated variety of capitalism' after the end of apartheid failed amid a turn to international neoliberal macroeconomic policies (Natrass 2014: 56, 57; Togo 2016: 93). The South African state's neoliberal policy framework is plagued by inconsistencies, and its practice by corruption, the net result of which is to exacerbate unemployment, for example, rather than to facilitate emancipation (Natrass: 2014: 56; Adjor and Kebalo 2018).

The flow of neoliberal ideology from the mega- to the macro-level draws through the abstractions of the epistemic fallacy. The policy of the South African Department of Arts and Culture echoes the explicit mega-level international commitment to embed heritage within a neoliberal frame as part of the 'cultural and creative industries' (Thomas 2016: 37).<sup>4</sup> Heritage is seen as an industry, in which 'optimal performance' is measured in relation to job creation, investment and economic growth as the solutions for social problems (Kamga and Heleba 2012: 83).<sup>5</sup> This ensures that macro-level heritage policy is focused on a decolonization process operationalized through neoliberal economic principles that marginalize social-ecological concerns.

The absence of social-ecological care from macro-level neoliberal ideology is apparent in sectors other than heritage. South Africa has progressive environmental policies, such as the National Environmental Management Act and the Climate Change Bill.<sup>6</sup> These seem to be rhetorical, demonstrated by plans for new coal-fired power stations despite the government's pledge to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 34 per cent by 2020, which has not happened (Reddy 2013), and the continued allocation of huge amounts of water to mining despite high levels of water pollution by the industry, years of drought, and a widespread lack of public access to potable water (Molobela and Sinha 2012; van Rooyen *et al.* 2011).<sup>7</sup> South African energy production parastatal Eskom protects its mismanaged monopoly by blocking the introduction of renewables, while the Mpumalanga province recorded the highest levels of nitrogen dioxide air pollution in the world, directly caused by Eskom's coal-fired power generation.<sup>8</sup> About 23,000 people die in South Africa every year as a result of air pollution, and while the lockdown in response to the current global pandemic has reduced air pollution, it can still be anticipated to exacerbate the impacts of the Covid-19 virus.<sup>9</sup> Rhetorical environmental policy serves as a supporting example of the exclusion of social-ecological perspectives from a practice underpinned by neoliberal ideology. Rhetorical environmental policy also has no agency with which to influence heritage policy.

It seems that macro-level decolonial policy thus proposes to counter the inequalities and violence of *colonial* dualist capitalism through the inequalities and violence of *contemporary* dualist capitalism. This paradoxical position undermines emancipatory decolonial potentials, and facilitates the appropriation of decolonial heritage into the neoliberal set of epistemic fallacies.

As mega-level influences flow into the macro-level of heritage policy, the emergent D-E separation reflects the complex contradictions of neoliberal ideology. To begin to resolve the separation is to begin to resolve the contradictions between emancipatory eco-decolonial ideals and the oppressive, profit-focused principals of neoliberalism.

#### **4. The meso-level of formal museum practice, and 5., the micro-level of social interaction**

As explained above, the survey data is introduced in the meso-level, as the responses had a clear focus on the structural restrictions that emerge from the macro-level, to be felt at the meso-level of practice by the workers who responded to the surveys. The responses surfaced meso-, micro-, individual- and sub-individual-level reactions to the restrictions on practice and agency that emerge from 'overlying' levels of power.

The meso-level considers how ideologies shape formal and functional roles in institutional practice, and the micro-level looks at social interactions and relationships (Price 2016: 27; Munnik 2016: 308; Togo 2016: 93). Neoliberal ideology emerges in the meso-level to govern formal practice relations between the institution (management) and employees, and determines the degree of agency workers may have to influence practice.

The conditions of the meso-level flow into the micro-level of social relations. There, they affect the degree of agency museum workers may have in interactions with users and which they may transfer to users. The agency of museum workers, as the executors of the museum's social responsibilities, is the agency of the museum itself. The close entanglement of issues of structure and agency here enables a perspective on how meso-level organizational rules emergent from macro-level ideology impact vital micro-level face-to-face interactions. Respondent 3 speaks of how 'Good communication ... between the museum worker and the public ... has a very important transformative function. ... [It is] an opportunity to break down barriers'.<sup>10</sup> This is an opportunity that may be seized or lost through the degree of agency provided by the ontological structure of the museum.

South African museum practice historically emerged from the mega- and macro-level colonial western modes of traditional dualist practice (Corsane 2000: 28; Abungu 2004: 4; Rall 2018: 11; Vollgraaff 2018: 374). This deep dualist structure is perpetuated through the contemporary influences of the authorized heritage discourse (AHD), which legitimates the values and validated practice of a given heritage context and can be understood as a set of ideological expectations which are, in turn, legitimated by museums themselves when they adopt its values (Herbert 2000: 83; Khan 2000: 50; Vollgraaff 2012: 31; Pendlebury 2013: 709; Jeffery 2017: 22). The AHD is a vehicle through which the paradox of neoliberal ideology, as the vector for the decolonization of heritage, passes from the macro- to the meso-level and becomes engrained as the implicit ontology of museology. The absence noted above of social-ecological perspectives from the *South African Museums Association Bulletin* seems likely to result at least in part from such ideological limitations on practice and research.

Neoliberal constraints on the agency of the museum and museum workers can be identified in the commodification of heritage practice, which constitutes a postcolonial reproduction of colonial hegemonies of growth, and constrains sustainability initiatives in favour of profitability (Helland and Lindgren 2016: 433; Togo 2016: 93). The close association of heritage with tourism may reinforce and exploit cultural stereotypes as these are transformed into a consumable spectacle, while governance structures see museums as tourist sites and not as knowledge-generating institutions (Rassool 2000: 6-10; Witz *et al.* 2001: 280; Marschall 2005: 103-4; Soudien 2008: 215; Vollgraaff 2018: 386). The iconic Robben Island Museum, for instance, 'is like a huge sausage factory: get as many tourists on and off the island and don't worry if the layered history of the island is lost. As long as the money comes in, it doesn't matter'.<sup>11</sup>

In another example, 'official memory' emerges as meso-level values of political and economic elites morph the AHD into a set of hegemonic narratives, evident in the political manipulation of the practice of memorialization (Abungu 2004: 3; Shoba 2005: 26; Bakker and Müller 2010: 50; Rankin 2013: 79, 90; Zuma 2018: 40; Roux 2018: 408-9).<sup>12</sup> The political apparatus of state power possesses the means to turn cultural capital into political power (Mahony 2017: 128). Official memory can be understood in terms of the focus of authoritarian capital on the material interests of politically powerful economic elites, which can be generative of patrimonialism and corruption (Natrass: 2014: 56; Venugopal 2015: 174). 'Museums in South Africa are under pressure to adhere to a single, authorized narrative of the past and the present', (Vollgraaff 2018: 385), a narrative which constitutes a selective discourse of heroic leaders, of survival, triumph and exemplariness, and silences and alienates dissonant voices and communities (Rassool 2000: 11; Dubin 2006: 238; Soudien 2008: 214; Bakker and Müller 2010: 49-50; Mngqolo 2010: 70; Rassool 2016: 196). The museum is instrumentalized in the construction of a specific identity, which absents deeper treatments of the 'less remembered miseries and celebrations of township life' (Soudien 2008: 211), as well as narratives that may surface contemporary social-ecological injustices.

Respondent 5 feels that 'Museums have become very focused on liberation heritage and government goals to the detriment of grassroots voices and non-political issues'.<sup>13</sup> 'Politicians have had too much of an input regarding what museums should/should not consider their business',<sup>14</sup> while 'Many (politically-correct) temporary displays have been completed but this is not a good reflection [of decolonization]'.<sup>15</sup> Equally, when a museum tacks on a token 'Struggle Room'<sup>15</sup> this limits the learning opportunities offered to communities and does no justice to the layered memory of anti-apartheid movements (Soudien 2008: 211).

Authorized heritage narratives and official memory can also undermine the crucial role of arts and culture in social critique, and potentially discriminate against niche, experimental or radical programmes (Mahony 2017: 130-1). Such circumstances impede broad community connections to a museum.<sup>17</sup>

Perhaps the most significant effect of neoliberal ideology on museum practice is the emergence of quantitative management practice, the strategic focus of museum management on rigid quantitative performance indicators, logistics, administration and Treasury compliance requirements (Vollgraaff 2004: 2; Dubin 2006: 217; Vollgraaff 2018: 373, 384). The demands of compliance to regulatory bodies overshadows museological functions,<sup>18</sup> and energy is placed on economic measurements instead of effective museum services (Vollgraaff 2018: 377-87).

Museum and heritage workers' practice goals and any feedback into the management system are formally limited to the numerical. Qualitative ideals and ideas and potentials for creative worker-driven expansion of museum practice are absented by the limitations of economically correct practice. Respondent 5 feels that there is a need to weaken the focus on managerialism and measurable outcomes and to reward experimentation and creative thinking,<sup>19</sup> while Respondent 2 emphasizes that:

Bureaucracy itself is deeply colonial ... Productivity is the only important factor and employees are seen as a troublesome group who want too much money for too little work. This type of 'us' and 'them' mentality creates another binary which is the hallmark of colonization.<sup>20</sup>

Neoliberal quantitative management thus tends to consolidate dualist thinking and alienates workers (see Mahony 2017 on activist interventions in cultural institutions in resistance to capitalist 'corporatization' of practice). Museum governance at the macro- and meso-levels seems to be largely divorced from the museum's (theoretical) meso- and micro-level social obligations, just as neoliberal ideology is largely divorced from the lived reality of a world in social-ecological crisis (see, for instance, Hawkins 2009: 50 on how the brand value of the notorious plastic bag outweighs its ecological impacts).

The reciprocity of the structure-agency relationship at the institutional level thus seems to be biased towards political and ideological structures that have more power and limit the agency of workers. That is, individuals at the meso- and micro-levels are constrained in such a way that they are reproductive of structure. 'What we have learned from museum educators worldwide is that what matters most is the belief that museums can be the agents of socioecological change';<sup>21</sup> however, the structural limitations on the agency of museum workers and museum users cannot support the emergence of emancipatory social-ecological impulses. The paradox of neoliberalism as the driver of emancipatory potentials flows from the 'overlying' levels into practice to become the heart of the D-E separation, and neutralizes potentials for social-ecological justice. Through such contradictions neoliberalism appropriates decolonial practice so that, like policy, it becomes an element of the capitalist architecture of epistemic fallacies that precipitates the D-E separation.

This is a strong motivation for an eco-decolonial perspective that may act as a philosophical and theoretical foundation from which museum practitioners may talk back to powerful overlying forces, and their meso-level expression in commodification, official memory, and quantitative management practice. This may facilitate deeper interrogation of the paradox of neoliberal ideology as the driver for the emancipatory impulses of decolonialism, and the ways in which this absents social-ecological perspectives and perpetuates dualism.

Despite emergent international trends towards ecologization, however, dualist practice frames remain firmly entrenched. The International Council of Museums (ICOM) is redeveloping its definition of the museum in order to better address contemporary challenges.<sup>22</sup> Collection is considered sacrosanct in the redefinition process:

The museum definition should retain ... the unique, defining and essential unity in museums of the functions of collecting, preserving, documenting, researching, exhibiting and in other ways communicating the collections ... The word museum is easily understood in its manifold complexity, with a stable core concept of a collection.<sup>23</sup>

The full scope of a museum's practice activities emerges from collection. Collection is conserved at the heart of the museum's dualist practice frame, which may perhaps be understood in light of the fact that, despite the need for museum practice to be rooted in critical theory, '[For] the museum worker ... the practical project tends to start from, and stop with, the object' (Thomas 2010: 7).

Collection is thus the grounding ontological activity of museum work. Collection practice is rooted in historical museological dualism, which the implicit neoliberal ontology both fixes and exploits in contemporary practice. This is the deeper underlying mechanism for the persistence of human-nature divisions in the work that museums do. While the *methods* of collecting, and of interpreting and exhibiting collections are the focus of critique, reflection, and change (Pearce 2003; Morgan and Macdonald 2020), even in the context of discussions about redefining and reinventing the museum to ensure its future, there is little critique of the *principle* of collection as the defining activity of the museum. Collection seems to be exterior to change, because it is so fundamental to what a museum is conceived to be. To reshape museum practice, however, seems to require a fundamental reimagining of the implicit museological ontology, and thus of the grounding ontological activity, collection. This is a crucial element of the emergence of an eco-decolonial form of practice.

## 6. The individual or biographical level

This is the stratum of individual agency and the potential capacity for expression of the personal psychological agendas defined at the sub-individual level. The museum worker's sense of their relationship with the institution may be empowering or disempowering, both personally and in relationships with users of the museum.

Most respondents expressed personal concern at the global social-ecological crisis as a threat to 'the survival of the human race and the earth system as a whole',<sup>24</sup> 'a crisis from which we cannot return if we do not address our waste problems such as plastics, waste water, carbon footprint, etc., now'.<sup>25</sup> Respondent 1 felt that it is important for museums to emphasize the ecological cost of cultural practices,<sup>26</sup> while 'Protection of the environment ... is key to sustainability. ... Cultural museums need to play their role towards realization of a sustainable society'.<sup>27</sup> In a nuanced critique of dualism, one respondent noted that 'we do not see non-humans as beings with their own interests'.<sup>28</sup>

There is thus a tension between respondents' individual, progressive social-ecological concerns and the neoliberal ideology of the institutions for which they work. This tension flows through the structure-agency nexus to influence individual senses of agency and value, and also generates potential for museum workers to talk back to the contradictions of the overlying levels and disrupt practice constraints.

A potentially powerful perspective views decolonization not as an institutional process, but as a form of personal reflexivity and agency:

Decolonization asks us to deeply introspect and explore the biases which we all have and which affect how we ... treat other people in various environments. ... Looking outside of oneself and working for the good of the future generations is ... part of decolonization, because your community and society are a part of you and are as important as the individual.<sup>29</sup>

In this sense, decolonization may be considered as a personal, reflexive openness to others' perspectives. Reflexivity may counter personal biases and underpin a critical counterpoint to personal or institutional political agendas. The generation of agency for such reflexive, individual sensibilities may potentially contribute more effectively to institutional decolonization than neoliberal quantitative practice. The development of such potentials could become a key element of an eco-decolonial philosophy and theory for museum practice.

Impetus towards multi- and inter-disciplinary practice has gained new urgency as a catalyst for emergent social-ecological practices (Bhaskar 2010: 4). To disrupt 'disciplinary purity' is particularly crucial for museums in their movement towards relational modes of practice that are better able to engage with entangled decolonial and ecological demands (Phillips 2019: 331), and the value of interdisciplinary approaches was emphasized by respondents.

Knowledge is not confined to a specific field, but overlaps and flows through various aspects of the disciplines. ... Museums are ... open to multi-disciplinary work. ... Museums cross disciplinary divides ... created during colonial times ... and an important aspect of decolonization is the interwoven nature of knowledge.<sup>30</sup>

Interdisciplinarity may be envisioned as the disruption of the boundaries that define traditional practice, in order to encourage new ways of thinking.<sup>31</sup> This may generate links between specialists in various fields,<sup>32</sup> and develop collaboration with the communities of practice in various disciplines.<sup>33</sup> It may enable museums to develop programmes that disrupt dualism as they 'better combine humanities and natural sciences',<sup>34</sup> so that 'ecological issues are not seen as remote scientific ideas, but issues that affect how we live. Our culture affects our environment and the state of the environment affects our culture'.<sup>35</sup>

'Studying the natural world is a cultural activity. Science is a cultural activity',<sup>36</sup> an understanding which is key to the disruption of dualism. Cultural museums potentially 'provide an ideal bridge between culture, social history and science',<sup>37</sup> which offers an opportunity for museums to explore the entanglement of humanity with nature:

People, culture, customs, everything we do, create or use is linked to our interaction with nature. We create things in order to survive our environment, we use things to control our environment. We have ways of doing things because of our environment, our customs are mostly based on what is available in our environment. We are part of nature.<sup>38</sup>

'Culture is rooted on [sic] nature. There is no way that the two can be separated',<sup>39</sup> to the extent that, 'We are one, part of nature'.<sup>40</sup>

There are clear tensions between individual and institutional positionalities on social-ecological issues. South African museum workers demonstrate nuanced perspectives with potential to disrupt the constraints on practice of the neoliberal ontology that underpins the D-E separation. Such perspectives may open transformative pathways for museum practice, but are absented by the institution-individual binary and limited communications channels created by quantitative management. An eco-decolonial museum practice would look for ways to realign the structure-agency nexus to enable greater agency in practice for such progressive individual level perspectives.

## 7. The sub-individual psychological level

The sub-individual level is focused on personal psychology and personal agendas (Price 2016: 27; Togo 2016: 88, 91). This is the level of a person's emotions, their sense of their connection to their heritage, to their environment and to other living things, and the level of personal interest or lack of interest in decolonization and/or ecologization.

At the sub-individual level, respondents reflected on their senses of agency in relation to the deep problems they encounter in the world. Mega-level issues of 'Climate change, global warming, extreme weather, population pressure, scarcity of resources', and the macro-level 'inability of governing systems to lessen the rich-poor divides or enable social justice', bring about 'information overload and mistrust on the level of the individual's ability to experience them. It does not make it less real, but it makes one feel more useless'.<sup>41</sup> This seems to be an expression of a sense of ineffectiveness that people may feel when they are faced with 'wicked problems' such as social-ecological crisis, problems that lack simplistic solutions and straightforward planning responses, and which are complex and ambiguous and often embedded within controversy around what needs to or can be done (Lotz-Sisitka *et al.* 2015: 73; Colding *et al.* 2019: 512).

This sense of ineffectiveness may be deeper when the person is embedded within an institutional structure that is rooted in neoliberalism and its quantitative tentacles, which limit individual and collective agency. Such structures are attuned to neither individual nor sub-individual reactions to wicked problems, nor to the potential development of creative approaches to their resolution at these or overlying strata. For museum workers to feel a deep sense of agency and value requires 'a fundamental shift in how work is done and how museum employees view themselves. Value can only come from ... proper management

providing employees with a feeling of agency and autonomy. ... Fundamentally museum staff need to be valued'.<sup>42</sup> This sense of value effects responses to wicked problems, and their emergent causes and effects through the levels of the lamination.

The expression of individual psychologies and values can surely be seen in the respondents' considered comments, which indicate a depth of interest in the contradictions at hand and a commitment to their resolution.

### Conclusions

The goal of this paper is to contribute to the philosophical and theoretical framework of museology and to surface potential new transformative pathways for museum practice. It envisions the possibility of an eco-decolonial mode of thinking that may resolve the separation of decolonization and ecologization of practice in South African museology and disrupt the persistence of international museological human-nature dualism at the ontological level.

The philosophy of critical realism offers value as underlabourer for the expansion of museum theory and practice. The critical realist 1M analysis surfaces the deep generative roles of capitalism and neoliberalism in the ideological formations that shape museum practice. CR philosophy shows how neoliberalism, rather than just a difficult context for practice, in fact becomes the implicit ontology of museology. The laminated perspective shows how this happens historically, through the co-evolution of dualist museology and dualist capitalism, from the cabinets of curiosity of European colonial capital through to the museum as a social enterprise in the contemporary era of neoliberal capital.

Just like colonial capitalism, neoliberal capitalism is operationalized through human-nature dualism (Moore 2017: 597). As the implicit ontology of museum practice, neoliberalism is at the root of the persistence of museological human-nature dualism. The ontological and epistemological contradictions of neoliberalism flow through each level of the 1M lamination. They move from ideology and policy into practice through the authorized heritage discourse, and are associated with constraints on museum practice such as official memory and quantitative management practice, which limit the agency of museum workers and of museums themselves and signal a fundamental problem for museum work: how to be socially and ecologically responsible within a governing system that depends on not being so.

Most significant for museum work, however, is the paradox of the oppressive ideology of neoliberalism positioned as the fundamental driver of the emergent, emancipatory, relational museological impulses of decolonization and ecologization. Emancipatory practices cannot be supported by the neoliberal ideology that generates and perpetuates the inequalities and injustices of the Capitalocene. Rather, emancipatory principles and practice are appropriated by neoliberal ideology, for instance through the commodification of practice, so that they become part of the complex architecture of epistemic fallacies through which the epistemology of neoliberalism represents and protects itself as the essential global ontology.

The idea of a practice driven by neoliberal authority, however, implies the possibility of transgressive discourses and activist practices. Transgression and activism may emerge from the understanding that epistemic contradictions, such as 'emancipatory neoliberalism', are also vulnerabilities (Moore 2017: 595).

Neoliberalism is the implicit ontology of museum practice. Collection is the grounding ontological activity of dualist museum work. Collection is thus at the heart of the fault-line between museological tradition and progress, between entrenched and emergent modes of practice. To reflect on collecting as a principle is to reflect on the core of the museum. In ICOM's redefinition process, however, the principle of acquisition is isolated from critique.<sup>43</sup> This effectively applies a philosophical shield to the deep roots of museological dualism in neoliberalism. To disrupt the untouchable position of the principle of collection may enable the fresh perspectives necessary for deep transformation of museum philosophy, theory and practice.

To unsettle acquisition's fundamental ontological position is entangled with a second potential pathway, the recalibration of the structure-agency nexus. The CR perspective on a reciprocity between workers' individual, progressive 'underlying' positionalities and neoliberal institutional 'overlying' positionalities may be operationalized. Workers may assume

the agency to conduct activities with potential to change practice and disrupt the implicit neoliberal ontology. Such 'interstitial' activism by museum workers, activism from within the ontological formation so that it may be 'opened up' from the inside, should be seen 'not as an attack on these public institutions for their duplicitous value systems, but as acts of love for what they could be' (Mahony 2017: 132-3). Workers' perspectives on 'the living, multi-species connections of humanity-in-nature and the web of life' (Moore 2017: 598) may resist the appropriation of museum practice into the neoliberal epistemic architecture, disrupt the division of humans and nature into discrete abstractions, and challenge the simultaneously anthropocentric and dehumanizing impulses of neoliberalism. In doing so, workers' agency-activism may contribute to a relational practice that will link social and environmental justice. Such an eco-decolonial perspective may disrupt dualist historical trajectories, and focus on the ways in which the amelioration of the colonial depredations of the past is entangled with the amelioration of the social-ecological crisis of the present.

Forthcoming work will develop the ideas emergent from the 1M analysis through the subsequent phases of the critical realist dialectical framework, and further explore the potentials of an emancipatory eco-decolonialism, to contribute to the reimagination of the ontology of museology and the deep transformation of the museum.

Received: 19 August 2019  
Finally accepted: 1 October 2020

#### Notes

- <sup>1</sup> Respondent 5, interview by author, typed questionnaire, 10 May 2018, Cape Town.
- <sup>2</sup> Alison Gibbons, 'Postmodernism is Dead. What Comes Next?', *Times Literary Supplement* Online 3 October 2019. <https://www.the-tls.co.uk/articles/postmodernism-dead-comes-next/>, accessed 14 February 2020.
- <sup>3</sup> Jette Sandahl, 'International Council of Museums Standing Committee for Museum Definition, Prospects and Potentials: Report and Recommendations', International Council of Museums 19 June 2018. <https://icom.museum/en/activities/standards-guidelines/museum-definition/>, accessed 14 October 2019.
- <sup>4</sup> Department of Arts and Culture, 'Revision of the Department of Arts and Culture 1996 White Paper', 2017. <http://www.dac.gov.za/white-papers>, accessed 20 May 2020.
- <sup>5</sup> South African Cultural Observatory, 'Minister Mthethwa Interaction with the Creative Industries', 2018. <https://www.southafricanculturalobservatory.org.za/article/minister-mthethwa-interaction-with-the-creative-industries>, accessed 13 May 2020; South African Government, 'Mzansi's Golden Economy: Contribution of the Arts, Culture and Heritage Sector to the New Growth Path', 2011. <https://www.gov.za/documents/mzansis-golden-economy-contribution-arts-culture-and-heritage-sector-new-growth-path>, accessed 27 June 2012.
- <sup>6</sup> Department of Environmental Affairs and Tourism, 'National Environmental Management Act 107 of 1998', *Government Gazette*, 401 (19519) 1998. [www.environment.gov.za/sites/default/files/legislations/nema\\_amendment\\_act107.pdf](http://www.environment.gov.za/sites/default/files/legislations/nema_amendment_act107.pdf), accessed on 15 May 2020; Department of Environmental Affairs, 'Climate Change Bill, 2018', *Government Gazette*, 636 (41689) 2018. [www.environment.gov.za/sites/default/files/legislations/climatechangebill2018\\_qn41689.pdf](http://www.environment.gov.za/sites/default/files/legislations/climatechangebill2018_qn41689.pdf), accessed 15 May 2020.
- <sup>7</sup> Siphso Kings, 'New Bill Gives Mines Carte Blanche', *Mail and Guardian* 27 March 2014. <https://mq.co.za/article/2014-03-27-new-bill-gives-mines-carte-blanche/>, accessed 18 November 2014; Siphso Kings, 'Water be Damned, The Mines Are What Count', *Mail and Guardian* 19 November 2015. <https://mq.co.za/article/2015-11-19-water-be-damned-the-mines-are-what-count/>, accessed 24 January 2020.

- <sup>8</sup> Lisa Steyn, 'Eskom Gridlocks Renewable Energy', *Mail and Guardian* 30 October 2015. <http://mq.co.za/article/2015-10-29-eskom-gridlocks-renewable-energy>, accessed 11 January 2016; Mashadi Kekana, 'Mpumalanga Tops World Nitrogen Dioxide Air Pollution Charts', *Mail and Guardian* 30 October 2018. <https://mq.co.za/article/2018-10-30-mpumalanga-tops-world-nitrogen-dioxide-air-pollution-charts>, accessed 20 November 2018.
- <sup>9</sup> Kevin Davie, 'SA, Like Others, Flunks Emissions Report Card', *Mail and Guardian Business* 12 November 2019. <https://mq.co.za/article/2019-11-12-00-sa-like-others-flunks-emissions-report-card/>, accessed 27 January 2020; World Economic Forum, 'The Deadly Link Between COVID-19 and Air Pollution', 15 April 2020. <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2020/04/the-deadly-link-between-covid-19-and-air-pollution/>, accessed 15 May 2020; Christi Nortier, C. (2020) 'Air Pollution Drops, Illegal Cigarette Trade Spikes and Schools Approach Reopening', *Maverick Citizen* 11 May 2020. <https://www.dailymaverick.co.za/article/2020-05-11-air-pollution-drops-illegal-cigarette-trade-spikes-and-schools-approach-reopening/>, accessed 15 May 2020.
- <sup>10</sup> Respondent 3, interview by author, typed questionnaire, 12 July 2018, Grahamstown.
- <sup>11</sup> Respondent 2, interview by author, typed questionnaire, 1 June 2018, Pretoria.
- <sup>12</sup> Sabelo Skiti, 'Sad Monument a Blot on Memory of Cradock Four', *Sunday Times* 15 May 2015. <https://www.timeslive.co.za/sunday-times/news/2015-05-24-sad-monument-a-blot-on-memory-of-cradock-four/>, accessed 30 April 2019; Derrick Spies, 'Cradock Four Memorial Neglected, Forgotten', *News 24* 7 April 2015. <https://www.news24.com/SouthAfrica/News/Cradock-Four-memorial-neglected-forgotten-20150407>, accessed 30 April 2019; Leigh Paulse, 'Sarah Baartman Remembrance Centre Project at Standstill', *SABC News* 15 January 2019. <http://www.sabcnews.com/sabcnews/sarah-baartman-remembrance-centre-project-at-standstill/>, accessed 28 January 2019.
- <sup>13</sup> Respondent 5, interview, 10 May 2018.
- <sup>14</sup> Respondent 11, interview by author, typed questionnaire, 4 June 2018, Pretoria.
- <sup>15</sup> Respondent 6, interview by author, typed questionnaire, 27 June 2018, East London.
- <sup>16</sup> Respondent 11, interview, 4 June 2018; Respondent 12, interview by author, typed questionnaire, 5 June 2018, Grahamstown.
- <sup>17</sup> Respondent 8, interview by author, typed questionnaire, 10 May 2018, Cape Town; Respondent 1, interview by author, typed questionnaire, 6 June 2018, Grahamstown.
- <sup>18</sup> Respondent 1, interview, 6 June 2018.
- <sup>19</sup> Respondent 5, interview, 10 May 2018.
- <sup>20</sup> Respondent 2, interview, 1 June 2018.
- <sup>21</sup> Respondent 14, interview by author, typed questionnaire, 5 July 2018, Grahamstown.
- <sup>22</sup> International Council of Museums, 'Museum Definition', 2007. <https://icom.museum/en/activities/standards-guidelines/museum-definition/>, accessed 16 July 2019.
- <sup>23</sup> Sandahl, 'Report and Recommendations'; Jette Sandahl, 'Definitions Are Dynamic, Not Static', *Museums Association*, 5 December 2019. [https://www.museumsassociation.org/museums-journal/comment/01122019-definitions-are-dynamic-not-static?utm\\_campaign=1644717\\_12122019&utm\\_medium=email&utm\\_source=Museums%20Association&dm\\_i=2VBX,Z92L,7AK7Z8,3PDZT,1](https://www.museumsassociation.org/museums-journal/comment/01122019-definitions-are-dynamic-not-static?utm_campaign=1644717_12122019&utm_medium=email&utm_source=Museums%20Association&dm_i=2VBX,Z92L,7AK7Z8,3PDZT,1), accessed on 13 December 2019.

- <sup>24</sup> Respondent 1, interview, 6 June 2018.
- <sup>25</sup> Respondent 7, interview by author, typed questionnaire, 19 March 2018, Grahamstown.
- <sup>26</sup> Respondent 1, interview, 6 June 2018.
- <sup>27</sup> Respondent 13, interview by author, typed questionnaire, 25 June 2018, Grahamstown.
- <sup>28</sup> Respondent 6, interview, 27 June 2018.
- <sup>29</sup> Respondent 2, interview, 1 June 2018.
- <sup>30</sup> Respondent 2, interview, 1 June 2018.
- <sup>31</sup> Respondent 8, interview, 10 May 2018.
- <sup>32</sup> Respondent 7, interview, 19 March 2018.
- <sup>33</sup> Respondent 9, interview by author, typed questionnaire, 7 June 2018, Roodepoort.
- <sup>34</sup> Respondent 6, interview, 27 June 2018.
- <sup>35</sup> Respondent 8, interview, 10 May 2018.
- <sup>36</sup> Respondent 5, interview, 10 May 2018.
- <sup>37</sup> Respondent 4, interview by author, typed questionnaire, 17 June 2018, Cape Town.
- <sup>38</sup> Respondent 5, interview, 10 May 2018.
- <sup>39</sup> Respondent 13, interview, 25 June 2018.
- <sup>40</sup> Respondent 12, interview, 5 June 2018.
- <sup>41</sup> Respondent 1, interview, 6 June 2018.
- <sup>42</sup> Respondent 2, interview, 1 June 2018.
- <sup>43</sup> Gibbons, 'Postmodernism is Dead'.

## References

- Abungu, G. (2004) 'Democratising Museums and Heritage Ten Years On', *South African Museums Association Bulletin*, 40 3-5.
- Adjor, D.M. and Kebalo, L. (2018) 'Does Corruption Matter for Unemployment in SADC Countries?', *Review of Economic and Business Studies*, 11 (1) 65-92. DOI [10.1515/rebs-2018-0074](https://doi.org/10.1515/rebs-2018-0074).
- Allen, F. (2015) 'The State of the Climate Justice Movement in South Africa', *Capitalism Nature Socialism*, 26 (2) 46-57. DOI: [10.1080/10455752.2015.1017731](https://doi.org/10.1080/10455752.2015.1017731).
- Alonso, M.F. (2008) 'Can We Protect Traditional Knowledges?', in Boaventura de Sousa Santos (ed) *Another Knowledge Is Possible: Beyond Northern Epistemologies*, 249-71, New York: Verso.
- Anderies, J.M., Janssen, M.A. and Ostrom, E. (2004) 'A Framework to Analyze the Robustness of Social-ecological Systems from an Institutional Perspective', *Ecology and Society*, 9 (1) <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26267655>.

- Bakker, K.A. and Müller, L. (2010) 'Intangible Heritage and Community Identity in Post-Apartheid South Africa', *Museum International*, 62 (1) 48-56.
- Ballantyne, R. and Uzzel, D. (2011) 'Looking Back and Looking Forward: The Rise of the Visitor-Centered Museum', *Curator*, 54 (1) 85-92.
- Bhaskar, R. (1998) *The Possibility of Naturalism: A Philosophical Critique of the Contemporary Human Sciences*, London: Routledge.
- (2008) *Dialectic: The Pulse of Freedom*. London: Verso.
- (2010) 'Contexts of Interdisciplinarity: Interdisciplinarity and Climate Change', in Roy Bhaskar, Cheryl Frank, Karl Georg Høyer, Petter Næss and Jenneth Parker (eds) *Interdisciplinarity and Climate Change: Transforming Knowledge and Practice for our Global Future*, 1-24, London: Routledge.
- Bhaskar, R. and Parker, J. (2010) 'Introduction', in Roy Bhaskar, Cheryl Frank, Karl Georg Høyer, Petter Næss and Jenneth Parker (eds) *Interdisciplinarity and Climate Change: Transforming Knowledge and Practice for our Global Future*, vii-xiii, London: Routledge.
- Cameron, F. (2015a) 'Ecologizing Experimentations: A Method and Manifesto for Composing a Post-humanist Museum', in Fiona R. Cameron and Brett Neilson (eds) *Climate Change and Museum Futures*, 16-33, London: Routledge.
- Cameron, F. (2015b) 'The Liquid Museum: New Institutional Ontologies for a Complex, Uncertain World', in Andrea Witcomb and Kylie Message (eds) *The International Handbooks of Museum Studies: Museum Theory*, 345-61, Milton: John Wiley and Sons.
- Colding, J., Barthel, S. and Sörqvist, P. (2019) 'Wicked Problems of Smart Cities', *Smart Cities*, 2 512-21. [doi:10.3390/smartsities2040031](https://doi.org/10.3390/smartsities2040031).
- Corsane, G. (2000) 'What can South African Museums Learn from the Work of the French Sociologist Pierre Bourdieu?', *South African Museums Association Bulletin*, 24 (1) 25-30.
- (2004) 'Transforming Museums and Heritage in Postcolonial and Post-Apartheid South Africa: The Impact of Processes of Policy Formulation and New Legislation', *Social Analysis*, 48 (1) 5-15.
- Crutzen, P.J. (2002) 'Geology of Mankind', *Nature*, 415 23.
- De Sousa Santos, B. (2018) *The End of the Cognitive Empire: The Coming of Age of Epistemologies of the South*, London: Duke University Press.
- Dondolo, L. (2005) 'Museums and Communities: The Reconstruction of Museums and their Practices in Post-apartheid South Africa', *South African Museums Association Bulletin*, 31 68-71.
- Dubin, S.C. (2006) *Transforming Museums: Mounting Queen Victoria in a Democratic South Africa*, New York: Palgrave MacMillan.
- Fletcher, A.J. (2017) 'Applying Critical Realism in Qualitative Research: Methodology Meets Method', *International Journal of Social Research Methodology*, 20 (2) 181-194. [DOI: 10.1080/13645579.2016.1144401](https://doi.org/10.1080/13645579.2016.1144401).
- Fox, W.L. (2017) 'The Art of the Anthropocene', in Jennifer Newell, Libby Robin and Kirsten Wehner (eds) *Curating the Future: Museums, Communities and Climate Change*, 196-205, London: Routledge.

- Frank, C. (2010) 'Global Warming and Cultural/Media Articulations of Emerging and Contending Social Imaginaries: A Critical Realist Perspective', in Roy Bhaskar, Cheryl Frank, Karl Georg Høyer, Petter Næss and Jenneth Parker (eds) *Interdisciplinarity and Climate Change: Transforming Knowledge and Practice for our Global Future*, 100-15, London: Routledge.
- Hartwig, M. (2008) 'Introduction', in Roy Bhaskar, *Dialectic: The Pulse of Freedom*, xiii-xxxii, New York: Routledge.
- Hawkins, G. (2009) 'More-than-Human Politics: The Case of Plastic Bags', *Australian Humanities Review*, 46 41-54.
- Helland, L.E.F. and Lindgren, T. (2016) 'What Goes Around Comes Around: From the Coloniality of Power to the Crisis of Civilization', *Journal of World-Systems Research*, 22 (2) 430-62.
- Herbert, D.G. (2000) 'Natural Science in Museums: Life Between a Rock and a Hard Place', *South African Museums Association Bulletin*, 24 (1) 80-4.
- Jeffery, T. (2017) 'Future-Proofing South Africa's Cultural Museums: Climate Change, Heritage Discourse and Cultural Landscapes', *South African Museums Association Bulletin*, 39 19-28.
- Kamga, S.A.D. and Heleba, S. (2012) 'Can Economic Growth Translate into Access to Rights? Challenges Faced by Institutions in South Africa in Ensuring that Growth Leads to Better Living Standards', *International Journal on Human Rights*, 9 (17) 83-106.
- Keene, S. (2006) 'All That is Solid? Museums and the Postmodern', *Public Archaeology*, 5 (3) 185-98.
- Khan, F. (2000) 'Environmentalists, Museologists and Communities: Partners in the Conservation of Heritage', *South African Museums Association Bulletin*, 24 (1) 50-4.
- Levitz, C. and Mathers, K. (2000) 'A Poverty of Theory, A Wealth of Activity: Museology and South African Museums', *South African Museums Association Bulletin*, 24 (1) 18-21.
- Lotz-Sisitka, H. (2016) 'Absenting Absence: Expanding Zones of Proximal Development in Environmental Learning Processes', in Leigh Price and Heila Lotz-Sisitka (eds) *Critical Realism, Environmental Learning and Social-Ecological Change*, 318-39, London: Routledge.
- Lotz-Sisitka, H. and Price, L. (2016) 'Why Critical Realism, Environmental Learning and Social-Ecological Change? Introducing the Book', in Leigh Price and Heila Lotz-Sisitka (eds) *Critical Realism, Environmental Learning and Social-Ecological Change*, 1-17, London: Routledge.
- Lotz-Sisitka, H., Wals, A.E.J., Kronlid, D. and McGarry, D. (2015) 'Transformative, Transgressive Social Learning: Rethinking Higher Education Pedagogy in Times of Systemic Global Dysfunction', *Current Opinion in Environmental Sustainability*, 16 73-80. [doi.org/10.1016/j.cosust.2015.07.018](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cosust.2015.07.018).
- Macdonald, S. (2015) 'Is "Difficult Heritage" Still Difficult? Why Public Acknowledgment of Past Perpetration May No Longer Be So Unsettling to Collective Identities', *Museum International*, 67 (1-4) 6-22.

- Mahony, E. (2017) 'Opening Spaces of Resistance in the Corporatized Cultural Institution: Liberate Tate and the Art Not Oil Coalition', *Museum and Society*, 15 (2) 126-41.
- Marschall, S. (2005) 'Making Money with Memories: The Fusion of Heritage, Tourism and Identity Formation in South Africa', *Historia*, 50 (1) 103-22.
- Martin, M. (2000) 'Theory into Practice, Practice into Theory', *South African Museums Association Bulletin*, 24 (1) 11-7.
- Mdanda, S. (2016) 'Museums and Democratic Education: How Museums were Transformed after the 1994 Elections in South Africa', *South African Museums Association Bulletin*, 38 (1) 47-57.
- Meskell, L. (2012) *The Nature of Heritage: The New South Africa*, Chicester: Wiley-Blackwell.
- Mngqolo, S. (2010) 'Voices Within our Exhibitions', *South African Museums Association Bulletin*, 33 (1) 70.
- Molobela, I.P. and Sinha, P. (2012) 'Management of Water Resources in South Africa: A Review', *African Journal of Environmental Science and Technology*, 5 (12) 993-1002. DOI: [10.5897/AJEST11.136](https://doi.org/10.5897/AJEST11.136).
- Moore, J.W. (2017) 'The Capitalocene, Part I: On the Nature and Origins of our Ecological Crisis', *The Journal of Peasant Studies*, 44 (3) 594-630. DOI: [10.1080/03066150.2016.1235036](https://doi.org/10.1080/03066150.2016.1235036).
- Morgan, J. and Macdonald, S. (2020) 'De-Growing Museum Collections for New Heritage Futures', *International Journal of Heritage Studies*, 26 (1) 56-70. DOI: [10.1080/13527258.2018.1530289](https://doi.org/10.1080/13527258.2018.1530289).
- Mosely, E. (2007) 'Visualizing Apartheid: Contemporary Art and Collective Memory during South Africa's Transition to Democracy', *Antipoda*, 5 97-119.
- Mukute, M. (2016) 'Dialectical Critical Realism and Cultural Historical Activity Theory (CHAT): Exploring and Expanding Learning Processes in Sustainable Agriculture Workplace Contexts', in Leigh Price and Heila Lotz-Sisitka (eds) *Critical Realism, Environmental Learning and Social-Ecological Change*, 190-211, New York: Routledge.
- Munnik, V. (2016) 'Steel Valley and the Absence of Environmental Justice in the New South Africa: Critical Realism's Kinship with Environmental Justice', in Leigh Price and Heila Lotz-Sisitka (eds) *Critical Realism, Environmental Learning and Social-Ecological Change*, 293-317, London: Routledge.
- Nattrass, N. (2014) 'A South African Variety of Capitalism?', *New Political Economy*, 19 (1) 56-78. DOI: [10.1080/13563467.2013.768610](https://doi.org/10.1080/13563467.2013.768610).
- Newell, J., Robin, L. and Wehner, K. (2017) 'Introduction', in Jennifer Newell, Libby Robin and Kirsten Wehner (eds) *Curating the Future: Museums, Communities and Climate Change*, 1-16, London: Routledge.
- Nixon, R. (2017) 'The Anthropocene and Environmental Justice', in Jennifer Newell, Libby Robin and Kirsten Wehner (eds) *Curating the Future: Museums, Communities and Climate Change*, 23-31, London: Routledge.
- Norrie, A. (2010) *Dialectic and Difference: Dialectical Critical Realism and the Grounds of Justice*, London: Routledge.

- O'Donoghue, R. (2016) 'Working with Critical Realist Perspective and Tools at the Interface of Indigenous and Scientific Knowledge in a Science Curriculum Setting', in Leigh Price and Heila Lotz-Sisitka (eds) *Critical Realism, Environmental Learning and Social-Ecological Change*, 159-77, London: Routledge.
- Palermo, G. (2007) 'The Ontology of Economic Power in Capitalism: Mainstream Economics and Marx', *Cambridge Journal of Economics*, 31 (4) 539-61. doi: [org/10.1093/cje/bel036](https://doi.org/10.1093/cje/bel036).
- Pearce, S.M. (2003) *Interpreting Objects and Collections*, London: Routledge.
- Pendlebury, J. (2013) 'Conservation Values, the Authorised Heritage Discourse and the Conservation-Planning Assemblage', *International Journal of Heritage Studies*, 19 (7) 709-27.
- Phillips, R.B. (2019) "'Making Fun" of the Museum: Multi-disciplinarity, Holism, and the "Return of Curiosity"', *Museum and Society*, 17 (3) 316-41.
- Plumwood, V. (2002) 'Decolonising Relationships with Nature', *Philosophy Activism Nature*, 2 7-30.
- Potter, G. (2001) 'Truth in Fiction, Science and Criticism', in José Lopez and Garry Potter (eds) *After Postmodernism: An Introduction to Critical Realism*, 183-95, London: Athlone Press.
- Price, L. (2016) 'Key Critical Realist Concepts for Environmental Educators', in Leigh Price and Heila Lotz-Sisitka (eds) *Critical Realism, Environmental Learning and Social-Ecological Change*, 18-39, London: Routledge.
- Rall, M. (2018) 'Across Time of Three South African San Exhibitions: Reflecting on Colonialism, Apartheid and Decolonisation', *South African Museums Association Bulletin*, 40 (1) 11-22.
- Rankin, E. (2013) 'Creating/Curating Cultural Capital: Monuments and Museums for Post-Apartheid South Africa', *Humanities*, 2 72-98. doi: [10.3390/h2010072](https://doi.org/10.3390/h2010072).
- Rassool, C. (2000) 'The Rise of Heritage and the Reconstitution of History in South Africa', *Kronos*, 26 (1) 1-21.
- (2016) 'Red Mandela: Contests of Auto-biography and Auto/biography in South Africa', *Kronos*, 42 195-213.
- Reddy, T. (2013). 'Coal3 will be Another Eskom Catastrophe', *Mail and Guardian*, 27 September, 44.
- Robin, L., Avango, D., Keogh, L., Möllers, N and Trischler, H. (2017) 'Displaying the Anthropocene In and Beyond Museums', in Jennifer Newell, Libby Robin and Kirsten Wehner (eds) *Curating the Future: Museums, Communities and Climate Change*, 252-66, London: Routledge.
- Rosenberg, E. (2020a) 'Synthesis and Elaboration of Critical Realist Methodology for Green Skills Research', in Eureka Rosenberg, Presha Ramsarup and Heila Lotz-Sisitka (eds) *Green Skills Research in South Africa: Models, Cases and Methods*, 192-207, Abingdon: Routledge.
- Rosenberg, E. (2020b) 'Special Issue: Education for Sustainability in a Time of Crises. Editorial Part 1', *Southern African Journal of Environmental Education*, 36 1-7. DOI: [10.4314/sajee.v36i1.1](https://doi.org/10.4314/sajee.v36i1.1).

- Rossi, U. (2012) 'On the Varying Ontologies of Capitalism: Embeddedness, Dispossession, Subsumption', *Progress in Human Geography*, 37 (3) 348-65.
- Roux, N. (2018) "A House for Dead People": Memory and Spatial Transformation in Red Location, South Africa', *Social & Cultural Geography*, 19 (4) 407-28. DOI: [10.1080/14649365.2017.1280614](https://doi.org/10.1080/14649365.2017.1280614).
- Sabai, D. (2016) 'Indigenous Knowledge and Critical Realism on the Eastern Coast of Tanzania', in Leigh Price and Heila Lotz-Sisitka (eds) *Critical Realism, Environmental Learning and Social-Ecological Change*, 178-89, London: Routledge.
- Schudel, I.J. (2017). 'Modelling Dialectical Processes in Environmental Learning: An Elaboration of Roy Bhaskar's Onto-axiological Chain', *Journal of Critical Realism*, 16 (2) 163-183. DOI: [10.1080/14767430.2017.1288061](https://doi.org/10.1080/14767430.2017.1288061).
- Scott, D. (2010) *Education, Epistemology and Critical Realism*, London: Routledge.
- Scott, D. and Oelofse, C. (2005) 'Social and Environmental Justice in South African Cities: Including 'Invisible Stakeholders' in Environmental Assessment Procedures', *Journal of Environmental Planning and Management*, 48 (3) 445-67. DOI: [10.1080/09640560500067582](https://doi.org/10.1080/09640560500067582).
- Shoba, N. (2005) 'Community Museums: An Insight into the Socio-Economic, Environmental and Cultural Impacts on Community Museums in the Eastern Cape', *South African Museums Association Bulletin*, 31 26.
- Smith, C. (2014) 'Post-Modernising the Museum: The Ration Shed', *Historical Encounters*, 1 (1) 32-49.
- Soudien, C. (2008) 'Emerging Discourses Around Identity In New South African Museum Exhibitions', *Interventions*, 10 (2) 207-21. DOI: [10.1080/13698010802145119](https://doi.org/10.1080/13698010802145119).
- Thomas, N. (2010) 'The Museum as Method', *Museum Anthropology*, 33 (1) 6-10. DOI: [10.1111/j.1548-1379.2010.01070.x](https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1548-1379.2010.01070.x).
- (2016) *The Ascendancy of the Museum*, London: Reaktion.
- Togo, M. (2016) 'Underlabouring Systems Thinking with Critical Realism in Understanding Rhodes University's Response to the Sustainability Imperative', in Leigh Price and Heila Lotz-Sisitka (eds) *Critical Realism, Environmental Learning and Social-Ecological Change*, 85-97, London: Routledge.
- van Rooyen, J., de Lange, M. and Hassan, R. (2011) 'Water Resource Situation, Strategies and Allocation Regimes in South Africa', in Barbara Schreiner and Rashid Hassan (eds) *Transforming Water Management in South Africa: Designing and Implementing a New Policy Framework*, 19-32, Pretoria: Springer.
- Venugopal, R. (2015) 'Neoliberalism as Concept', *Economy and Society*, 44 (2) 165-87. DOI: [10.1080/03085147.2015.1013356](https://doi.org/10.1080/03085147.2015.1013356).
- Vergo, P. (1989) 'Introduction', in Peter Vergo (ed) *The New Museology*, 1-5, Bath: Reaktion.

- Vollgraaff, H. (2004) 'Editorial', *South African Museums Association Bulletin*, 30 (1) 2.
- (2012) 'Museum Practice: Rooted in Social Space', *South African Museums Association Bulletin*, 35 31-5.
- (2018) 'Revitalising the South African Museum Sector: New Museological Trends', in Patrick Ngulube (ed) *Handbook of Research on Heritage Management and Preservation*, 372-95, Hershey PA: IGI Global.
- von Weizsäcker, E.U. and Wijkman, A. (2018) *Come On! Capitalism, Short-termism, Population and the Destruction of the Planet*, New York: Springer.
- Walker, B., Holling, C.S., Carpenter, S.R. and Kinzig, A. (2004) 'Resilience, Adaptability and Transformability in Social-ecological Systems', *Ecology and Society*, 9 (2) <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26267673>.
- Wehner, K. (2017) 'Towards an Ecological Museology: Responding to the Animal-Objects of the Australian Institute of Anatomy Collection', in Jennifer Newell, Libby Robin and Kirsten Wehner (eds) *Curating the Future: Museums, Communities and Climate Change*, 85-100, London: Routledge.
- Weil, S. (1999) 'From Being About Something to Being For Somebody: The Ongoing Transformation of the American Museum', *Daedalus*, 128 (3) 229-58.
- Wells, H.G. (1898) *The War of the Worlds*, New York: Dover.
- Witz, L., Rassool, C. and Minkley, G. (2001) 'Repackaging the Past for South African Tourism', *Daedalus*, 130 (1) 277-96.
- Wray, L. (2019) 'Taking a Position: Challenging the Anti-Authorial Turn in Art Curating', in Robert R. Janes and Richard Sandell (eds) *Museum Activism*, 315-25, London: Routledge.
- Zuma, B. (2018) 'The Extent to which South African Museums Surrendered to Political Undertones', *Museum International*, 70 (3-4) 38-47. doi.org/10.1111/muse.12208.

#### Author

Tom Jeffery is Curator of Exhibitions at Amazwi South African Museum of Literature, and a PhD scholar at the Environmental Learning Research Centre at Rhodes University, South Africa. His research explores ways in which critical realist philosophy might contribute to the integration of social-ecological issues into museum theory and practice. He is particularly interested in the ways in which the current trends towards decolonization and ecologization of museum work may intersect in an eco-decolonial form of theory and practice.

Amazwi South African Museum of Literature  
25A Worcester Street  
Makhanda / Grahamstown  
South Africa

Environmental Learning Research Centre  
Lucas Avenue  
Makhanda / Grahamstown  
South Africa

Tel: 0466227042

## APPENDIX 5

### **“Towards an Eco-decolonial Museology: A Critical Realist Perspective on the Crises of South African Museums”**

**Accepted for publication in the August/September 2021 edition of *South African Journal of Environmental Education*. Below is the final, peer-reviewed and edited version of the article.**

#### **Abstract**

South African museums face multivalent, simultaneous crises. The ‘MELD’ dialectical framework of critical realist philosophy is used to explore potentials for a deep reimagination of museum theory and practice that may generate a new, relational mode better able than persistent dualist modes to respond to complex, emergent crises. This is conceived as the ecological-decolonial, or eco-decolonial, mode of museology.

At 1M, the ‘MELD’ analysis surfaces the implicit neoliberal ontology of South African museum work and the emergent paradox of ‘emancipatory neoliberalism’. This paradox is generative of a number of constraints on practice and agency, including commodification of heritage, a restrictive form of official memory, and quantitative management practice. These limit potentials for museums to respond to complex crises that require relational capabilities.

2E explores the potential negation of these constraints. To disrupt the principle of collection as the grounding ontological activity of museum practice may disrupt the implicit neoliberal ontology. This may contribute to emergent, sophisticated social-ecological trends in museum practice, both in South Africa and internationally.

At 3L, a dialectical view on the concept of cultural landscape offers a relational frame for an eco-decolonial museum practice that may better respond to the crises museums face. The practical implications of the eco-decolonial approach are considered at 4D.

**Keywords:** museum practice; critical realism; ontology; dialectic; collection; cultural landscape.

In the South African context, museums’ potentials as complex and dynamic learning environments (Kristinsdóttir 2017: 424) are constrained by at least three concurrent and entangled moments of crisis for practice: the global social-ecological crisis; a crisis of identity and relevance that is the subject of decolonial critique and that the analysis below will surface as an ontological crisis; and the emergent crisis of the Covid-19 pandemic, which shines an intense light on the museum as a social structure. What do these crises mean in terms of the agency of museums and museum workers, and

the agency they may transmit to users through public programmes? What do they mean for the future sustainability of South African museums as educational institutions? What pathways may chart fresh transformational potentials for museum practice?

Forms of museum practice with potential to explore the dynamics of social and ecological processes as interlinked systems are increasingly urgent (Anderies, Janssen and Ostrom 2004: 2; Walker et al. 2004: 1). Decolonization and ecologization of practice are current museological trends that have particular relevance to this. The ecologization of museology refers to emergent ways of thinking that disrupt persistent human-nature dualism and emphasize the relationship between humanity and the environment as mutually constructive (Plumwood 2002; Allen 2015: 49; Newell, Robin and Wehner 2017: 1-16; Phillips 2019).

Decolonization can be considered as a process of empowerment of marginalized peoples and rehabilitation of associated knowledge and traditions (Dondolo 2005: 68-69; Alonso 2008: 249; Mdanda 2016). South African museums are focused on amelioration of the depredations of the colonial and apartheid eras, the memorialization of a difficult heritage, and on inclusivity, representivity and relevance (Corsane 2004: 6, 10; Mosely 2007: 101; Bakker and Müller 2010: 48; Meskell 2012: 6; MacDonald 2015). Relational, social-ecological perspectives are largely absent from the primarily social focus of South African decolonial museology (Jeffery 2017: 22). This is a constraint that limits the decolonial perspective and hinders decolonization, and for which this article will consider potential resolutions.

This article explores potentials for a new form of museum practice suited to the contexts of crisis outlined above, and with potential to generate a relational mode of thinking and working that is grounded in the entanglement of the decolonial (social) and ecological crises. This will be conceptualized as the ecological-decolonial, or eco-decolonial, mode of museology.

A critical realist dialectical analysis surfaces neoliberalism as the implicit ontology (Bhaskar 2008: 4) of museum work, that is, as the underlying ontology that drives practice. This ontology is not generally a subject of museological critique. To disrupt the implicit ontology is a vital first step in negotiating museums' crises of identity and relevance, and in generating potentials for a multidisciplinary museum practice suited to a context of social-ecological crisis (Bhaskar 2010: 22). This is a deep and medium- to long-term process toward emancipatory potentials. This ontological work is vital if South African museums, as potentially crucial centres of informal education, are to be able to respond more effectively both to rapidly emergent and longer term crises.

For the entirety of their post-apartheid existence South African museums have been struggling to reinvent themselves for new, diverse audiences and emergent needs. This struggle, within an emergent snarl of crises, and together with the International Council of Museums' (ICOM)

current process of redefinition of the museum (International Council of Museums 2007), represents a moment of fluidity in which museums may radically reimagine themselves. This reimagination must necessarily have a relational perspective on the entangled social and ecological crises that characterize post-apartheid museums' practice context. Social-ecological relationality is the foundation of the eco-decolonial mode of museology.

### **Why Dialectical Critical Realism?**

Dialectical critical realism is notoriously complex, but it is very valuable to the understanding of social structures such as museums, and the mechanisms that steer practice in particular directions (Price 2016: 18; Lotz-Sisitka & Price 2016: 1). The philosophy of dialectical critical realism (henceforth DCR) offers "explanatory tools and forms of reasoning that allow for making the complexities found in our contexts more visible and open for dialogue, engagement, learning and reflexivity" (Lotz-Sisitka & Price 2016: 5), and has potential to contribute to the emergence of progressive modes of museological theory and practice better able to respond to crisis.

The contemporary museum, with its persistent dualist foundation that separates social from ecological perspectives, is easily perceived as operating separately from the concerns of the world today, focused too much on the past, and "ill-equipped philosophically and ontologically" to face the challenges of a "messy and turbulent world" (Cameron 2015a: 345). The application of critical perspectives to the museum context is vital if museums are to remain socially relevant (Vergo 1990: 3; Smith 2014: 33). Vollgraaff's (2018: 382-384) comprehensive survey of the *South African Museums Association Bulletin* identifies an absence of social-ecological themes and concludes that South African perspectives lag behind international museological thinking (also see Levitz and Mathers 2000: 20; Martin 2000: 13). This implies a need to develop the philosophical and theoretical perspectives that shape South African museum practice. DCR was developed to act as a philosophical 'underlabourer' for such processes, as elaborated below.

The complexity of DCR is reflected in some of the language that comes with making use of it. The analysis below is hopefully accessible, but the goal of this article is to draw new philosophical and theoretical perspectives into museology's approaches to difficult and complex contexts, and this necessarily comes with new concepts and new language. The concept of absences and absencing at 2E is a good example of this, as it can initially seem counterintuitive.

DCR, however, potentially removes constraints on transformation and enables progress towards social-ecological justice (Bhaskar 2008: 38; Lotz-Sisitka 2016: 324; Mukute 2016: 196; Schudel 2017: 174, 179). That is, it is deeply useful for generating practical change in transformative contexts such as that of South African museum practice. If the language is sometimes unfamiliar and

challenging, as it was indeed found to be during the research for this and previous articles, it is hoped that the reader will approach this challenge from the perspective of generating valuable new ways of thinking with the potential to further the vital agenda of transformation.

### **Research methodology**

The analysis makes use of abduction and induction. Abduction refers to the recontextualization of existing knowledge (Togo 2016, 89), and the work here draws in themes or codes from earlier work (Jeffery 2017; Jeffery 2021). An initial exploration of policy and practice, for instance (Jeffery 2017: 22-24), identified an absence of ecological issues from museum practice, generated by their absence from the policy framework, and a need to link ecological and decolonial concerns for meaningful transformations of museum practice. A deep 1M contextual analysis (Jeffery 2021) is the basis for the 1M analysis conducted here.

Induction refers to the identification of new codes from the data at hand, “a process that ... helps us to [move] from a set of observations to a theory” (Sabai 2016, 182) and to “surface general premises that may inform changes to practice (Sabai 2016, 183). A review of literature enacts induction of new codes. The progress through the ‘MELD’ schema in the analysis below moves from abduction of 1M codes from previous work (which are emphasized below because of their vital importance to the analysis) to the induction of new codes at 2E, 3L and 4D. Through abduction and induction the analysis explores and develops the practical transformative potential of the eco-decolonial mode of museology as a new, relational approach to the resolution of the crises faced by museums.

### **Philosophical methodology: Dialectical critical realism as underlabourer**

Underlabouring can be understood as “the process of clarifying ... ontological and epistemological confusions and uncertainties [to support] a transformative research intent,” or the practice of philosophy for real social-ecological change (Bhaskar 2008: 335; Bhaskar and Parker 2010: vii; Price 2016: 18; Rosenberg 2020a: 192). DCR specifically looks to the “re-vindication of ontology ... the philosophical study of being, as distinct from and irreducible to epistemology” (Bhaskar 2010: 1) and “stresses the crucial role that being (ontology) plays in our ... efforts to understand the way things are” (Norrie 2010: 7). As such, it has potentials to equip museums to meet the urgent philosophical and ontological challenges to which Cameron refers above, and to further the museological goal of transformation towards the betterment of peoples’ lives (Weil 1999; Ballantyne and Uzzel 2011: 87). To think of DCR as ‘underlabourer’ is to think of it as a philosophical support system, a system that

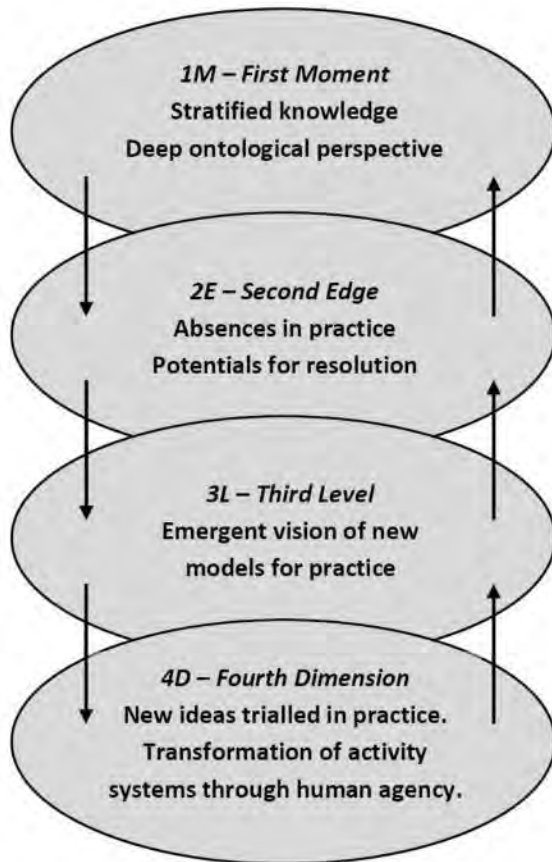
enables practical change by offering new ways to understand, critique and change the real conditions of practice.

DCR is here proposed as underlabourer to the development of the emancipatory potentials of museological philosophy, theory and practice. This development relates the South African context to an emergent, and yet tentative, international critique of dualist museological structures (Cameron 2015a: 16; Cameron 2015b; Newell, Robin and Wehner: 2017: 1-16; Wehner 2017: 87; Jeffery 2017: 21; Jeffery 2021). DCR offers new potentials to disrupt dualist constraints on practice, that is, to disrupt the entrenched historical museological division between social and ecological perspectives and the restrictions that are generated by this division. This enables progress towards the relational, eco-decolonial mode that may bring greater freedom to “humanity-in-nature” (Moore 2017: 598).

One of the important philosophical contributions of DCR to understanding complex contexts is its stratified or layered approach to reality. DCR initially conceives three “ontological domains”: the real (that which exists independent of human experience), the actual (the moment at which human experience ‘discovers’ the real and interacts with it), and the empirical (cultural mediation of the real and the actual) (Bhaskar 2010: 2; Price 2016: 18-19; Rosenberg 2020a: 197). The epistemic fallacy, which is significant to the analysis below, is the reduction of the domain of the real to the domain of the actual, and the reduction of ontology to epistemology.

That is, the epistemic fallacy is the representation of epistemology (a specific interpretation of the world) as ontology (a state of being, or the real way the world is, and without alternative). This process “functions merely to cover the generation of an implicit ontology” (Bhaskar 2008: 4; Bhaskar 2010: 1), and the epistemic fallacy is thus potentially a manipulation of knowledge to the benefit of restrictive forces. To identify instances of the epistemic fallacy can focus attention on deep ontological issues, and on the deep causal mechanisms of the restrictions on practice that are of interest in the present analysis. This will be explored below in the context of capitalist dualism and its neoliberal ideology and the ways in which these have come to constitute the implicit ontology of museology. This ontology has profoundly negative impacts on the transformation of the museum as a social structure and on the ability of museums to offer agency to people.

## Dialectical critical realism and the 'MELD' schema



**Figure 1. Overview of the 'MELD' schema**  
relational nature of the process.

The critical realist oeuvre developed from basic critical realism to dialectical critical realism and later meta-reality (Lotz-Sisitka and Price 2016: 11). Basic critical realism became 1M, the First Moment of the 'MELD' schema that structures dialectical critical realism. 1M precedes second Edge (2E), third Level (3L) and fourth Dimension (4D) (Hartwig 2008: xiii). 'MELD' is "a robust schema for investigating ... research contexts concerned with societal transformation," and a means through which normalized practice can be expanded reflexively (Lotz-Sisitka 2016: 318; Schudel 2017: 163). The MELD process will structure the analysis below as it looks for potentials to remove constraints on transformation towards social-ecological justice in museology. The character of each moment is outlined at its start. Figure 1 gives an overview of the MELD schema. The bidirectional arrows show the

### 1M and depth ontology

1M enables a deep understanding of the status-quo, through "the intrication of a multiplicity of explanatory mechanisms" (Bhaskar 2008: 196; Bhaskar 2010: 6; Fletcher 2017: 18). DCR views the world as constituted by real, open systems in which phenomena are generated by an array of driving impulses (Bhaskar 2010: 3-5). In a further refinement of the stratified DCR perspective on the world, this generative structure is conceived as a lamination of intersecting levels that interact in emergent ways (Bhaskar 1998: 8; Bhaskar 2010: 5; Lotz-Sisitka 2016: 320). The relational "seven laminations of scale" model tracks emergence through: 1.) the cosmological or planetary level, 2.) the mega level of civilizations, 3.) the macro level of policy and ideology, 4.) the meso level of formal practice, 5.) the micro level of social interaction, 6.) the individual or biographical level, and 7.) the sub-individual, psychological level (Bhaskar 2010: 9; Price 2016: 26). Each level is emergent from but also influences those previous, a relational perspective on the interconnected nature of the world that helps researchers to avoid relativism and reductive, linear philosophies such as dualism (Cameron 2015b:

29; Rosenberg 2020a: 197). This deep, retroductive ontological perspective seems vital in the context of a crisis-ridden museum practice mired in historical dualism.

A detailed 1M analysis of the ontological context of museum work is conducted elsewhere (Jeffery 2021). In the limited space here, an abductive analysis will focus on the most crucial moments of the 1M emergence of neoliberalism as the implicit ontology of museum practice. This implicit ontology is the most powerful restrictive force on museology, and largely unrecognized because of the fundamental levels at which it operates. The disruption of this ontology is a primary goal of the eco-decolonial mode of museology, as this can enable the emergence of more progressive and emancipatory practice than is possible in current decolonial practice that is limited by this ontology.

At the planetary level, the 'Anthropocene' proposition of humanity as a geological force (Crutzen 2002: 23) has been valuable in popularising understanding of human impacts on the planet, including in emergent museological approaches (Fox 2017; Robin et al. 2017; Nixon 2017: 24). To conceive the present age as the Capitalocene, however, illuminates "a system of power, profit and re/production in the web of life ... that not only accumulates capital, but drives extinction" (Moore 2017: 594-597). The Capitalocene perspective also reveals capitalism's "spaces of vulnerability and contradiction," (Moore 2017: 595), such as the paradox of emancipatory neoliberalism elaborated below, and may thus enable emancipatory strategies.

At the mega level the Capitalocene perspective surfaces neoliberalism as a global ideology reliant on human-nature dualism in the same ways as colonial capital (see Plumwood 2002: 8 on "our current failures and blindspots in relationships with nature"; and Plumwood 2002: 9 and Moore 2015: 611-612 on cheap nature and labour, and who counts as 'human'). Neoliberalism in the present analysis is considered as the ideology emergent from and supportive of the actual practices and impacts of dualist Capitalism on the real world. A significant facet of this ideology is the construction of "real abstractions" such as Humanity, Nature, Society, the Economy (Moore 2017: 595). These can be understood as instances of the epistemic fallacy, which construct human-nature dualism as a given condition of reality (Moore 2017: 601). Rosenberg (2020b: 2) echoes de Sousa Santos' (2018) position that such manipulations reproduce the capitalist "cognitive empire" that elevates its contradictory and violent epistemology to ontology in order to "take away our ability to imagine or propose anything else without being made out to be wishful and irrational" (Rosenberg 2020b: 2). This perspective enables a critical view on the historical emergence of museological dualism from colonial capitalist dualism and perpetuated in the decolonial context by the contemporary dualism of neoliberal ideology. Successive historical manifestations of capitalism thus

restrict the emancipatory potentials of the museum and limit the responses of museum practice to crises.

At the macro level, attempts to “forge a more social-democratic and co-ordinated variety of capitalism” after the end of apartheid faltered amid a turn to international neoliberal macroeconomic policies (Nattrass 2014: 56, 57; Togo 2016: 93). The neoliberal policy framework is plagued by inconsistencies, and its practice by corruption, the net result of which is to exacerbate unemployment, for example, rather than to facilitate emancipation (Nattrass: 2014: 56; Adjor and Kebalo 2018).

The flow of neoliberal ideology from the mega to the macro level draws through the abstractions of the epistemic fallacy. Macro level South African policy echoes mega-level international commitments to embed heritage within a neoliberal frame as the “cultural and creative industries” (Thomas 2016: 37; Department of Arts and Culture 2017). “Optimal performance” is measured in relation to job creation, investment and economic growth as the solutions for social problems (Kamga and Heleba 2012: 83; South African Government 2011; South African Cultural Observatory 2018). Macro level policy upon which decolonialism is premised thus proposes to counter the inequalities and violence of *colonial* dualist capitalism through the inequalities and violence of *contemporary* dualist neoliberalism (powerfully expressed in Nixon 2011).

This paradoxical position undermines emancipatory practice potentials, and is a key element of the persistence of South African museums’ crisis of relevance and their limited responses to social-ecological crisis. This is the key moment in which the implicit ontology of museum practice can be seen to be characterised by the emergence of the paradox of emancipatory neoliberalism. The developments to philosophy and theory that this article emphasizes in the development of the eco-decolonial mode of museology are vital in order to disrupt this paradox and the limitations it places on the emancipatory potentials of museum practice.

Neoliberal ideology emerges at the meso level to govern formal relations between the institution (management) and employees, and determines the degree of agency workers may have to influence practice. These relations flow into the micro level to affect the degree of agency museum workers may have in interactions with users and which they may transfer to users through learning programmes. The agency of museum workers, as the executors of the museum’s social responsibilities, is the agency of the museum itself. The close entanglement of issues of structure and agency here enables a perspective on the dependence of agency, and thus social sustainability, on the flawed ontological structure of the museum, and shows why it is vital that transformation take place at an ontological level.

South African museum practice historically emerged from colonial western modes of dualist practice (Corsane 2000: 28; Abungu 2004: 4; Rall 2018: 11; Vollgraaff 2018: 374). Despite the emergent international critique referenced above, and even as ICOM redevelops its definition of the museum in order to better address contemporary challenges, the dualist practice frame remains entrenched. The full scope of a museum's meso-level activities emerge from the practice of collection, such that collection is the grounding ontological activity of museum work. Collection practice is rooted in historical and neoliberal dualism, but is considered untouchable in the redefinition process:

The museum definition should retain ... the unique, defining and essential unity in museums of the functions of collecting, preserving, documenting, researching, exhibiting and in other ways communicating the collections ... The word museum is easily understood in its manifold complexity, with a stable core concept of a collection. (Sandahl 2018: 2; also see Sandahl 2019)

As noted above, neoliberalism as a global ideology is reliant on human-nature dualism in the same ways as colonial capital. The defence of collection fixes the implicit neoliberal ontology and its dualist frame in contemporary museum practice and implicates museums in Capitalocene injustice.

Personal psychological agendas defined at the sub-individual level may be expressed at the individual level (Price 2016: 27; Togo 2016: 88, 91). The museum worker's sense of their relationship with the institution may be empowering or disempowering, both personally and in relationships with users of the museum. The emergence of social-ecological practice trends and the progressive and nuanced positionalities expressed by South African museum workers (Jeffery 2021: 56-59) suggests tension between individual social-ecological positionalities and institutional neoliberal ideology. This may generate potentials for museum workers to resist contradictions and disrupt practice constraints. This and other potentials for transformation are explored in more detail at 2E.

## **2E: Absences and absenting**

2E is "the point of transition or becoming" (Hartwig 2008: xiii), concerned with identifying absences (which can be understood as social ills, untruths, injustice, or other constraints) in practice visible after the initial 1M analysis. CR conceptualizes change in terms of absence, as absence is ontologically prior to presence, which implies that the potential for emancipatory change lies within absences, and that to act with transformative agency can thus be viewed as a reflexive, dialectical act of the absenting (negation) of absences (Bhaskar 2008: 266). The absenting of absences is an

emancipatory movement towards more adequate knowledge and the expansion of normalized practice.

Neoliberal constraint can be identified in the commodification of heritage practice, which constitutes a postcolonial reproduction of colonial hegemonies and restricts sustainability initiatives in favour of profitability (Togo 2016: 93; Helland and Lindgren 2016: 433). The close association of heritage with tourism may reinforce and exploit cultural stereotypes as these are transformed into a consumable spectacle, while governance structures see museums as tourist sites and not as knowledge-generating institutions (Rassool 2000: 6-10; Witz, Rassool and Minkley 2001: 280; Marschall 2005: 103-104; Vollgraaff 2018: 386).

'Official memory' emerges in the manipulation of meso-level practices of memorialization in relation to the values and material interests of political and economic elites (Abungu 2004: 3; Shoba 2005: 26; Bakker and Müller 2010: 50; Rankin 2013: 79, 90; Skiti 2015; Zuma 2018: 40; Roux 2018: 408-409; Paulse 2019). "Museums in South Africa are under pressure to adhere to a single, authorized narrative of the past and the present," (Vollgraaff 2018: 385), a selective discourse of heroic leaders, of survival, triumph and exemplariness, that silences and alienates dissonant voices and communities (Rassool 2000: 11; Dubin 2006: 238; Soudien 2008: 214; Bakker and Müller 2010: 49-50; Mngqolo 2010: 70; Rassool 2016: 196). The museum is instrumentalized in the construction of a specific identity, which for instance absents deeper treatments of the "less remembered miseries and celebrations of township life" (Soudien 2008: 211), as well as narratives of contemporary social-ecological injustice. Official memory can undermine the crucial role of arts and culture in social critique, and potentially discriminates against niche, experimental or radical programmes (Mahony 2017: 130-131).

Perhaps the most significant constraint of neoliberal ideology on museum practice is the strategic focus of museum management on rigid quantitative performance indicators, logistics, administration and Treasury compliance requirements (Vollgraaff 2004: 2; Dubin 2006: 217; Vollgraaff 2018: 373, 384). The demands of compliance and economic measurements overshadow museological functions and effective museum services (Vollgraaff 2018: 377). Museum and heritage workers are alienated from the management system, and feedback into the system is limited (see de Shuman 2020 for a deeply personal reflection on this structural condition). Potentials for creative worker-driven expansion of museum practice are absented by the limitations of economically correct practice. Neoliberalism generates a worker-institution binary that thus tends to consolidate dualist thinking (see Mahony 2017 on activist interventions against "corporatization" of the practice of cultural institutions). Political and ideological structures constrain the agency of workers at the

meso and micro levels in ways that ensure they are reproductive of structure. That is, neoliberal political and ideological structures prevent transformation even as they claim to champion them.

The paradox of emancipatory neoliberalism thus flows through the lamination to constrain practice so that, like policy, practice becomes an element of the neoliberal architecture. The implicit neoliberal ontology of museology perpetuates the historical injustices (absences) of human-nature dualism, and most crucially, absents relational social-ecological potentials for theory and practice.

At least two, entangled, practical, transformative pathways (means to absent these absences) surface from the 1M analysis. Firstly, tensions between traditional-institutional and progressive-individual museum workers' positionalities generate potential for "interstitial" activism by museum workers. This is activism from within the ontological formation so that it may be "opened up" from the inside, and which should be seen "not as an attack on these public institutions for their duplicitous value systems, but as acts of love for what they could be" (Mahony 2017: 132). The sense of limited agency that an individual may feel within an institutional structure rooted in neoliberalism potentially manifests in resistance to its constraints. There is in this sense a personal level, as expressed by de Shuman above, to the ability or inability of museums to respond to crises. This potential may inform the 3L vision and be explored in practice at 4D, particularly in terms of the ways in which it may facilitate the second transformative pathway.

Neoliberalism is the implicit ontology, and collection is the grounding ontological activity of museum work. While the *methods* of collecting, and of interpreting and exhibiting collections are the focus of critique, reflection, and change (Pearce 2003; Morgan and Macdonald 2020), the *principle* of collection is so fundamental to what a museum is conceived to be that it seems to be exterior to processes of formal change intended to reinvent the museum and ensure its future (Sandahl 2018: 2). This effectively applies a philosophical shield to the deep ontological roots of museological dualism and the ways in which this reflects the colonial hierarchy of culture as superior to nature and cultures themselves as similarly hierarchical (Cameron 2015b: 19). This hierarchical ordering is equally vital to the implicit neoliberal ontology that, again, remains as reliant on dualism as was colonial capital (Moore 2017: 597).

Human-nature dualism thus continues to frame the work that museums do because of the absence of critique directed at the ontological and ideological significance of the practice of collection. "Core museum functions and societal responsibilities are not in competition with each other" (Sandahl 2019), but the absence of reflexivity directed at the ontological significance of collection generates an absence of coherence between the theoretical social-ecological responsibilities and the actual practice of museum work. The ontological alignment between collection and oppressive ideology is why there is a pressing need for new forms of reflexive and

disruptive social-ecological relationality in theory and practice, such as the eco-decolonial mode of museology. Rather than being hidden and protected, collection may be positioned at the heart of the “ideological faultline” of tensions between traditionalist and progressive museologies (Adams 2019a: 1; Adams 2019b: 1). The disruption of the untouchable position of the principle of collection in the eco-decolonial mode of museology may thus contribute to resolution of the fundamental ontological paradox of emancipatory neoliberalism.

This moment of multiple crises and potentials for their resolution is one in which museum practice might be reimagined, and this will be the focus of the 3L analysis.

### **3L: A vision for museum practice**

3L develops the emergent vision of the open system that is being studied, “the inner truth or pulse of things and the spot from which we must act” (Bhaskar 2008: 8; Schudel 2017: 179). 3L is about exploring possibilities in the newly understood context, and initiates a vision for the world in which social-ecological justice predominates (Schudel 2017: 179). A relational point of view is emphasized as new models for practice are imagined (Bhaskar 2008: 46; Norrie 2010: 16; Mukute 2016: 195). The fundamental shift envisioned in the development of the eco-decolonial mode of museology is an ontological transformation from traditionalist human-nature dualism to a progressive human-nature dialectic. The idea of cultural landscape offers a theoretical frame for this ontological shift, one with which the heritage sector is familiar and which demonstrates emergent relational potentials.

Perspectives on cultural landscape have a presence in various ICOM documents (see Garlandini 2016 for a summary of the broad ICOM position on cultural landscape). Most institutional conceptions of cultural landscape are routinely instrumental, dualist, even gendered, “nature and man” perspectives in which environmentalism is subaltern to overarching “cultural forces” (UNESCO 1972: 2; UNESCO 2017: 20; Luengo 2015, xi). In the South African context, however, the more progressive ‘Declaration on Museums and Cultural Landscape’ conceives a complex layering of cultural meanings associated with landscape (ICOM-SA and ICOMOS-SA 2016: 2), which encourages a relational perspective. The eco-decolonial develops this perspective to reimagine cultural landscape as a culture-landscape dialectic, which is a form of human-nature dialectic. The eco-decolonial is thus a dialectical rather than a dualist mode of museum practice.

To reframe museological thinking and practice within a dialectic of culture-landscape opens potentials for emerging scholarship around relationality between culture and landscape (see, for instance, Crouch 2010) to disrupt human-nature dualism, the opposition at the heart of museology’s ontological crisis. A perspective on situated knowledge of social-ecological crisis emerges with potential to disrupt acquisition as the grounding ontological activity of museum practice. That is,

there is potential for the eco-decolonial to be a situated form of practice and for this situated turn to disrupt the implicit museological ontology. This situated turn may focus museum theory and practice on the ways in which the amelioration of the colonial depredations of the past, and the resolution of museums' crises of identity and relevance, is entangled with the amelioration of the social-ecological crises of the present. The historical depth of its relational perspective is vital to the legitimacy of the eco-decolonial mode.

Though dualist museology historically privileges the tangible, the intangible values associated with sites are always present and inseparable from material culture (Department of Arts and Culture 2009: 32; Sodano 2017: 83; Ntsoane 2002: 29-30). In the post-colonial moment, the intangible is emphasized because of the urgent need for the critical rehabilitation of indigenous knowledge (Mungwini 2013: 79). This historic opposition can never be erased, but a dialectical eco-decolonial mode of practice may enable emergence of "a complex, co-embedded, constellational relationship" (Norrie 2010: 170) through which marginalized and dominant epistemologies may combine in new and interesting ways. The dialectical softening of the calcified distinctions between tangible and intangible, indigenous and colonial-scientific, between community memory (heritage, past) and community need (present and future), offers a logic for practice grounded in humanity's immersion in ecological systems and a spiritual communion with nature as source of life. This historical-immersive logic is conceived as 'humanity-in-nature' in the eco-decolonial approach, and may facilitate a more progressive museological stance on human-more-than-human relations with potential to inform learning and development (Mukute 2016: 199).

Eco-decolonial relationality may be further deepened by nuanced Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) perspectives on intergenerational knowledge and learning around biodiversity loss:

Biodiversity loss as a global concern ... has shaped education imperatives towards learning-led ... social-ecological change and intergenerational learning ... that might better situate indigenous peoples on their intergenerational lands in reflexive learning within a rich mix of ancient and modern scientific ideas and ideals (O'Donoghue, Sandoval-Rivera and Payyappallimana 2019: 1).

The culture-landscape dialectic may draw on this to relate biodiversity loss as a global social-ecological concern to decolonial impulses focused on situated intergenerational knowledge. This emphasizes that, "The depth of historical wisdom and its intergenerational custodians must enter the sustainability game as key players towards attaining more just and sustainable futures"

(O'Donoghue, Sandoval-Rivera and Payyappallimana 2019: 2). Rosenberg (2020b: 3), too, notes that "Charting the way forward may ... require us to look back, to consider the almost-forgotten wisdom from earlier times". There is eco-decolonial museological potential for intergenerational narratives of social relations to biodiversity to be co-curated by museums and communities into learning opportunities.

A dialectic of culture-landscape thus potentially offers an interdisciplinary practice frame that may deepen the emergent decolonial and ecological strands of museum practice and help bring them together into the relational eco-decolonial mode. From this fresh and progressive perspective may emerge patterns of reflexive learning that make available a new "ecology of knowledges" (de Sousa Santos, Arriscado and Meneses 2008: xx) through which museums may surface means to address their ontological crisis and thus to engage more deeply with the social-ecological crisis.

An eco-decolonial museum practice drawing on this ecology of knowledges may focus on "supporting and curating networks of related things and their significance, rather than delivering knowledge from a single vantage point" (Newell, Robin and Wehner 2017: 2). The curated network, however, could focus on people as complex social-ecological entities and on their stories, rather than on 'things'. Progressive moves towards "collaborative ways of interpreting and relating to collections" (Newell, Robin and Wehner 2017: 2) could become a focus on collaborative ways of relating to people rather than objects, so that the grounding ontological activity becomes collaborative storytelling and the curation of community narratives. This may be facilitated by interesting things, *but the acquisition of things, even as the basis for narratives, is not the operational focus of museum work*. Rather than acquisition, the focus of eco-decolonial museum work becomes people and their stories and the culture-landscape in which they live and narrate as humanity-in-nature. The vision of an eco-decolonial museum practice is thus of intergenerational story sharing within a dialectic of culture-landscape disrupting traditional dualist practice, and thus disrupting the implicit neoliberal ontology.

#### **4D: Potentials for change in context**

4D is about "active and reflexive engagement within the world" (Bhaskar 2008: 8). At 4D, new ideas may be trialled in practice in order to bring real change to social structures through transformative human agency, which is how the eco-decolonial will move towards greater justice and the active resolution of social ills (Mukute 2016: 196; Schudel 2017: 174; Bhaskar 2008: 8). 4D is the moment of real change in the practice context, through "the exercising of intentional and ethical human agency" (Mukute 2016, 196). Interstitial activism, surfaced above as a transformative pathway for museum practice, is exercised at 4D within the eco-decolonial culture-landscape dialectical practice

frame imagined at 3L. Museum workers may assume the agency to break down the resilience of an inherently unsustainable system (Lotz-Sisitka et al. 2015: 74) and become 4D agents for emancipatory change outside the neutralising paradox of emancipatory neoliberalism.

Interstitial activism may actively shift the focus of the grounding ontological activity of museum work away from acquisition to a practice of curation of social-ecological narratives, “a movement away from collections towards interactive curatorial practices across physical and digital archives” (Hamer 2019: 392). Physical archives are understood to transcend museums’ store rooms to include land and landscape, natural ecological systems and natural heritage, the world-as-record and the human record of living in the world. Such physical archives are in the first instance real (in the DCR sense) and prior to human interpretation. In the second instance, in the domain of the actual, such physical archives are potentially generative of narratives that draw on intergenerational memory as a discursive practice. The perception of museums as places of dead things and the dust of history (Thomas 2016: 119) is an element of South African museums’ crisis of relevance. This may begin to be resolved through *in situ* active and practical engagements with peoples’ living memories and perceptions of social-ecological change.

3L considered potential for the emergence of a situated turn for eco-decolonial museology. In the 4D practical development of the situated turn, multidisciplinary scholarship in the culture-landscape dialectic may be brought into contact with real experiences – situated narratives – of social-ecological crisis. The emergence of such situated narratives will be facilitated during fieldwork, and they may be co-curated by the museum and narrators as evidence for the necessity of structural change. The eco-decolonial mode thus works towards the active resolution of museums’ crises of identity and relevance while it works towards the amelioration of the social-ecological crises of the present, and again, carries out this work with awareness of historical contexts.

Physical archives imagined in this way provoke a practical mode of ‘collections management’ that is necessarily simultaneously cultural and ecological, and disruptive of dualism in that it requires multidisciplinary strategies for practice that bridge cultural and ecological studies, the humanities and the sciences. This represents the eco-decolonial operationalization of a humanity-in-nature perspective for museum practice so that it is simultaneously and inseparably decolonial and ecological in impulse. That is, the decolonial and the ecological are not and cannot be separated.

Workers may thus disrupt acquisition as the grounding ontological activity of museum work, and disrupt the implicit neoliberal ideology of museum work. This may revitalize the agency of museum workers and thus of museums, and consequently revitalize the agency that may be transmitted to museum users through museums’ learning programmes.

## **Future work**

Future work will develop the 4D moment. It will explore the practical potentials of the eco-decolonial mode in more detail and lay a concrete path towards implementation. An important element of the development of the eco-decolonial mode of museology is the development of a multi- and interdisciplinary network of actors, as this is a vital catalyst for emergent social-ecological practices (Bhaskar 2010, 4). Actors in this network will come from within the museum sector but also from outside it and perhaps more importantly so, because new ideas and approaches and new ways of thinking come from outside normalized thinking and practice. It is crucial to seek constructive relationships that may help in the generation of the eco-decolonial mode and that, most particularly, may offer constructive collaboration in learning to work in new ways and with new patterns of thinking. Cultural Historical Activity Theory will be employed during this process (see, for instance, Engeström 2015).

This kind of multi- and interdisciplinary development may be understood as the development of a transformative knowledge network with transgressive learning capacities, a form of networking for learning that is potentially an important driver of change towards more sustainable practice (see, for instance, [transgressivelearning.org](http://transgressivelearning.org) for an overview of such networked potentials; also see Lotz-Sisitka et al. 2015; Lotz-Sisitka et al. 2016). Future work will make use of a constellational approach to the generation of a network of theoretical potentials that may contribute to the practical emergence of the eco-decolonial, and will explore the situated narrative approach as potentially a form of transgressive learning for sustainable practice.

## **Conclusion**

A Critical Realist 'MELD' analysis surfaced neoliberalism as the implicit ontology of museum practice (1M), and considered potentials for ontological rejuvenation through disruption of the grounding ontological activity of museum practice, acquisition (2E). A dialectic of culture-landscape was envisioned as a fresh practice frame for museum work (3L), in which persistent human-nature dualism may be replaced by relational perspectives. Interstitial activism by museum workers (4D) may contribute towards the potentials surfaced in the analysis for emancipatory change towards a relational eco-decolonial approach to museological practice.

To treat culture-landscape as dialectic may enable revitalized ontological potentials for museological theory and practice. Museums may use the dialectic to reinterpret their relation to physical and cultural spaces and explore the layers of meaning attached to people, sites, and ecologies. The dialectic may disrupt the philosophical shield around acquisition and undermine the

dualist neoliberal ontology. A culture-landscape dialectical frame for museum practice may expand the emancipatory capacities of museums in the Capitalocene.

The dialectic may embrace an ecology of knowledges emergent from a relational Education for Sustainable Development perspective on intergenerational knowledge and biodiversity loss ((O'Donoghue, Sandoval-Rivera and Payyappallimana 2019: 1-4). The idea of ESD as "co-engaged meaning making" ((O'Donoghue, Sandoval-Rivera and Payyappallimana 2019: 4) may be expressed in co-curation and co-creation of exhibitions and learning programmes with "indigenous custodians of the associated knowledge" ((O'Donoghue, Sandoval-Rivera and Payyappallimana 2019: 2). Co-creative processes focused on social-ecological learning potentials may be vitalized through museums' character as storytellers (Bedford 2001; Ciasnocha, Ollson and Shermis 2006). Museums may deploy their skills of storytelling and pedagogy (exhibition and education programmes) in such a way that they become not only collectors and memorialists, but facilitators of oral histories, and of active, activist, social-ecological knowledge. Curation as an act of storytelling may be creative and collaborative and offers opportunities for museums to become a 'story incubator' for people conceived as complex social-ecological entities, members of humanity-in-nature.

In this co-created practice, it is the communities' own narratives that form the backbone of the learning opportunities. The museum acts as facilitator of emergent, situated social-ecological narratives, rather than a collector (consumer) of things. The museum together with the community may co-create a knowledge commons with points of access for the community, the museum, and the museum's (hopefully) growing base of users. Price (2016: 20) outlines how climate denials exploit the inability of the scientific method to prove that complex, entangled social-ecological and biophysical processes, such as climate change, are responsible for observed changes in natural systems. The formal scientific method cannot relate evidence at the level of the empirical to the real occurrence of anthropogenic climate change, for instance. Social structures such as museums, however, may facilitate and foreground situated knowledge and evidence for social-ecological crises such as climate change, and thus potentially motivate the cultural and political change that the scientific method cannot. A relational perspective on decolonial and ecological crises thus generates potentials to disrupt the "really unhealthy structures" of dualism which, as in the case of the paradox of emancipatory neoliberalism and its social-ecological impacts, "can be present and have generative effects even in the absence of empirical evidence" (Lotz-Sisitka 2016: 324).

In practical terms, the situated narrative approach will entail museum curators working in the field to facilitate the emergence of narratives of peoples' relations to culture-landscape. The eco-decolonial situated narrative approach differs from traditional museological approaches in that it is not primarily historical, in that it is not focused on the past alone (although it has a vital

perspective on historical context), and not primarily archival. It is an activist and interventionist approach, a mode of knowledge co-production in which the museum is a facilitator of the emergence of new forms of knowledge through, for instance, mediating interactions between intergenerational and scientific knowledge.

The need to disrupt acquisition as an ontological activity thus drives the practical focus of the eco-decolonial mode on generating a deeper understanding of social-ecological crises and potentials for their mitigation. The primary aim of the situated narrative approach is thus not to gather and archive but to generate new perspectives on urgent social-ecological issues. The narratives are the core of an active process of knowledge co-production that potentially offers the custodians of intergenerational knowledge active agency in a context, social-ecological crisis, that is normally, or normatively, the preserve of ecological science.

The ontological shift towards a culture-landscape dialectical practice frame may focus museology on a deep engagement with situated social-ecological relationships. Museums may enable agency and empowerment for communities through co-development of projects, which constitute a public voice. This work may emphasize the embeddedness of that voice in a culture-landscape shared with a diversity of living things, and the dialectic may thus expand museological practice so that, to adapt Fiona Cameron's vision (2015b: 22), it invites previously invisible human and non-human social collectives into the civic life of the museum so that their Capitalocene stories may be told. In this way, the eco-decolonial mode of museology may begin to address museums' crises of relevance and identity.

## References

- Abungu, G. (2004). Democratising museums and heritage ten years on. *South African Museums Association Bulletin*, 40(1), 3-5.
- Adams, G.K. (2019a). Rift emerges over ICOM's proposed museum definition. *Museums Journal*, 22 August. . <https://www.museumsassociation.org/museums-journal/news/22082019-rift-over-icom-definition>, visited 3 October 2019.
- Adams, G.K. (2019b). News: What is a museum in the 21<sup>st</sup> century? *Museums Association*. [https://www.museumsassociation.org/news/18092019-what-is-a-museum-in-the-21st-century?utm\\_campaign=1577290\\_19092019&utm\\_medium=email&utm\\_source=Museums%20Association&dm\\_i=2VBX,XT1M,27M8HC,3JGE0,1](https://www.museumsassociation.org/news/18092019-what-is-a-museum-in-the-21st-century?utm_campaign=1577290_19092019&utm_medium=email&utm_source=Museums%20Association&dm_i=2VBX,XT1M,27M8HC,3JGE0,1), visited 3 October 2019.

Adjor, D.M., and Kebalo, L. (2018). Does corruption matter for unemployment in SADC countries?. *Review of Economic and Business Studies*. 11(1), 65-92. DOI 10.1515/rebs-2018-0074.

Allen, F. (2015). The state of the climate justice movement in South Africa. *Capitalism Nature Socialism*, 26(2), 46-57. DOI: 10.1080/10455752.2015.1017731.

Alonso, M.F. (2008). Can we protect traditional knowledges? In de Sousa Santos, Boaventura (Ed) *Another knowledge is possible: Beyond northern epistemologies*. New York: Verso. pp.249-271.

Anderies, J.M., Janssen, M.A. and Ostrom, E. (2004). A framework to analyze the robustness of social-ecological systems from an institutional perspective. *Ecology and Society*, 9(1), 1-17.

<https://www.ecologyandsociety.org/vol9/iss1/art18/>

Bakker, K. A. Müller, L. (2010). Intangible heritage and community identity in post-apartheid South Africa'. *Museum International*, 62(1), 48-56.

Ballantyne, R. and Uzzel, D. (2011). Looking back and looking forward: The rise of the visitor-centered museum. *Curator*, 54(10), 85-92.

Bedford, L. (2001). Storytelling: The real work of museums. *Curator*, 44(1), 27-34.

Bhaskar, R. (1998). *The possibility of naturalism: A philosophical critique of the contemporary human sciences*. London: Routledge.

Bhaskar, R. (2008). *Dialectic: The Pulse of Freedom*. London: Verso.

Bhaskar, R. (2010). Contexts of interdisciplinarity: Interdisciplinarity and climate change. In Bhaskar, R., Frank, C., Høyer, K.G., Næss, P. and Parker, J. (Eds) *Interdisciplinarity and climate change: Transforming knowledge and practice for our global future*. London: Routledge. pp1-24.

Bhaskar, R. and Parker, J. (2010). Introduction. In Bhaskar, R., Frank, C., Høyer, K.G., Næss, P. and Parker, J. (Eds) *Interdisciplinarity and climate change: Transforming knowledge and practice for our global future*. London: Routledge. pp.vii-xiii.

Cameron, F. (2015a). The liquid museum: New institutional ontologies for a complex, uncertain world. In Witcomb, A. and Message, K. (Eds), *The international handbooks of museum studies: Museum theory*. Milton: John Wiley and Sons. pp.345-361.

Cameron, F. (2015b). Ecologizing experimentations: A method and manifesto for composing a post-humanist museum. In Cameron, F. and Neilson, B (Eds), *Climate change and museum futures*. London: Routledge. pp.16-33.

Ciasnocha, D., Olsson, M. and Shermis, N. (2006). The power of storytelling: An interview with Mari-Louise Olsson, the Executive Director of the Museum of Mölndal. *The Journal of Museum Education*, 31(1), 63-69.

Crouch, D. (2010). Flirting with space: Thinking landscape relationally. *Cultural Geographies*, 17(1). 5-18. doi.org/10.1177/1474474009349996

Crutzen, P.J. (2002). Geology of Mankind. *Nature*, 415, 23.

Corsane, G. (2000). What can South African museums learn from the work of the French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu? *South African Museums Association Bulletin*, 24(1), 25-30.

Corsane, G. (2004). Transforming museums and heritage in postcolonial and post-apartheid South Africa: The impact of processes of policy formulation and new legislation. *Social Analysis*, 48(1), 5-15.

De Shuman, A.M. (2020). No longer in extremis. *Medium*. 15 June.

<https://medium.com/@andreamontiel23/no-longer-in-extremis-9aa1c5996f35>, visited 20 June 2020.

De Sousa Santos, B., Arriscado, J.N. and Meneses, M.P. (2008). Introduction: Opening up the canon of knowledge and recognition of difference. In De Sousa Santos, B. (Ed) *Another knowledge is possible: Beyond northern epistemologies*. London: Verso. pp. xix-lxii.

De Sousa Santos, B. (2018). *The end of the cognitive empire: The coming of age of epistemologies of the South*. London: Duke University Press.

Department of Arts And Culture. (2009). Review of heritage legislation: Final report, volume 1. <http://www.dac.gov.za/sites/default/files/Review%20of%20Heritage%20Legislation%20Report.pdf>, visited 5 December 2019.

Department of Arts and Culture. (2017). Revision of the Department of Arts And Culture 1996 White Paper. <http://www.dac.gov.za/white-papers>, visited 20 May 2020.

Dondolo, L. (2005). Museums and communities: The reconstruction of museums and their practices in post-apartheid South Africa. *South African Museums Association Bulletin*, 31(1), 68-71.

Dubin, S.C. (2006). *Transforming museums: Mounting Queen Victoria in a democratic South Africa*. New York: Palgrave MacMillan.

Engeström, Y. (2015). *Learning by expanding: An Activity-Theoretical approach to developmental research*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Fletcher, A.J. (2017). Applying critical realism in qualitative research: Methodology meets method. *International Journal of Social Research Methodology*, 20(2), 181-194. DOI: 10.1080/13645579.2016.1144401.

Fox, W.L. (2017). The art of the Anthropocene. In Newell, J., Robin, L. and Wehner, K. (Eds) *Curating the future: Museums, communities and climate change*. London: Routledge. pp.196-205.

Garlandini, A. (2017). ICOM Milan 2016: The new responsibilities of museums towards landscapes. *Museum international*, 69(1-2), 164—175. <https://doi.org/10.1111/muse.12160>.

Hamer, N. (2019). The hybrid exhibits of the story museum: The child as creative artist and the limits to hands-on participation. *Museum & Society*. 17(3), 390-403.

Hartwig, M. (2008). Introduction. In Roy Bhaskar, *Dialectic: The Pulse of Freedom*. New York: Routledge. pp.xiii-xxxii.

Helland, L.E.F., and Lindgren, T. (2016). What goes around comes around: From the coloniality of power to the crisis of civilization. *Journal of World-Systems Research*, 22(2), 430-462.

ICOM (International Council of Museums). (2007). Museum definition.

<https://icom.museum/en/activities/standards-guidelines/museum-definition/>, visited 16 July 2019.

International Council of Museums-South Africa (ICOM-SA) and International Committee on Monuments and Sites-South Africa (ICOMOS-SA). (2016). *Declaration on museums and cultural landscapes*. [http://network.icom.museum/fileadmin/user\\_upload/minisites/icom-south-africa/pdf/Declaration\\_on\\_Museums\\_and\\_Cultural\\_Landscapes\\_FINAL\\_2.0.pdf](http://network.icom.museum/fileadmin/user_upload/minisites/icom-south-africa/pdf/Declaration_on_Museums_and_Cultural_Landscapes_FINAL_2.0.pdf), visited 10 June 2019.

Jeffery, T. (2017). Future-proofing South Africa's cultural museums: Climate change, heritage discourse and cultural landscapes. *South African Museums Association Bulletin*, 39(1), 19-28. <https://doi.org/10.10520/EJC-c85c01dee>

Jeffery, T. (2021). Critical realist philosophy and the possibility of an eco-decolonial museology." *Museum and Society*, (19)1, 48-70.

Kamga, S.A.D and Heleba, S. (2012). 'Can economic growth translate into access to rights? Challenges faced by institutions in South Africa in ensuring that growth leads to better living standards. *International Journal on Human Rights*, 9(17), 83-106.

Kristinsdóttir, A. (2017). Toward sustainable museum education practices: Confronting challenges and uncertainties. *Museum Management and Curatorship*, 32(5), 424-439. DOI: 10.1080/09647775.2016.1250104.

Levitz, C. and Mathers, K. (2000). A poverty of theory, a wealth of activity: Museology and South African museums. *South African Museums Association Bulletin*, 24(1), 18-21.

Lotz-Sisitka, H. (2016). Absenting absence: Expanding zones of proximal development in environmental learning processes. In Price, L. and Lotz-Sisitka, H. (Eds) *Critical Realism, Environmental Learning and Social-Ecological Change*. London: Routledge. pp.318-339.

Lotz-Sisitka, H. and Price, L. (2016). Why critical realism, environmental learning and social-ecological change? Introducing the book. In Price, L. and Lotz-Sisitka, H. (Eds) *Critical Realism, Environmental Learning and Social-Ecological Change*. London: Routledge. pp.1-18.

Lotz-Sisitka, H., Wals, A.E.J., Kronlid, D., and McGarry, D. (2015). Transformative, transgressive social learning: Rethinking higher education pedagogy in times of systemic global dysfunction. *Current Opinion in Environmental Sustainability*, 16, 73-80. doi.org/10.1016/j.cosust.2015.07.018.

Lotz-Sisitka, H., Belay, M.A., Mphepo, G., Chaves, M., Macintyre, T., Pesanayi, T., Wals, A., Mukute, M., Kronlid, D., Tuan Tran, D., Joon, D. and McGarry, D. (2016). Co-designing research on transgressive learning in times of climate change. *Current Opinion in Environmental Sustainability*, 20, 50–55. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.cosust.2016.04.004>

Luengo, M. (2015). Foreword. In Taylor, K. St Clair, A. and Mitchell, N.J. (Eds) *Conserving cultural landscapes: Challenges and new directions*. London: Routledge. Pp.xi—xviii.

Macdonald, S. (2015). Is ‘difficult heritage’ still difficult? Why public acknowledgment of past perpetration may no longer be so unsettling to collective identities. *Museum International*, 67(1-4), 6-22.

Mahony, E. (2017). Opening spaces of resistance in the corporatized cultural institution: Liberate Tate and the Art Not Oil Coalition. *Museum & Society*, 15(2), 126-141.

Marschall, S. (2005). Making money with memories: The fusion of heritage, tourism and identity formation in South Africa. *Historia*, 50(1), 103-122.

Martin, M. (2000). Theory into practice, practice into theory. *South African Museums Association Bulletin*, 24(1), 11-17.

Mdanda, S. (2016). Museums and democratic education: How museums were transformed after the 1994 elections in South Africa. *South African Museums Association Bulletin*, 38(1) 47-57.

Meskell, L. (2012). *The nature of heritage: The new South Africa*. Sussex: Wiley-Blackwell.

Mngqolo, S. (2010). Voices within our exhibitions. *South African Museums Association Bulletin* 33(1) 70.

Mukute, M. (2016). Dialectical critical realism and Cultural Historical Activity Theory (CHAT): Exploring and expanding learning processes in sustainable agriculture workplace contexts. In Price, L. and Lotz-Sisitka, H. (Eds) *Critical Realism, Environmental Learning and Social-Ecological Change*. London: Routledge. pp.190-211.

Mungwini, P. (2013). African modernities and the critical reappropriation of indigenous knowledges: Towards a polycentric global epistemology. *International Journal of African Renaissance Studies - Multi-, Inter- and Transdisciplinarity*. 8(1), 78-93. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/18186874.2013.834556>.

Moore, J.W. (2017). 'The Capitalocene, part I: On the nature and origins of our ecological crisis. *The Journal of Peasant Studies*, 44(3), 594-630. DOI:10.1080/03066150.2016.1235036.

Morgan, J. and Macdonald, S. (2020). De-growing museum collections for new heritage futures. *International Journal of Heritage Studies*, 26(1), 56-70. DOI:10.1080/13527258.2018.1530289.

Mosely, E. (2007). Visualizing apartheid: Contemporary art and collective memory during South Africa's transition to democracy. *Antipoda*, 5, 97-119.

Nattrass, N. (2014). A South African variety of capitalism?. *New Political Economy*, 19(1), 56-78. DOI: 10.1080/13563467.2013.768610.

Newell, J., Robin, L. and Wehner, K. (2017). Introduction. In Newell, J., Robin, L. and Wehner, K. (Eds) *Curating the future: Museums, communities and climate change*. London: Routledge. pp.1-16.

Nixon, R. (2011). *Slow violence and the environmentalism of the poor*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press.

Nixon, R. (2017). The Anthropocene and environmental justice. In Newell, J., Robin, L. and Wehner, K. (Eds) *Curating the future: Museums, communities and climate change*. London: Routledge. pp.23-31.

- Norrie, A. (2010). *Dialectic and difference: Dialectical critical realism and the grounds of justice*. London: Routledge.
- Ntsoane, O. (2002). Indigenisation of museums and de-fossilisation of knowledge: Towards a future perfect place. *South African Museums Association Bulletin*, 28(1), 27-31.
- O'Donoghue, R., Sandoval-Rivera, Juan, C.A. and Payyappallimana, U. (2019). Landscape, memory and learning to change in changing worlds: Contemplating intergenerational learning and traditional knowledge practices within social-ecological landscapes of change. *Southern African Journal of Environmental Education*, 35, 1-34.
- Paulse, J. (2019). Sarah Baartman Remembrance Centre project at standstill. *SABC News*, 15 January. <http://www.sabcnews.com/sabcnews/sarah-baartman-remembrance-centre-project-at-standstill/>, visited 28 January 2019.
- Pearce, S.M. (2003). *Interpreting Objects and Collections*. London: Routledge.
- Phillips, R.B. (2019). 'Making fun' of the museum: Multi-disciplinarity, holism, and the 'return of curiosity'. *Museum and Society*, 17(3), 316-341.
- Plumwood, V. (2002). Decolonising relationships with nature. *Philosophy Activism Nature*, 2, 7-30.
- Price, L. (2016). 'Key critical realist concepts for environmental educators. In Price, L. and Lotz-Sisitka, H. (Eds) *Critical Realism, Environmental Learning and Social-Ecological Change*. London: Routledge. pp.18-39.
- Rall, M. (2018). Across time of three South African San exhibitions: Reflecting on colonialism, apartheid and decolonisation. *South African Museums Association Bulletin*, 40(1), 11-22.
- Rankin, E. (2013). Creating/curating cultural capital: Monuments and museums for post-apartheid South Africa. *Humanities*, 2, 72–98. doi:10.3390/h2010072.
- Rassool, C. (2000). The rise of heritage and the reconstitution of history in South Africa. *Kronos*, 26(1), 1-21.

Rassool, C. (2016). Red Mandela: Contests of auto-biography and auto/biography in South Africa. *Kronos*, 42, 195-213.

Robin, L., Avango, D., Keogh, L., Möllers, N and Trischler, H. (2017). Displaying the Anthropocene in and beyond museums. In Newell, J., Robin, L. and Wehner, K. (Eds) *Curating the future: Museums, communities and climate change*. London: Routledge. pp.252-266.

Rosenberg, E. (2020a). Synthesis and elaboration of critical realist methodology for green skills research. In Rosenberg, E., Ramsarup P. and Lotz-Sisitka, H. (Eds) *Green Skills Research in South Africa: Models, Cases and Methods*. Oxon: Routledge. pp.192-207.

Rosenberg, E. (2020b). Special issue: Education for sustainability in a time of crises. Editorial Part 1, June 2020. *Southern African Journal of Environmental Education*, 36, 1-7. DOI 10.4314/sajee.v36i1.1.

Roux, N. (2018). 'A house for dead people': Memory and spatial transformation in Red Location, South Africa. *Social & Cultural Geography*, 19(4), 407-428. DOI: 10.1080/14649365.2017.1280614.

Sabai, D. (2016). Indigenous knowledge and critical realism on the eastern coast of Tanzania. In Price, L. and Lotz-Sisitka, H. (Eds) *Critical Realism, Environmental Learning and Social-Ecological Change*. London: Routledge. pp. 178-189.

Sandahl, J. (2018). International Council of Museums Standing Committee for Museum Definition, Prospects and Potentials: Report and Recommendations. ICOM (International Council of Museums). 19 June. <https://icom.museum/en/activities/standards-guidelines/museum-definition/>, visited 14 October 2019.

Sandahl, J. (2019). Definitions are dynamic, not static. *Museums Journal*, 119 (12). [https://www.museumsassociation.org/museums-journal/comment/01122019-definitions-are-dynamic-not-static?utm\\_campaign=1644717\\_12122019&utm\\_medium=email&utm\\_source=Museums%20Association&dm\\_i=2VBX,Z92L,7AK7Z8,3PDZT,1](https://www.museumsassociation.org/museums-journal/comment/01122019-definitions-are-dynamic-not-static?utm_campaign=1644717_12122019&utm_medium=email&utm_source=Museums%20Association&dm_i=2VBX,Z92L,7AK7Z8,3PDZT,1), visited 13 December 2019.

Schudel, I.J. (2017). Modelling dialectical processes in environmental learning: An elaboration of Roy Bhaskar's onto-axiological chain. *Journal of Critical Realism*, 16(2), 163-183.

DOI:10.1080/14767430.2017.1288061

Shoba, N. (2005). 'Community museums: An Insight into the socio-economic, environmental and cultural impacts on community museums in the Eastern Cape. *South African Museums Association Bulletin*, 31(1), 26.

Skiti, S. (2015). Sad monument a blot on memory of Cradock Four. *Sunday Times*, 15 May.

<https://www.timeslive.co.za/sunday-times/news/2015-05-24-sad-monument-a-blot-on-memory-of-cradock-four/>, visited 30 April 2019.

Smith, C. (2014). Post-modernising the museum: The Ration Shed. *Historical Encounters*, 1(1), 32-49.

Sodano, C. (2017). Cultural landscapes in international charters. *Museum International* 69(12), 80-85. <https://doi.org/10.1111/muse.12152>.

Soudien, C. (2008). Emerging discourses around identity in new South African museum exhibitions. *Interventions*, 10(2), 207-221. DOI:10.1080/13698010802145119.

South African Cultural Observatory. (2018). Minister Mthethwa interaction with the creative industries. <https://www.southafricanculturalobservatory.org.za/article/minister-mthethwa-interaction-with-the-creative-industries>, visited 13 May 2020.

South African Government. (2011). Mzansi's Golden Economy: Contribution of the arts, culture and heritage sector to the New Growth Path. <https://www.gov.za/documents/mzansis-golden-economy-contribution-arts-culture-and-heritage-sector-new-growth-path>, visited 13 May 2020.

Thomas, N. (2016). *The ascendancy of the museum*. London: Reaktion.

Togo, M. (2016). Underlabouring systems thinking with critical realism in understanding Rhodes University's response to the sustainability imperative. In Price, L. and Lotz-Sisitka, H. (Eds) *Critical Realism, Environmental Learning and Social-Ecological Change*. London: Routledge. pp.85-97.

United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). (1972). *Convention concerning the protection of the world cultural and natural heritage*.

<https://whc.unesco.org/en/conventiontext/>, visited 6 November 2019.

United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). (2017). *Operational Guidelines for the Implementation of the World Heritage Convention*.

<https://whc.unesco.org/en/guidelines/>, visited 18 June 2019.

Vollgraaff, H. (2004). Editorial. *South African Museums Association Bulletin*, 30(1), 2.

Vollgraaff, H. (2018). Revitalising the South African museum sector: New museological trends. In Ngulube, P. (Ed) *Handbook of research on heritage management and preservation*. Hershey PA: IGI Global. pp.372-395.

Vergo, P. (1989). Introduction. In Vergo, P. (Ed) *The New Museology*. Bath: Reaktion. pp.1-5.

Walker, B., Holling, C. S., Carpenter, S.R. and Kinzig, A. (2004). Resilience, adaptability and transformability in social-ecological systems. *Ecology and Society*, 9(2).

<https://www.ecologyandsociety.org/vol9/iss2/art5/>.

Wehner, K. (2017). Towards an ecological museology: Responding to the animal-objects of the Australian Institute of Anatomy collection. In In Newell, J., Robin, L. and Wehner, K. (Eds) *Curating the future: Museums, communities and climate change*. London: Routledge. pp. 85-100.

Weil, S. (1999). From being about something to being for somebody: The ongoing transformation of the American museum. *Daedalus*, 128(3), 229-258.

Witz, L., Rassool, C. and Minkley, G. (2001). Repackaging the past for South African tourism.

*Daedalus*, 130(1), 277-296.

Zuma, B. (2018). The extent to which South African museums surrendered to political undertones. *Museum International*, 70(3-4), 38-47. doi.org/10.1111/muse.12208.

## **APPENDIX 6**

### **“Humanature: Critical Realism and the Possibility of an Eco-decolonial Museology”**

**Submitted to the Journal of Critical Realism in January 2021 and awaiting editorial feedback.**

This 4D article builds on previous 1M to 3L work that introduced critical realist philosophy into the museological context as underlabourer for the development of an eco-decolonial mode of museology. Such a mode is a response to the need to disrupt the implicit neoliberal ontology of museology and the dualist philosophy and practice that it perpetuates.

A constellation of theoretical perspectives is developed that surfaces potential pathways towards the eco-decolonial mode of museology. The article explores the practical potentials of this constellation through a retrospective case study of two museum exhibitions. The case study emphasizes the operationalisation of a dialectic between society and ecology and the relationship between structure and agency as vital to an eco-decolonial museology with potential to disrupt normalized practice and enhance the emancipatory capacities of the museum as a social structure.

Keywords: museum theory and practice; dualism; ontology; dialectical critical realism; eco-decolonial

### **Introduction**

Earlier work (Jeffery 2017; Jeffery 2021; Jeffery, forthcoming) used the critical realist onto-axiological chain to surface and historically contextualize (1M) the implicit neoliberal ontology of contemporary dualist museology. An ecological-decolonial, or eco-decolonial mode of museology was proposed to bring about the 3L vision of a relational museology (Jeffery, forthcoming) and to counter in practice (4D) the 2E restrictions of neoliberal dualism on museology (Jeffery 2021, 57-59). Dialectical critical realism (DCR) was positioned as the underlabourer (Bhaskar 2008, 335) for the development of the eco-decolonial mode (Jeffery 2021, 51), in an act of the practice of philosophy for real social-ecological change (Bhaskar 2008, 216; Bhaskar and Parker 2010, vii; Price 2016, 18; Rosenberg 2020, 192).

The most significant tension surfaced in the earlier work is the paradox of emancipatory neoliberalism (Jeffery 2021, 56 and 61; Jeffery, forthcoming). The oppressive ideology of neoliberalism is positioned as the fundamental policy and practice context for emergent, emancipatory museological impulses. Such impulses cannot be supported by the neoliberal ideology that generates and perpetuates inequalities and injustices on a global scale (see Plumwood 2002, 9

and Moore 2017, 611-612 on cheap nature and labour, and who counts as human in the Capitalocene).

Collection, or 'acquisition' in a more accurate reflection of the extractive logic of the implicit neoliberal ontology, is the grounding ontological activity of museology (Jeffery 2021, 61), from which the full scope of museums' activities emerge (Sandahl 2018, 2). Acquisition is exterior to processes of change such as the International Council of Museums' redefinition process (Sandahl 2019, 1). This constructs a philosophical shield around the deep ontological roots of museological dualism and consolidates emancipatory neoliberalism as an absence of coherence between the theoretical social-ecological responsibilities and the actual practice of museum work (the importance of the 'coherence of theory and practice in practice' is described in Bhaskar 2008, 352; Hartwig 2007, 157; Hartwig 2008, xiv).

The fundamental problem that the work seeks to resolve is that an implicit neoliberal ontology, hitherto unarticulated in museological criticism, absents vital relational social-ecological perspectives from museology and absents the emancipatory potentials of museums that are emphasized as critical to their relevance and sustainability (see, for instance, Nielsen 2015; Pop et al. 2019). The eco-decolonial is a potential solution to this problem. It is a new mode of practice emergent from the onto-axiological chain that may disrupt the ontological position of acquisition and absent its absences towards a more relational ontology. The development of the eco-decolonial mode is continued here, with a focus on the 3L and 4D moments of the onto-axiological chain. The analysis constructs a constellational perspective on 3L theoretical potentials for expansion of 4D practice that further develops the earlier work.

## **Methodology**

The analysis makes use of abduction, induction and a constellational approach to theoretical perspectives. Abduction refers to the recontextualization of existing knowledge (Togo 2016, 89), drawing in themes, or codes, from earlier work. An initial exploration of policy and practice, for instance (Jeffery 2017), identified an absence of ecological issues from museum practice, generated by their absence from the policy framework, and a need to link ecological and decolonial concerns for meaningful transformations of museum practice. These constitute abductive codes for the present analysis.

Abducted codes include the 1M restrictions on practice such as commodification, a restrictive authorized heritage discourse, and the suppression of staff agency and interest in social-ecological issues, as well as the resistance to such structural restrictions that was expressed in the surveys conducted in the earlier work (Jeffery 2021, 56-59). Abduction draws into the present

analysis the sense of frustration that was expressed with the slow pace of transformation and the limitations on agency that emerge from the current governance structures of museum practice. The paradox of emancipatory neoliberalism in which the implicit neoliberal ontology limits the processes of decolonization that governance structures claim to champion is a key element of the motivation drawn from previous work for the further development here of the eco-decolonial mode of museology.

Induction refers to the identification of new codes from the data at hand, 'a process that ... helps us to [move] from a set of observations to a theory' (Sabai 2016, 182). A review of literature and the research that was carried out on the exhibition projects discussed in the case study inductively surface general premises that may inform changes to practice (Sabai 2016, 183), such as the transformative potential of relationality that is surfaced in the case study.

The research carried out for the previous work and in the development of the present articles surfaced a wide range of theoretical perspectives that seemed potentially useful in the development of the eco-decolonial mode of museology. There was a need to bring these together in some way to enable the further emergence of the eco-decolonial. The idea of constellationality (Bhaskar 2008, 120) became useful for this, as elaborated below. It enables the construction of theoretical pathways towards the practical emergence of an eco-decolonial mode of thinking and working. It simultaneously builds upon the deep retroductive perspective that was developed in the earlier work, and thus integrates the historical and structural causes of the restrictions on practice that the eco-decolonial is intended to resolve. The constellational approach deepens the interpretation and analysis of the codes from previous work and enables them to be effectively integrated with those developed in the present analysis.

To disrupt the ontological power of acquisition may bring transformation to the museum as a social structure through the active absencing of absences and the absencing of the structural constraints that keep absences in place (Bhaskar 2008, 8; Norrie 2010, 28; Mukute 2016, 196; Schudel 2017, 174). This potentially revitalizes the agency of the museum so that it may better engage with, offer learning to and also learn from people in this time of social-ecological crisis. In other words, there is potential here for an ontological transformation that may allow the museum as a social structure to expand to become a site of co-engaged and expansive learning (see, for instance, O'Donoghue 2016 and Pesanayi 2016 on co-engaged social-ecological learning potentials).

A transformative pathway towards social-ecological relationality in museology was identified in earlier work. The meso-level disruption of acquisition through interstitial activism grounded in workers' social-ecological agency (Jeffery 2021, 61-62) was envisioned within a dialectical culture-landscape practice frame (Jeffery, forthcoming). Transformative pathways towards the eco-

decolonial mode are more fully theorized and deepened here using the constellational approach, which draws in perspectives from a range of disciplines and thus contributes to the development of interdisciplinary potentials for relational museology. Emergent museological perspectives that focus on the disruption of dualism (for instance, Cameron 2015; Newell, Robin and Wehner 2017; Wehner 2017) may be constellationally linked to theoretical perspectives from other disciplines that have developed the social-ecological relationality that is absent from dualist museology. Museology may thus be treated in an open-systemic way rather than the traditional closed, dualist perspective.

### **Critical realism in action**

A 4D case study explores practical examples of emergent social-ecological transformation of practice. A retrospective critical realist lens is applied to two exhibition projects carried out by Amazwi South African Museum of Literature (henceforth Amazwi). This lens draws on the constellational pathway developed below towards social-ecological relationality in museology. The two exhibition projects were carried out in a cultural museum practice context but the workers involved made use of a relational social-ecological approach to practice. This can be understood as a 4D moment of the transformation of dualist practice driven by the agency of the museum's workers from within and in spite of the restrictive formal structure.

Similar to Schudel's work in *Education for Sustainable Development* (2017) and Baloi's work to understand the practice of community irrigation schemes in Mozambique (2017), the case study is a practical application of critical realism in a context of societal transformation, in this case museology in a postcolonial, post-apartheid context of social-ecological crisis. Such practical examples of critical realism in action remain unusual, and such a project has never been undertaken in the museum context.

Future work using Cultural Historical Activity Theory (CHAT) Change Laboratories to develop such potentials and to move towards the implementation of the eco-decolonial mode is considered towards the end of the analysis.

### **3L Constellational interdisciplinarity towards new theory and practice for museology**

Constellationality implies a vital openness to connections, an open-system perspective that may counter museology's dualist ontology with a dialectic of emancipation (Bhaskar 2008, 36). To disrupt 'disciplinary purity' (Phillips 2019, 331) is particularly crucial for the impetus towards multi- and interdisciplinary networks that has gained urgency as a catalyst for emergent social-ecological practices (Bhaskar 2010, 4).

Resolution of the ‘problem of opposites’ may be achieved through the ‘key figure of constellationality’ (Bhaskar 2008, 253), which offers a ‘hiatus’ of duality (Bhaskar 2008, 259). Museological dualism is grounded in the opposition of human and nature, society and ecology, ‘a separation that so clearly does not exist’ (Moore 2017, 598). The relational eco-decolonial mode, potentially emergent from a constellational perspective, moves towards the resolution of persistent museological human-nature dualism to a progressive human-nature dialectic. This represents the potential for a fundamental, ontological shift for museum practice.

Mukute (2016, 191) explains the concept of constellations as ‘collections of related ideas, things and people’. The constellation maps the 3L totality as a system of internal relations (Nunez 2014, 26), but the totality of an open system with a focus on the generation of emergent practices can surely also be considered in terms of *potential* relations, as is done here. Constellationality not only maps connections, but may be generative of them too.

Significantly for the future work in Change Laboratories considered below, Mukute (2016, 191) remarks that the concept of constellationality, ‘is closely tied to that of interacting activity systems in Cultural Historical Activity Theory (CHAT)’ (also see Engeström, 1987; Engeström and Sannino, 2010; and Nunez 2014, 37 on the potential for DCR to provide the stratified perspective that is missing from CHAT).

The analysis below will elaborate a constellation of theoretical possibilities, or at least one potential form of it (perhaps, rather, an asterism), and a path through it towards an eco-decolonial museology. Figure 1 gives an overview.

The range of perspectives drawn into the constellation is broad, but neither exhaustive nor definitive. Neither should it be taken that eco-decolonial work should or could use all of these perspectives together all of the time. The development of the eco-decolonial mode will be an iterative process. This can be seen in the way that the 3L and 4D perspectives that were outlined in previous work (Jeffery, forthcoming) are developed into a new iteration in the present analysis. This is an expansive development that is historically rooted (1M) and relational, which emphasizes the future value of collaborative potentials with CHAT to further develop the work (Engeström et al. 1996; Vilela 2014). What is presented here is a selection of perspectives that may be explored in various combinations to generate iterations of a relational and emancipatory museology. That is, the constellation is open as DCR enables philosophical connections between theoretical positionalities that are potentially generative of a dialectical and interdisciplinary practice frame for a dynamic and progressive museology.

### **A pathway through a constellation**

The eco-decolonial regards emergent museological perspectives on decolonisation and ecologisation as inherently entangled in the movement towards forms of museum practice with potential to explore the dynamics of social and ecological processes as interlinked systems (Jeffery 2021, 48). As mentioned above, the constellation imagined here will develop this perspective through links to critical approaches that manifest social-ecological relationality.

Cultural landscape occupies a position of increasing significance in heritage practice (see, for instance, Roe and Taylor 2014). Many institutional conceptions of cultural landscape are routinely dualist, anthropocentric and gendered 'nature and man' perspectives, instrumental conceptions in which environmentalism is external to overarching 'cultural forces' (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization 1972, 2; Luengo 2015, xi; Garlandini 2016; (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization 2017, 20). More progressive perspectives, however, explore the 'complex layering of meaning attached to the landscape' in a holistic fashion (International Council of Museums-South Africa and International Committee on Monuments and Sites-South Africa 2016, 4). The emerging relationality in cultural landscape approaches to people and place (see, for instance, Crouch 2010) may be further developed into a dialectic of culture-landscape. Emerging critical museological approaches to human-nature dualism, the opposition at the heart of museology's ontological crisis, may then be framed within this dialectic.

A culture-landscape dialectical perspective may strengthen an interdisciplinary focus on situated knowledge of social-ecological crisis, for instance drawing on Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) perspectives on situated intergenerational knowledge and learning around biodiversity loss that offers the potential for ESD to inform future sustainability initiatives (O'Donoghue, Sandoval-Rivera and Payyappallimana 2019, 4). Biodiversity loss as a global social-ecological concern from the perspective of western science may be related to decolonial impulses through a relational focus on marginalized indigenous perspectives on biodiversity. There is then museological potential for narratives of social-ecological relations to place and biodiversity, both western and indigenous in a further disruption of opposites, to be co-curated by museums and communities into exhibitions and co-engaged learning opportunities.

The situated turn in ESD offers a theoretical positionality from which to conceive a situated turn for museum practice, that is, a means for museum practice to shift its ontological focus from an inward-looking fixation on acquisition to an outward-looking exploration of humanity-in-nature. This offers potential to counter the neoliberal cognitive empire with a new, relational 'ecology of knowledges' (de Sousa Santos, Arriscado and Meneses 2008, xx), which is also another way of understanding the constellational perspective. This ecology of knowledges will emphasize critical

reflexivity on the entanglement of human and more-than-human belonging in a perspective on the historical depth of culture-landscape (see, for instance, Murdock 2020).

A further interdisciplinary/constellational connection can be found in Amazwi's focus as a museum of literature, which grounded the exhibitions discussed below in the increasingly significant literary genre of ecocriticism (Lemmer 2007, 338). The emergent strand of postcolonial ecocriticism (Huggan and Tiffin 2015) is potentially particularly significant to an eco-decolonial museology grounded in culture-landscape as it encourages a relational perspective on both the anthropocentric focus of the postcolonial and the ecocritical focus on place (Huggan and Tiffin 2015, viii). The divergence of social and ecological justice in postcolonial and ecological perspectives echoes a similar divergence emergent from museological dualism, and its resolution in postcolonial ecocriticism offers a theoretical position from which the eco-decolonial mode of museology may articulate the 'mutual entanglement of human and natural history' (Huggan and Tiffin 2015, vii).

The need for relational thinking about cultural representation and the politics of implementing sustainability (Heise 2006, 506) in the 'high age of neoliberalism' (Nixon 2011, 17) resonates with the eco-decolonial focus on the relationality between ecological work and the work of social transformation and on the disruption of neoliberal ontology and links to the culture-landscape dialectical frame of the eco-decolonial. This frame, to make a small but vital modification to the perspective of the International Council of Museums-South Africa (2016, 1), 'sees diverse cultural traditions as constantly interacting, adapting and evolving [within] geological history, biological diversity and the story of human development'.

Postcolonial ecocriticism is emerging as a critical interventionist discourse that cultivates a sense of 'worldliness' (Huggan and Tiffin 2015, ix). The need to act in the world, to intervene in practical ways in urgent social-ecological contexts, is vital to DCR (Price 2016, 25) and has parallels with the emergence of an activist mode in museology. The interviews conducted with South African museum workers indicate that the restrictions of emancipatory neoliberalism are the primary structural means through which power<sub>2</sub> constrains the power<sub>1</sub> agency (Bhaskar 2008, 143) of museum workers and ensures that they are reproductive rather than transformative of the museum as a neoliberal social structure (Jeffery 2021, 58). Interviews with British workers (Hollows 2019, 81) similarly suggest that they are 'critically conscious' of the potential for their social-ecological values to effect practice, but feel disempowered to act. This dialectical tension in meso-level museum practice is emergent from the neoliberal ontological frame and delineates a 'sub-politics' (Beck 1992, 14) of workers in tension with governance structures.

Tension between the nuanced social-ecological perspectives of museum workers and restrictive dualist institutional positionalities (Jeffery 2021, 60) represent potential for the

operationalisation of an expansive museological 'activist and interventionist approach' (Sannino, Engeström and Lemos 2016, 600, and which links to the discussion of CHAT potentials for the eco-decolonial below). Workers' progressive social-ecological positionalities may be considered a sub-politics, a possible mode of reflexivity external to institutional positionalities and within which inheres the possibility of challenging dominant structures (Guivant 2016, 228). The idea of sub-politics offers a perspective from which to recalibrate the reciprocity between structure and agency and theorize workers' progressive viewpoints as a significant component of the conception and development of the museum as a social structure.

Interstitial activism, for instance, offers agency to operationalize this sub-politics and to bring change from within the ontological formation of the museum, 'not as an attack on these public institutions for their duplicitous value systems, but as acts of love for what they could be' (Mahony 2017, 132). Neoliberal ontology limits the agency available to workers and, through managerialism for instance (Jeffery 2021, 58), resists activism that might disrupt the dualism on which it relies. Interstitial activism, which occurs outside formal structures, is a means to circumvent neoliberal restrictions and for museum workers to act with activist intent towards inequality, injustice and environmental crises (Janes and Sandell 2019a, 1).

Workers, aware of structural ideological restrictions, may thus assume the agency to disrupt the constraints of the neoliberal ontology and to initiate a transformative pathway towards social-ecological justice. This is a practical application of critical realist philosophical perspectives on absenting and transformative agency (Bhaskar 2008, 38; Norrie 2010, 16; Lotz-Sisitka 2016, 324; Mukute 2016, 196; Schudel 2017, 174, 179), which may equally be understood as a moment of expansive learning through the operationalization of the generative force of tensions (Engeström and Sannino 2010, 4).

Within the constellation, or knowledge ecology, outlined thus far progressive moves towards 'collaborative ways of interpreting and relating to collections' (Newell, Robin and Wehner 2017, 2) could become a dialectical focus on collaborative ways of relating to people-in-nature rather than objects. The grounding ontological activity of museum practice becomes collaborative storytelling with people understood as complex social-ecological entities. Co-curation focuses on facilitating situated social-ecological narrative perspectives on the real. The acquisition of things, even as the basis for narratives, is not the operational focus of museum work. The focus of museum work, its practice frame, instead becomes the culture-landscape in which humanity-in-nature lives and narrates, grounded in awareness of interwoven human and non-human ecological communities whose lives and freedoms are equally threatened by forces of inequality (Cameron 2015, 16; Newell,

Robin and Wehner 2017, 12; Wehner 2017, 87). The grounding ontological activity of acquisition, collection, is thus disrupted, and so in turn is the implicit neoliberal ontology that it supports.

Museums will surely continue to acquire objects, and use objects in exhibitions and other public programmes. What is being suggested is that museums may use the constellational pathway imagined here, or develop other such pathways, to engage reflexively with the deep ontological implications of dualism and the activity of acquisition. Epistemological reflection on the use of collections is quite prevalent (see for instance Pearce 2003; Morgan and Macdonald 2020). Reflexivity on the deeper underlying ontology of acquisition is not, but such a depth perspective can bring meaningful change to social structures (Bhaskar 2010, 3, 11; Price 2016, 19; Mukute 2016, 192).

Most particularly, museums should reflect on the extent to which acquisition, positioned as the driver of all of the museum's activities, perpetuates the absences of relevance and sustainability that museums are trying to overcome, because it is supported by and perpetuates an underlying, unjust ontology. It is this implicit capitalist ontology, with its historical emergence from colonialism to neoliberalism (Jeffery 2021, 55), that must be a focus of critical reflexivity in order to bring about meaningful structural change to the museum.

#### **4D Change: Case study**

The above surfaces potential for 'experimental practice' driven by the 'recognition that museums not only have the potential to shape a more sustainable, equitable and fair world, but also an obligation to do so' (Janes and Sandell 2019b, xxvii). This is a 4D potential and obligation, which may be fulfilled as the axiology of freedom ontologically nurtures the experimental transformative practice of the emergent eco-decolonial mode. A brief historical perspective on Amazwi and on the museum's exhibition programme is provided as a context for a case study of emergent change.

Amazwi is housed in the first South African museum building to achieve a 5-Star rating from the Green Building Council of South Africa (Bosworth 2013). The Director of the museum wrote in a document shared with staff in November 2020 that Amazwi aims to lead the implementation of sustainable museum practice in South Africa, both internally and externally. Its operating policies focus on responsible consumption and production patterns and a no-waste working culture.

While the influences of macro-level policy on meso-level practice (Jeffery 2021, 55) mean that Amazwi's practice remains broadly typical of the dualist museology perpetuated by an implicit neoliberal ontology, addressing social-ecological issues is important to the curators involved in developing the museum's exhibitions. That is, there is a progressive sub-politics that is a potential basis for interstitial activism. Some history of social-ecological focus and movement towards

relational and future-oriented transformation can be identified in two exhibitions, 'This is What I'm Made Of: Landscape in South African Literature' (2011) and 'Humanature' (2019). The case study explores these, with emphasis on 'Humanature', in an act of retrospective critical realist reflection on what can be understood as a 4D moment. Museum staff, including managers as distinct from restrictive policy and management structures, can be considered to have claimed the agency to disrupt dualism and to expand practice through the society-ecology dialectic. The empirical analysis below thus explores real change in context.

### ***This is What I'm Made Of: Landscape in South African Literature***

'This is What I'm Made Of' can be considered an earlier iteration of social-ecological relationality in practice that was further developed in 'Humanature'. The title comes from Antje Krog's *Country of my Skull* (1998, 210), 'This is my landscape. The marrow of my bones. The plains. The sweeping veld. The honey-blond sandstone stones. This I love. This is what I'm made of.' Krog's eloquent ecocritical expression of self and environment as mutually constructive initiates a dialectic of culture-landscape, and illustrates the interdisciplinary potential for ecocritical perspectives to be generative of a relational museology.

A public call for photographs and artworks depicting South African landscape generated many submissions, including a powerful illustration of the culture-landscape dialectic in a photo of the ashes of poet Don Maclennan (Image 1) being scattered by Maclennan's son Ben on the Compassberg Mountain, which the poet asks be done in this extract from his poem 'Under Compassberg' (Maclennan 2006, 145):

Scatter my ashes  
on the summit I so loved.  
Let the dolerite have  
what's left of me.  
When the wind blows from the north  
The scent of agathosma will enfold me.

In an earlier iteration of the co-production central to 'Humanature', a partnership was developed between the museum and 'Upstart', a youth development project founded in 2008 by Rhodes University's Department of Journalism and Media Studies in response to low levels of literacy (Makinana 2020). A group of 22 Grade 8 and 9 'Upstarters' (from 13 to 15 years old) was given disposable cameras, a lesson on using them, and an introduction to the project. They were asked to take photos of the landscape in which they live and to write a short paragraph about why they were motivated to take the particular photograph/s. The learners, all second-language English

speakers, wrote these situated narratives in English and received feedback from their teachers as part of their English language learning.

Learners' contributions suggested the innate social-ecological relationality of lived experience (Ross, Wit and Jones 2018, 47). See, for instance, Image 2 and the extract from the learner's narrative in its caption. The situated narrative perspective is central to the eco-decolonial mode of museology (Jeffery, forthcoming) and seems to readily draw out an innate sense of the mutual dependence of humanity and nature. This is significant to the relational values of an eco-decolonial mode and its disruption of dualism.

### **Humanature**

Red was chosen for the linking 'n' in 'Humanature' because of its resonance with ideas of change and urgency, and to emphasize the human-nature relationality that is the core premise of the exhibition. The 'n' represents the potential disruption of the binary construction of human-nature dualism.

Returning briefly to the development of the theoretical constellation, Milstein (2011, 21) similarly uses the compound term 'humanature' to 'reflexively engage human and nature ... in integral conversation [in a] turn toward lexical reciprocal intertwining' and draws links to Donna Haraway's notion of 'naturecultures,' 'nature and culture as inter-related historical and contemporary entities.' Haraway writes (2004, 2), 'There is no border where evolution ends and history begins, where genes stop and environment takes up, where culture rules and nature submits, or vice versa. Instead, there are turtles upon turtles of naturecultures all the way down.' The infinite and relational regression of natureculture 'turtles' may be added to the eco-decolonial constellation.

'Humanature' was conceived and curated in order to emphasize humanature relationality. From a retrospective critical realist perspective, the curatorial moment of 'Humanature' was an attempt to absent the absence of social issues from their ecological context and vice versa that is prevalent in museological practice (as initially surfaced in Jeffery 2017).

This is a movement towards coherence between the theoretical social-ecological responsibilities of museum work and the reality of dualist practice in which the fulfilment of those responsibilities is absented by neoliberal restrictions. The closer coherence of theory and practice in practice may break down the resilience of an inherently unsustainable system (Lotz-Sisitka et al. 2015, 74), such as a museology grounded in the paradox of emancipatory neoliberalism.

### ***Curation part 1: In-house research and development***

Research drew on the body of ecocritical creative writing in the museum's collection. The ecocritical

perspective on social-ecological relationality thus underpinned the initial emergence in Amazwi of social-ecological relationality in practice. Ecocriticism is also the (retrospective) entry point for the 'Humanature' exhibition project into the theoretical constellation of the eco-decolonial mode of museology, and is thus emphasized here.

In this respect, a museum of literature is perhaps in a unique position in relation to other museums. A dialectical relationship between society and ecology is already present in many of the ecocritical literary 'objects' it collects. This offered a more clear path for curation to be an act of reclaiming social-ecological agency than may be available to workers in other forms of museum.

As suggested above, what is important is reflexivity on the practice of acquisition in the moment of curation. Literature, presented as 'objects' in an exhibition, opens a pathway to philosophical and theoretical development of the idea of the object, insofar as literature itself may be considered an open system (as Reynolds 2007, for instance, considers in her review of the work of poet Jenny Boully). '[For] the museum worker ... the practical project tends to start from, and stop with, the object' (Thomas 2010, 7), but a 'literary' perspective on the object as an open system of connections and potential connections, as in fact a dialectical nexus, has strong potential to disrupt the dualist museological ontology.

Such a perspective may also question curatorial authority over the available interpretations of objects and contribute towards the emergent idea of the museum, which is never a neutral space (Jeffery 2017, 22; Wray 2019, 320), as a site of negotiated authority (Longair 2015, 1). To this end, and in a new methodology for Amazwi, 'Humanature' contained no interpretive text and focused solely on creative rather than critical writing. Telling people what they should do does not bring about behavioural change (Green and Mercer 2001, 1). In an act of co-generation of meaning, the literature and the visual materials selected by curators were allowed to speak for themselves, so that visitors could draw their own interpretations rather than feeling that they were being instructed.

The literary objects were curated with social-ecological relationality in mind, most particularly in the selection of manuscripts of the poet Douglas Livingstone. In Livingstone's work is to be found an early example – he died in 1996 – of the ecocritical sensibility which became more established in South African literature after the end of apartheid in 1994 (see Wylie 2008a, viii-xi for a discussion of this emergence). Livingstone's work 'draws extensively on scientific research in the field of bacteriology, is minutely located in place, evokes a secular sacramentalism in its representation of ecological interconnectedness, and situates the present moment in the context of deep time' (Martin 2013, 144; also see Wylie 2008b, 4). Livingstone described the poem 'Road Back' (1991, 60, extract below) as an expression of 'what really makes me tick' (Robbins 1992, 53).

Last night, creation did not look  
too bad, viewed through the lens  
of an empty glass. Today, the sea  
– your old ally against psychic apathy,  
who saves your soul from atrophy –  
was up to her ancient tricks and teased,  
“Child of my loins, conceived and born  
in solitude, here’s comfort for your grave substance.”

The subsequent development of this ecocritical perspective on human nature entanglement is apparent in the work of all the writers included in the exhibition, and is central to its ‘humanity-in-nature’ culture-landscape dialectical perspective. Dana Snyman (2008, 226), for instance, echoing Krog above, writes, ‘Without the hills and the valleys, the mountains and the marshes, the rivers and the deserts, the trees and the flowers of this continent, I am not I.’

The political context of post-apartheid decolonisation of the museum, which must naturally be integral to an eco-decolonial museology, is apparent in Athol Williams’ poem ‘Water Restrictions’ (2016). This relates legislated water restrictions in response to drought to the ‘water restrictions’ experienced by those living in poverty and without access to water: ‘Seems the dams have been low / for us, forever’. Vonani Bila, in the following extract from his poem ‘Burgersfort Landfill’ (2013), expresses the deeper neoliberal structures that are generative of this political context and which are a critical focus of the emergent eco-decolonial perspective:

Among the grim faced shack dwellers  
With their famished children ...  
The dark human vultures shove and shuffle  
Fighting over dirt ...  
But on election day -  
The vultures are fed with pap and beef stew  
Dressed in a clean T-shirt with the leader’s face.  
And when darkness falls  
The vultures jadedly retire to the dump  
A celestial graveyard of hopes - their home

In an echo of Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring*, Megan Davies' poem 'Crop Spraying' (1996) emphasizes the mindless tragedy that neoliberal commodification has made of food production:

Across and across  
In a cloud of powdered mist  
Insentient flies the clamorous fuming bird.  
Downtrodden, inarticulate  
Our thousands die  
That you may have  
A leaf of wilted lettuce on your plate

The social-ecological relationality of the 'Humanature' exhibition thus initially emerges from the exhibition's curators mobilising their social-ecological commitment through the ecocritical perspectives made available by Amazwi's nature as a museum of literature. The constellational perspective developed above allows the curation of 'Humanature' to be seen as curation within the social-ecologically conscious sub-politics of workers. Decolonisation was related to ecological perspectives in a move away from the more usual, anthropocentric social focus of the museum's practice, while still answering the demands of inclusivity and representivity and also extending these to the more-than-human personalities that are present in much of the writing.

### ***Curation part 2: Co-development***

A process of co-development was a significant element of the 'Humanature' project, a more considered iteration of the call for photographs that was part of 'This Is What I'm Made Of'. The South African youth was invited to contribute to the exhibition. The invitation was distributed nationally in three languages (English, isiXhosa and Afrikaans) through social media, the museum network, and direct contact with schools. To place advertisements in national media was prohibited by cost.

A partnership was developed between Amazwi and the Wildlife and Environment Society of South Africa (WESSA) and the international project 'Young Reporters for the Environment' (YRE) which WESSA coordinates in South Africa. The WESSA website describes this as 'a youth-led environmental journalism initiative that aims to enable our youth to take a stand for their local social and environmental issues through the media of writing, photography or video'. A section of the exhibition was dedicated to showcasing the work of learners involved in the YRE project.

Approximately 50% of the exhibition's content derived from submissions of situated narratives of social-ecological experience. Some examples are included below as Images 3 to 7 and their captions. The focus ranged widely across relations between poverty, pollution, health and environment, and YRE learners related their contributions to the increasing social-ecological concern around food safety (see, for instance, Orlando 2018).

The contributions universally expressed concern around social-ecological threats that young people witnessed in their daily lives. The majority of the writing was documentary and descriptive in style rather than creative (the invitation asked for a short written piece and did not specify genre). The emphasis on human-nature entanglement surfaced in these situated and critical narratives of lived experience is significant in relation to the expansion of museum practice towards an eco-decolonial mode. These narratives constitute relational social-ecological perspectives and their presence in the 'Humanature' exhibition is a moment of expansion towards an 'ecology of knowledges' that counters dualism and disrupts the underlying ontology.

The curators' assumption of the agency to disrupt the dualism that would ordinarily preclude social-ecological perspectives was an action that offered agency to members of the youth. 'Humanature' was a forum in which to express their social-ecological anxieties. This in turn meant that the museum was better able to offer social-ecological agency to visitors to the museum. This agentic movement contributed to an expansion of the museum's practice.

This is thus an example of curation focused on people as complex social-ecological entities, who are provided with agency to narrate their social-ecological perspectives on the real. The preservation of a person's voice and perspective meant that the curatorial process was not an act of interpretation, as is more usual in museum practice. This also demonstrates the importance to the eco-decolonial constellation of the extensive body of decolonial literature on engaging with and preserving original voice (see, for instance, Onciul 2015).

### ***Public programmes***

During the course of the exhibition's run education programmes were held both in the museum and at outside locations. Depending on the arrangements that were made in cooperation with teachers, some learners came to the museum for an introduction to the exhibition and then created artworks in response, while others were taken on field trips to a wind farm where they had a lesson on wind power and after which they created sculptures of the turbines. The artistic products then became part of the exhibition.

During the 2019 National Arts Festival, which is held annually in Makhanda, the Well Worn Theatre Company were invited to collaborate with the museum in generating a performance in the

'Humanature' exhibition space. Well Worn created and presented 'Burning Rebellion'. This is an ecocritical performance poem that was developed in response to the 'Humanature' exhibition. An iteration of the poem's text was mounted in the exhibition space for the remainder of the exhibition's run, and a video of the performance was looped on a screen in the exhibition space.

In association with the 'Humanature' project, Amazwi took on the organisation of an annual Literature and Ecology Colloquium that was previously hosted by Rhodes University and organized by Professor Dan Wylie, a prominent figure in ecocriticism. The 2019 Colloquium focused on the theme 'Water' and attracted a range of speakers from the humanities and sciences. The 2020 event, planned to be developed as a Literature, Heritage, Ecology Conference, was delayed by the Covid-19 pandemic and at time of writing is scheduled for March 2021 as a virtual event. The theme is interdisciplinary perspectives on plants and soil, which have significant presence in all three of the entangled fields of the conference, though perhaps none more so than ecology.

One of the goals of the conference is to foster cooperation and interaction between the humanities and the sciences. The humanities, through literature for instance, have capacities to communicate urgent themes of social-ecological crisis that emerge from the sciences. Price (2016, 20; also see Price 2019) outlines how climate denialists exploit the inability of the scientific method to prove that complex, entangled social-ecological and biophysical processes, such as anthropogenic climate change, are responsible for observed changes in natural systems. The formal scientific method cannot relate evidence at the level of the empirical to the real occurrence of the phenomena of anthropogenic climate change. Social structures such as museums, as they transform towards more relational modes of practice such as the eco-decolonial, may foreground situated knowledge and evidence for social-ecological crises such as climate change, and thus potentially contribute towards motivating the political and cultural change that the scientific method cannot.

The 'Humanature' exhibition is the first instance in which everyday people and their personal stories and expressions rather than museum 'things' were the primary focus of one of Amazwi's exhibition projects. Collection objects were part of the exhibition, but not the sole or even the primary focus, an initial moment of emphasis on situated narratives that is significant to the absenting of the absence of relational perspectives and consequently to the expansion of normalized practice (Lotz-Sisitka 2016, 319). This disruption of dualism in practice is a first iteration of disruption of the implicit neoliberal ontology, and flowed from the curatorial team's personal social-ecological positionalities and their commitment to developing social-ecological relationality in the museum's practice. This signals the future potential for DCR as underlabourer for the practical transformation of transformative museological work.

### **Future work: Developing eco-decolonial museology through Change Laboratories**

DCR offers a way to understand what was happening in the exhibition projects, and also offers means to develop the nascent social-ecological relationality apparent in the projects. The retrospective DCR case study thus surfaces potentials for iterative development of the eco-decolonial mode through the ongoing development of deeper constellational connections in theory and practice.

The potential that is emergent from DCR for museums to learn to work in new ways, to expand their practice and their emancipatory potentials, can be further developed using the Cultural Historical Activity Theory (CHAT) methodology of Change Laboratories. With its depth ontological and historical perspective, 'Dialectical critical realism effectively underlabours CHAT' (Mukute 2016, 191; also see Nunez 2014, 44-47) and is thus a foundation for the practical, transformative framework of the Change Laboratory (CL) while the CL is a means for 4D practical developments. The CL is a mechanism used to design new practice (Engeström and Sannino 2010, 10), such as the eco-decolonial mode of museology and 'facilitates both intensive, deep transformations and continuous incremental improvement' (Engeström et al. 1996, 10). CL interventions generate expansive learning cycles and learning actions (Engeström and Sannino 2010, 12) in a reflexive framework that engages with contradictions and absences (Baloi 2016, 215), which the DCR perspective makes visible. Museums may use CLs to absent the absences revealed by the dialectical approach, and to carefully learn to work in an eco-decolonial mode, to shape iterations of the eco-decolonial and to learn to implement it to the benefit of both museums and communities.

The CL has 'explicit emancipatory ... objectives, with the project participants [engaged in] a dialogical process of mutual learning' (Baloi 2016, 215). Marginalized people are those to whom museums have the least relevance, because of museums' colonial legacy and because of the contemporary neoliberal museological ontology that perpetuates the epistemological and structural divisions of the colonial era. As the museum learns to work in the new way using the CL approach, this necessarily involves the museum working with relevant communities in the CL. The CL is thus potentially a means to foster relevance and social-ecological sustainability.

Historically marginalized peoples' experience of social-ecological existence, furthermore, is often framed in knowledge systems that are similarly marginalized or at risk of appropriation into neoliberal epistemologies (De Sousa Santos 2018; Murdock 2020, 38; Jeffery 2021, 56-57). These systems are commonly referred to as indigenous knowledge although it has been argued that local knowledge (Hirst 2002, 3) or intergenerational knowledge (O'Donoghue, Sandoval-Rivera and Payyappallimana 2019, 1) are more appropriate terms. The blended DCR and CL approach potentially brings marginalized knowledge out of its subaltern position through a 'process of

collective factualizing leading to democratic decisions' (Price 2016, 22). Absences may be absented in a process that preserves or reasserts the integrity of marginalized knowledge and that is also generative of the cooperative development of new knowledge in a 'mutual learning process' between intergenerational and western perspectives (Sabai 2016, 186; also see O'Donoghue, Sandoval-Rivera and Payyappallimana 2019, 1).

The Change Laboratory is thus potentially a powerful 4D means to bring the practical potentials of DCR philosophical perspectives into active, iterative development and use in museology. This is a way to move forward into future work that builds on the social-ecological relationality surfaced in the retrospective DCR case study. CL work may develop the eco-decolonial expansion of practice through the generation of constellations of theoretical perspectives and practical means for their implementation. DCR is thus the relational philosophical basis that will underlabour a practical and democratic process of expansion of practice, and thus of agency to counter the restrictions of emancipatory neoliberalism.

## **Conclusion**

South African and international museums share a struggle to reimagine themselves, 'to redefine the contemporary museum as an active agent in shaping the world around us and making it a better place for all' (Janes and Sandell 2019b, xxviii). The DCR concept of constellationality offers a philosophical basis from which to develop theoretical positionalities for the real transformation of museum practice through active agency.

The critical movement in the analysis is from philosophy to theory to practice. DCR underlabours a constellational perspective that offers a means to surface and develop interdisciplinary transformational pathways that are more detailed and nuanced than the dominant museological formulation of decolonization. In South Africa, for instance, decolonization remains poorly understood in terms of what it means in practice (Jeffery 2021, 50; and see, for instance, Motsamayi 2020) and continues to absent relational social-ecological perspectives. The eco-decolonial mode of practice surfaced using DCR can answer these challenges at an ontological level.

Constellations of theoretical possibilities, such as the one developed here, encourage the emergence of alternative foundations for practice. Situated narratives of social-ecological experience, for instance, may disrupt the ontological paradox of emancipatory neoliberalism by offering real emancipation through agency. This generates potential for the disruption of the implicit neoliberal ontology and for greater coherence between the theoretical social-ecological responsibilities of museums and the actual practice of museum work.

The retrospective case study of the exhibition projects reveals these to be acts of expansion of practice towards a social-ecological position for museum work, with potential to counter the restrictions of the dualist practice frame. Workers' progressive perspectives realigned structure-agency relations as they worked in ways that disrupted the normalized practice of a purely social focus, and thus disrupted dualist historical trajectories. This is a valuable new iteration of transformative practice for Amazwi upon which the museum may reflect and build into future iterations, towards ever more enduring forms of eco-decolonial museology.

The utility of the theoretical constellation in developing the eco-decolonial perspective on museology demonstrates the utility of DCR as a philosophical underlabourer, as a means to conceive new ways of thinking and being in theory and in practice. DCR offers a philosophical position from which to see connections between diverse theoretical positionalities (ecocriticism, sub-politics and interstitial activism, for instance), and to generate a progressive dialectical and interdisciplinary practice frame for museology. This frame may be further developed in Change Laboratories, which can draw contributions from a wide range of disciplinary and personal perspectives to generate yet deeper transformative potentials and pathways towards the eco-decolonial mode. Together, dialectical critical realism and Change Laboratories offer potential for practical interventions to disrupt the persistent dualist restrictions on museology.

## References

- Baloi, Aristides. 2017. "Exploring transformative social learning and sustainability in community based irrigation scheme contexts in Mozambique." PhD Diss., Rhodes University.
- Beck, Ulrich. 1992. *Risk Society: Towards A New Modernity*. Translated by Mark Ritter. London: Sage.
- Bhaskar, Roy. 2008. *Dialectic: The Pulse of Freedom*. London: Verso.
- Bhaskar, Roy. 2010. "Contexts of interdisciplinarity: Interdisciplinarity and Climate Change." In *Interdisciplinarity and Climate Change: Transforming Knowledge and Practice for our Global Future*, edited by Roy Bhaskar, Cheryl Frank, Karl Georg Høyer, Petter Næss and Jenneth Parker, 1-24. London: Routledge.
- Bhaskar, Roy and Jenneth Parker. 2010. "Introduction." In *Interdisciplinarity and Climate Change: Transforming Knowledge and Practice for our Global Future*, edited by Roy Bhaskar, Cheryl Frank, Karl Georg Høyer, Petter Næss and Jenneth Parker, vii-xiii. London: Routledge.
- Bila, Vonani. 2013. "Burgersfort Landfill". <https://botsotso.org.za/2018/06/two-poems-by-vonani-bila-2/>

- Bosworth, Brendon. 2013. Literary Green. *Earthworks*, 15: 24-30.
- Cameron, Fiona. 2015. "Ecologizing Experimentations: A Method and Manifesto for Composing a Post-humanist Museum." In *Climate Change and Museum Futures*, edited by Fiona Cameron and Brett Neilson, 16-33. London: Routledge.
- Crouch, David. 2010. "Flirting with Space: Thinking Landscape Relationally." *Cultural Geographies* 17(1): 5-18. doi.org/10.1177/1474474009349996
- Davies, Megan. 1996. "Crop Spraying." *Something Quarterly*, 3(1): 15.
- De Sousa Santos, B., Arriscado, J.N. and Meneses, M.P. 2008. "Introduction: Opening up the Canon of Knowledge and Recognition of Difference." In *Another Knowledge is Possible: Beyond Northern Epistemologies*, edited by Boaventura de Sousa Santos, xix-lxii. London: Verso.
- De Sousa Santos, Boaventura. 2018. *The End of the Cognitive Empire: The Coming of Age of Epistemologies of the South*. London: Duke University Press.
- Engeström, Yrjö. 1987. *Learning by Expanding: An Activity Theoretical Approach to Developmental Research*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Engeström, Yrjö, Jaakko Virkkunen, Merja Helle, John Pihlaja & Reetta Poikela. 1996. "The Change Laboratory as a Tool for Transforming Work." *Lifelong Learning in Europe*, 1(2), 10-17.
- Engeström, Yrjö and Annalisa Sannino. 2010. "Studies of Expansive Learning: Foundations, Findings and Future Challenges." *Educational Research Review* 5 (1): 1-24. doi:10.1016/j.edurev.2009.12.002.
- Garlandini, Alberto. 2017. "ICOM Milan 2016: The new responsibilities of museums towards landscapes." *Museum international*, 69 (1-2): 164-175. https://doi.org/10.1111/muse.12160
- Green, Lawrence W. and Shawna L. Mercer. 2001. "Participatory Research: Can Public Health Researchers and Agencies Reconcile the Push From Funding Agencies and the Pull From Communities?" *American Journal of Public Health* 91(12): 1-4. DOI: 10.2105/AJPH.91.12.1926.
- Guivant, Julia Silvia. 2016. "Ulrich Beck's Legacy." *Ambiente y Sociedad* 29(1): 227-237.
- Haraway, Donna. 2004. *The Haraway Reader*. London: Routledge.
- Hartwig, Mervyn. 2007. *Dictionary of Critical Realism*. London: Routledge.

Hartwig, Mervyn. 2008. "Introduction." In *Dialectic: The Pulse of Freedom* by Roy Bhaskar, xiii-xxxii. London: Verso.

Heise, Ursula K. 2006. "The Hitchhiker's Guide to Ecocriticism." *Publications of the Modern Language Association*, 121(2): 503-516.

Hirst, Manton. 2002. "Critically Engaging Indigenous Knowledge Systems: Throwing the Baby out with the Bathwater." *South African Museums Association Bulletin*, 28(1), 3-7.

Hollows, Victoria. 2019. "The Activist Role of Museum Staff." In *Museum Activism*, edited by Robert R. Janes and Richard Sandell, 80-90. London: Routledge.

Huggan, Graham and Helen Tiffin. 2015. *Postcolonial Ecocriticism: Literature, Animals, Environment*. London: Routledge.

International Council of Museums-South Africa and International Committee on Monuments and Sites-South Africa. 2016. "Declaration on Museums and Cultural Landscapes." International Council of Museums. Accessed 6 November 2020.

[http://network.icom.museum/fileadmin/user\\_upload/minisites/icom-south-africa/pdf/Declaration\\_on\\_Museums\\_and\\_Cultural\\_Landscapes\\_FINAL\\_2.0.pdf](http://network.icom.museum/fileadmin/user_upload/minisites/icom-south-africa/pdf/Declaration_on_Museums_and_Cultural_Landscapes_FINAL_2.0.pdf)

Janes, Robert R. and Richard Sandell. 2019a. "Posterity has Arrived: The Necessary Emergence of Museum Activism". In *Museum Activism*, edited by Robert R. Janes and Richard Sandell, 1-22. London: Routledge.

Janes, Robert R. and Richard Sandell. 2019b. "Preface". In *Museum Activism*, edited by Robert R. Janes and Richard Sandell, xxvii-xxviii. London: Routledge.

Jeffery, Tom. 2017. "Future-Proofing South Africa's Cultural Museums: Climate Change, Heritage Discourse and Cultural Landscapes." *South African Museums Association Bulletin* 39: 19-28. <https://doi.org/10.10520/EJC-c85c01dee>

Jeffery, Tom. 2021. "Critical Realist Philosophy and the Possibility of an Eco-decolonial Museology." *Museum and Society* (19)1: 48-70.

Jeffery, Tom. Forthcoming. "Towards an Eco-decolonial Museology: A Critical Realist Perspective on the Crises of South African Museums." *South African Journal of Environmental Education*.

Krog, Antjie. 1998. *Country of My Skull*. Cape Town: Penguin Random House.

Lemmer, Erika. 2007. "Introduction: Special Issue Ecocriticism Part 2." *Journal of Literary Studies* 23(4): 337-340. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/02564710701786418>.

Livingstone, Douglas. 1991 'Road Back'. In *A Littoral Zone*. Cape Town: Carrefour. 60–61

Longair, Sarah. 2015. "Cultures of Curating: The Limits of Authority." *Museum History Journal* 8(1): 1-7. DOI: 10.1179/1936981614Z.00000000043

Lotz-Sisitka, Heila, Arjen E.J., Wals, David Kronlid and Dylan McGarry. 2015. "Transformative, transgressive social learning: Rethinking higher education pedagogy in times of systemic global dysfunction." *Current Opinion in Environmental Sustainability* 16: 73-80. [doi.org/10.1016/j.cosust.2015.07.018](http://doi.org/10.1016/j.cosust.2015.07.018).

Lotz-Sisitka, Heila. 2016. "Absenting Absence: Expanding Zones of Proximal Development in Environmental Learning Processes." In *Critical Realism, Environmental Learning and Social Change*, edited by Leigh Price and Heila Lotz-Sisitka, 318-339. London: Routledge.

Luengo, Monica. 2015. Foreword. In *Conserving Cultural Landscapes: Challenges and New Directions*, edited by Ken Taylor, Archer St Clair and Nora Mitchell, xi-xviii. London: Routledge.

Maclennan, Don. 2006. "Under Compassberg." In *Selected Poems* by Don Maclennan, 145. Plumstead, Cape Town: Snailpress.

Mahony, Emma. 2017. "Opening Spaces of Resistance in the Corporatized Cultural Institution: Liberate Tate and the Art Not Oil Coalition." *Museum and Society* 15(2): 126-141.

Makinana, Nompumezo. 2020. "Upstart." *Rhodes Community Engagement: Latest News*. Accessed 5 October 2020. <https://www.ru.ac.za/communityengagement/latestnews/upstart.html>.

Martin, Julia. 2013. "Witness to the Makeshift Shore: Ecological Practice in A Littoral Zone." *Alternation*, 6: 144-156.

Milstein, Tema. 2011. "Nature Identification: The Power of Pointing and Naming." *Environmental Communication* 5(1): 3-24. DOI: 10.1080/17524032.2010.535836.

Moore, Jason W. 2017. "The Capitalocene, Part I: On the Nature and Origins of our Ecological Crisis." *The Journal of Peasant Studies* 44 (3): 594-630. DOI:10.1080/03066150.2016.1235036.

Morgan, Jennie and Sharon Macdonald. 2020. "De-Growing Museum Collections for New Heritage Futures." *International Journal of Heritage Studies* 26(1): 56-70.

DOI:10.1080/13527258.2018.1530289.

Motsamayi, Methodi. 2020. "Ethnological Collections in Selected South African Museums: Past Issues and Current Challenges." *Museum & Society*, 18(4), 441-458.

Mukute, Mutizwa. 2016. "Dialectical Critical Realism and Cultural Historical Activity Theory (CHAT): Exploring and Expanding Learning Processes in Sustainable Agriculture Workplace Contexts." In *Critical Realism, Environmental Learning and Social-Ecological Change*, edited by Leigh Price and Heila Lotz-Sisitka, 190-211, London: Routledge.

Murdock, Esme G. 2020. "Troubling Ecological Citizenship: Expanding Our Minds and Hearts to See the More-Than-Human World as Our Relations." *Minding Nature* 13(2): 36-41.

Newell, Jennifer, Libby Robin and Kirsten Wehner. 2017. "Introduction." In *Curating the Future: Museums, Communities and Climate Change*, edited by Jennifer Newell, Libby Robin and Kirsten Wehner, 1-16. London: Routledge.

Nielsen, Jane K. 2015. "The Relevant Museum: Defining Relevance in Museological Practices." *Museum Management and Curatorship*, 30(5): 364-378, DOI:10.1080/09647775.2015.1043330

Nixon, Rob. 2011. *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press.

Norrie, Alan. 2010. *Dialectic and Difference: Dialectical Critical Realism and the Grounds of Justice*. London: Routledge.

Nunez, Iskra. 2014. *Critical Realist Activity Theory: An Engagement with Critical Realism and Cultural-Historical Activity Theory*. London: Routledge.

O'Donoghue, Rob. 2016. "Working with Critical Realist Perspective and Tools at the Interface of Indigenous and Scientific Knowledge in a Science Curriculum Setting." In *Critical Realism, Environmental Learning and Social Change*, edited by Leigh Price and Heila Lotz-Sisitka, 159-177. London: Routledge.

O'Donoghue, Rob, Juan Carlos A. Sandoval-Rivera and Unnikrishnan Payyappallimana. 2019. "Landscape, Memory and Learning to Change in Changing Worlds: Contemplating Intergenerational

Learning and Traditional Knowledge Practices within Social-Ecological Landscapes of Change.”  
*Southern African Journal of Environmental Education* 35: 1-34.

Onciul, Bryony. 2015. *Museums, Heritage and Indigenous Voice: Decolonising Engagement*. London: Routledge.

Orlando, Giovanni. 2018. “Offsetting Risk: Organic Food, Pollution, and the Transgression of Spatial Boundaries.” *Culture, Agriculture, Food and Environment* 40(1): 45–54. DOI: 10.1111/cuag.12105

Pearce, Susan M. 2003. *Interpreting Objects and Collections*. London: Routledge.

Pesanayi, Tichaona. 2016. “Exploring contradictions and absences in mobilizing ‘learning as process’ for sustainable agricultural practices.” In *Critical Realism, Environmental Learning and Social Change*, edited by Leigh Price and Heila Lotz-Sisitka, 213-230. London: Routledge.

Phillips, Ruth B. 2019. “‘Making Fun’ of the Museum: Multi-disciplinarity, Holism, and the ‘Return of Curiosity’.” *Museum and Society* 17 (3): 316-341.

Plumwood, Valerie. 2002. “Decolonising Relationships with Nature.” *Philosophy Activism Nature* 2: 7-30.

Pop, Izabela Luiza, Anca Borza, Anuta Buiga, Diana Ighian & Rita Toader. 2019. “Achieving Cultural Sustainability in Museums: A Step Toward Sustainable Development.” *Sustainability*, 11(970), 1-22. doi:10.3390/su11040970

Price, Leigh. 2016. “Key Critical Realist Concepts for Environmental Educators.” In *Critical Realism, Environmental Learning and Social Change*, edited by Leigh Price and Heila Lotz-Sisitka, 18-39. London: Routledge.

Price, Leigh. 2019. “A Return to Common-Sense: Why Ecology Needs Transcendental Realism.” *Journal of Critical Realism*, 18(1), 31-44. DOI: 10.1080/14767430.2019.1580178

Reynolds, Susan Salter. 2007. “Discoveries: Review of The Book of Beginnings and Endings: Essays by Jenny Bouilly”. *Los Angeles Times*, 23 December. Accessed 26 October.

<https://www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-2007-dec-23-bk-discoveries23-story.html>

Robbins, David. 1992. “Bleak Stuff.” *Nu Focus* 3(1): 52–53.

Roe, Maggie and Ken Taylor, eds. 2014. *New Cultural Landscapes*. London: Routledge.

Rosenberg, Eureka. 2020. "Synthesis and Elaboration of Critical Realist Methodology for Green Skills Research." In *Green Skills Research in South Africa: Models, Cases and Methods*, edited by Eureka Rosenberg, Presha Ramsarup and Heila Lotz-Sisitka, 192-207. Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge.

Ross, Helen, Katherine Witt and Natalie A. Jones. 2018. "Stephen Kellert's Development and Contribution of Relational Values in Social-Ecological Systems." *Current Opinion in Environmental Sustainability* 35: 46–53.

Sabai, Daniel. 2016. "Indigenous Knowledge and Critical Realism on the Eastern Coast of Tanzania." In *Critical Realism, Environmental Learning and Social Change*, edited by Leigh Price and Heila Lotz-Sisitka, 178-189. London: Routledge.

Sandahl, Jette. 2018. "International Council of Museums Standing Committee for Museum Definition, Prospects and Potentials: Report and Recommendations." International Council of Museums, 19 June. Accessed 14 October 2019. <https://icom.museum/en/activities/standards-guidelines/museum-definition/>

Sandahl, Jette. 2019. "Definitions are Dynamic, not Static". *Museums Journal*, 5 December. Accessed 13 December 2019. [https://www.museumsassociation.org/museums-journal/opinion/2019/12/01122019-definitions-are-dynamic-not-static/?utm\\_campaign=1644717\\_12122019&utm\\_medium=email&utm\\_source=Museums%20Association&dm\\_i=2VBX%2CZ92L%2C7AK7Z8%2C3PDZT%2C1](https://www.museumsassociation.org/museums-journal/opinion/2019/12/01122019-definitions-are-dynamic-not-static/?utm_campaign=1644717_12122019&utm_medium=email&utm_source=Museums%20Association&dm_i=2VBX%2CZ92L%2C7AK7Z8%2C3PDZT%2C1)

Sannino, Annalisa, Yrjö Engeström and Monica Lemos. 2016. "Formative Interventions for Expansive Learning and Transformative Agency." *Journal of the Learning Sciences* 25(4): 599-633. DOI: 10.1080/10508406.2016.1204547

Schudel, Ingrid Joan. 2017. "Modelling Dialectical Processes in Environmental Learning: An Elaboration of Roy Bhaskar's Onto-axiological Chain." *Journal of Critical Realism* 16 (2): 163-183. DOI:10.1080/14767430.2017.1288061.

Snyman, Dana. 2008. *On the Back Roads: Encounters with People and Places*. Cape Town: Tafelberg.

Thomas, Nicholas. 2010. "The Museum as Method." *Museum Anthropology* 33(1): 6-10. DOI: 10.1111/j.1548-1379.2010.01070.x.

Togo, Muchaiteyi. 2016. "Underlabouring Systems Thinking with Critical Realism in Understanding Rhodes University's Response to the Sustainability Imperative." In *Critical Realism, Environmental*

*Learning and Social-Ecological Change*, edited by Leigh Price and Heila Lotz-Sisitka , 85-97. London: Routledge.

United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. 1972. *Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage*. <https://whc.unesco.org/en/conventiontext/>

United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. 2017. *Operational Guidelines for the Implementation of the World Heritage Convention*. <https://whc.unesco.org/en/guidelines/>

Vilela, Rodolfo Andrade de Gouveia. 2014. "The Change Laboratory as a Tool for Collaborative Transforming Work Activities: An Interview with Jaakko Virkkunen." *Saúde e Sociedade* 23(1): 182-189. DOI 10.1590/S0104-12902014000100027

Wehner, Kirsten. 2017. "Towards an Ecological Museology: Responding to the Animal-Objects of the Australian Institute of Anatomy Collection." In *Curating the Future: Museums, Communities and Climate Change*, edited by Jennifer Newell, Libby Robin and Kirsten Wehner, 85-100. London: Routledge.

Williams, Athol. 2016. "Water Restrictions." <https://www.atholwilliams.com/poetry>

Wray, Lynn. 2019. "Taking a Position: Challenging the Anti-Authorial Turn in Art Curating." In *Museum Activism*, edited by Robert R. Janes and Richard Sandell, 315-325. London: Routledge.

Wylie, Dan. 2008a. "Preface." In *Toxic Belonging? Identity and Ecology in Southern Africa*, edited by Dan Wylie, vii-xi. Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing.

Wylie, Dan. 2008b. "Introduction." In *Toxic Belonging? Identity and Ecology in Southern Africa*, edited by Dan Wylie, 1-20. Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing.

Research article

## DECOLONIAL MUSEUMS IN A TIME OF SOCIAL-ECOLOGICAL CRISIS: CULTURAL LANDSCAPE AND THE REVITALISATION OF MUSEOLOGICAL THEORY

TOM JEFFERY

Amazwi South African Museum of Literature, Eastern Cape

E-mail: t.jeffery@amazwi.museum

(Received June 2019; Accepted October 2019)

### ABSTRACT

To ensure its contemporary relevance, the need for the redefinition of the Museum is widely acknowledged, and drives the present redefinition process called for by the International Council of Museums. This paper explores potential contributions from the conceptualisation of cultural landscape in the 2016 ICOM-SA/ICOMOS-SA 'Declaration on Cultural Landscape', for the context of a decolonial South African museology in a time of social-ecological crisis. The analysis is influenced by Fiona Cameron's conception of a post-humanist museum practice (2015) that potentially disrupts traditional, dualist museological ontologies. The discussion looks towards potential contributions to the relevance and social sustainability of South African museums, to the understanding of museums' relationships with their physical surroundings, and to museums' agentive capacity in interactions with communities. The conception of Cultural Landscape may contribute fresh perspectives to museums' social, ecological and political sustainability, and help integrate these concerns into a relational framework of ideas and role players that may underpin an emergent museum practice suited to the entangled decolonial and ecological contexts. This may enable Cultural Landscape to contribute towards a revitalisation of museological theory and practice for the South African context.

**Key words:** Definition of museums; cultural landscape; sustainability; decolonial; ecological.

### INTRODUCTION

The need for a redefinition of the Museum to ensure its contemporary relevance is widely acknowledged, to the extent that the International Council of Museums (ICOM) is redeveloping its definition in order to reflect new challenges and responsibilities for museums, and varied perspectives on what a museum is or may be (Museum Definition 2019). This process was intended to be completed at the 2019 ICOM General Conference, but the vote was postponed amid disagreement reported as "... part of a wider battle between the traditionalist and progressive wings of ICOM" (Adams 2019:1).

The world is in a state of social-ecological crisis, in that we face a range of critical ecological issues with profound impacts on society. These include anthropogenic climate change, food and water scarcities, deforestation, human overpopulation, loss of biodiversity, and pollution of the air, land and water. The cultural roots and social effects of these challenges are the location at which we find the responsibility for action on the part of cultural museums. While international eco-museological researchers speak of the need to 'ecologise' museum work (Cameron 2015; Wehner 2017), to consider the need for a 'social-ecological' practice may better enable

potential to explore the dynamics of coupled social and ecological processes (Anderies, Janssen & Ostrom 2004:2), and emphasise that these are "... linked systems of humans and nature" (Walker, Holling, Carpenter & Kinzig 2004:1). This article aims to demonstrate some relevance and value to decolonial museum practice of the social dynamics of ecological crisis, and consequently surface fresh potentials for South African museological theory.

This context of crisis has profound implications for the social responsibilities that are at the core of contemporary museum praxis (Ballantyne & Uzzel 2011:87; Fleming 2005:1, 2006:1; Freudenheim 2014:288; Tichmann 2010; Weil 1999). Ultimately, if they are to be seen as valuable institutions, museums must be actors with agency in the lives of their constituents (Buoro & Porto 2017:2), and increasingly this means that museums must take cognisance of the social and cultural effects of ecological factors. Despite the entanglement of the social with the ecological, ecological perspectives are largely absent from South African cultural museums' practice (Jeffery 2017:11,22), an absence which threatens museums' social sustainability as it means that they are unable to address the emerging challenges that communities face as environmental problems worsen.

This adds layers of complexity to the decolonisation of museums. The social responsibility of decolonial museum work can be understood broadly as "... the need to Africanise museums in post-apartheid South Africa" (Dondolo 2005:68), in the context of indigenous peoples' demands for respect of their lifestyles (Alonso 249:2007). Museum narratives must be reframed to address the traumas of the colonisation experience, and to challenge stereotypical representation in exhibitions. The agenda is one of inclusivity, representivity and relevance (Corsane 2004:6), engaging previously neglected communities, and asks, "How might the depredations of the colonial and apartheid eras be ameliorated?" (Meskell 2012:6).

Natural history and science museums often raise environmental issues in their public programmes. However, in the cultural museological context, decolonial representation is not linked to the ecological, despite the social and environmental impacts of the unsustainable neoliberal growth paradigms associated with neo-colonial frameworks. This is illustrated by the discussions of Helland & Lindgren (2016:433) on the postcolonial reproduction of colonial hegemonies of growth. In addition, Nixon (2011:105) unpacks "... the ongoing romance between unanswerable corporations and unspeakable regimes..." in the neo-colonial context and Kekana (2018) discusses Mpumalanga's world-record levels of carcinogenic nitrogen dioxide pollution, which results from 'growth' reliant on coal-fired power plants.

To draw such linkages could be achieved through a revitalisation of the theoretical foundation for South African museological practice. A number of researchers (Levitz & Mathers 2000:20; Martin 2000:13; Vollgraaff 2018:373, 380) have noted a pressing, and long-standing, need for this. It will be argued here that perspectives from Cultural Landscape studies may contribute to such a revitalisation within the complex and entangled decolonial and ecological contexts, and enable the emergence of an ecological mode of decolonial museum practice with increased capacity for social relevance and responsibility. This paper is an initial exploration of potential contributions to such a museology that may emerge from the perspectives on Cultural Landscape that are expressed in the 2016 joint ICOM-South Africa (ICOM-SA) / International Council on Monuments and Sites-South Africa (ICOMOS-SA) 'Declaration on Museums and Cultural Landscapes' (henceforth 'the Declaration').

Fiona Cameron (2015) outlines the need for a post-humanist approach to museology. Cameron is concerned with rethinking the modernist form of the museum and the dualist, humanist philosophy that underpins it as:

*A series of conceptual and practical divides ... used by modern western society to establish its own vision of the world; a standard to judge and subjugate others, both human and nonhuman (Cameron 2015:17).*

This modernist philosophy, emergent from the industrialised and urbanised contexts of 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century Europe and America and their colonial structures, shapes and perpetuates the dualist framework of museum praxis, most readily visible in the traditional divisions between cultural and natural history museums, but also pervading practice within each sphere. It entrenches the western values and practices that are challenged and problematised in the decolonial context, and that emerge from the outdated modernist classificatory schema and its processes of othering of 'lesser' groups of humans, and all non-humans (Cameron 2015:18). The 'post-humanist' principle references a need to disrupt the prejudiced colonial conception of who constituted humanity, as well as the need to critique the instrumental treatment of the non-human and therefore supposedly inferior 'natural' world. It is here, that the decolonial and the ecological intersect, and can potentially reinforce one another; and that a redefinition of the museum takes on layers of significance in the South African context.

A particular challenge is the ultimate need for policy level interventions that can enable such philosophical changes in museum management strategies and praxis. This requires engagement with policy makers, which museums in South Africa, as represented by the South African Museums Association (SAMA), do not presently have the capacity or influence to conduct (Vollgraaff 2015:52, 2018:380). The Declaration recognises the need for:

*The establishment of a forum where government, professional associations and private heritage and museum organisations can cooperate to ensure an integrated [heritage conservation] approach. ICOM-SA and ICOMOS-SA undertake to consult with other heritage and museum stakeholders regarding appropriate models for, and participation in, such a forum (ICOM: South Africa 2016:2).*

There is potential in this ongoing consultative process for an expanded, ecological decolonial museum practice framework, though this process may be lengthy. There is, however, initial potential for such a framework to emerge from the Declaration's conception of Cultural Landscape (CL). It may enable integration of the social, ecological and political elements of museums' sustainability into a fresh understanding of what the Museum might be. Cultural Landscape provides a powerful conceptual framework from which to reimagine the Museum for a context of ecological crisis, which must go hand in hand with the decolonial expansion of South African museological work if museums are to fulfil their social responsibilities. Cultural Landscape constitutes an ecologically sensitised meeting point of culture, heritage and environment (Jeffery 2017:24) and potentially disrupts the traditional culture-nature dualism of modernist museums to incorporate people, landscape, and ecology. It may also integrate the politics of colonisation, ownership, resources and neocolonial

(in)equality, and offers potentials for the representation and expression of indigenous knowledges. These are all thematic crucial to both the ecological and the decolonial contexts, and which unify in the field of Cultural Landscape.

The analysis below first reviews the current ICOM definition of the Museum, and then the conception of Cultural Landscape in the Declaration. The discussion surfaces potentials for Cultural Landscape perspectives to draw links between the decolonial and the ecological, and for these links to contribute towards the revitalisation of the theoretical framework for South African cultural museum practice.

#### THE ICOM DEFINITION OF THE MUSEUM

This first part of the literature review explores issues in the present ICOM definition of the Museum, through critical perspectives and through research collated by ICOM's Standing Committee for Museum Definition, Prospects and Potentials (Sandahl 2018). The present ICOM definition is as follows:

*A museum is a non-profit, permanent institution in the service of society and its development, open to the public, which acquires, conserves, researches, communicates and exhibits the tangible and intangible heritage of humanity and its environment for the purposes of education, study and enjoyment (ICOM Statutes 2007).*

Generally, the present ICOM definition is not geared towards the societal trends and issues of the 21<sup>st</sup> century (Sandahl 2018:5). It acknowledges neither the urgency of present ecological challenges, nor the imperative for sustainable solutions (Sandahl 2018:2); and does not link this crisis to the global inequalities perpetuated by neoliberal capitalism (Sandahl 2018:2,11), and which originate in modernist humanism's instrumental treatment of communities of people and of non-humans (Plumwood 2002:10). It is rooted in the (European) scientific, social and political epistemologies and value structures of the 18<sup>th</sup>, 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, notably the binary hierarchies of Western rationalism (Cameron 2015:17-18; Sandahl 2018:8). As such, it does not address the problems that arise from the Cartesian culture-nature dualism that remains characteristic of international museum work (Cameron 2015:18-22; Sandahl 2018:8). The phrasing, 'humanity and its environment,' and 'society and its development,' in the present definition perpetuate the isolation of humanity from nature (Sandahl 2018:9). 'Cultural history collections are divorced from responsibilities relative to nature,' (Cameron 2015:18-19; Sandahl 2018:9) despite the responsibility of human culture for ecological crisis and its associated social impacts (Greenberg, Knight & Westersund 2011:66; Midgley & Barnard 2009:1; Oreskes 2004).

The uncritical use of the term 'non-profit' evades the complex economic and political contexts within which museums are embedded (Sandahl 2018:7). Marschall (2005:103-104) elaborates on museums' economic and political contexts, and the following authors on the commodification of heritage praxis: Marschall (2005:103); Rassool (2000:6-8,10); Soudien (2008:215); Witz, Rassool & Minkley (2001:280). The definition furthermore neither enables critique of the ambiguous term 'development' (Connelly 2007; Sandahl 2018:6), nor interrogation of the inequalities that arise within the neoliberal growth context and the ways in which these threaten national cohesion and stability (Nixon 2011:70).

Consequently, it cannot enable museums to support local, regional, national and international communities' demands for ethical, social or political accountability from governments, corporations and other social structures, including museums themselves. As such, the present definition cannot capacitate a museological theory or practice capable of critique of the neocolonial influences that underpin inequality, and which unevenly distribute ecological risk into the global South and into poor communities within postcolonial societies (Nixon 2011:35). This element of the definition of the Museum may be considered through the lens of South African museology's focus on the rehabilitation of historical representation (Corsane 2004:6; Jeffery 2017:24; Meskell 2012:6).

This often seems to preclude museological engagement with present and future challenges faced by communities, as suggested by the protests directed at numerous post-apartheid sites of memorialisation (Abungu 2004:3; Bakker & Müller 2010:50; Paulse 2019; Rankin 2013:79,90; Roux 2018:408-409; Shoba 2005:26; Skiti 2015; Spies 2015; Zuma 2018:40). This is a focus which thus precludes from museum practice a critique of contemporary contexts of neocolonial inequality from which, historical colonial situationality notwithstanding, emerge many of the social and environmental challenges communities presently face (see for instance Boast 2011:56 on "...the anatomy of the museum that seems to be persistently neocolonial"). The decolonial museum thus cannot critique the neocolonial framework that contributes towards social inequality and environmental degradation.

The current definition does not connect culture, and cultural museums' social responsibilities, to the ecological crisis, or to the potentials of sustainable activities to enhance the freedom and flourishing of communities (Bhaskar 2008:xxviii; Ehrenfeld & Hoffman 2013), which must surely be a goal of decolonisation. By preventing museums from disrupting entrenched dualist (colonial) epistemologies and values of science, society and politics, which continue to isolate humanity from nature and perpetuate inequality, museums are prevented from addressing the community impacts of

ecological crisis. The current definition absents both colonial legacies and the political, intellectual and emotional processes of decolonisation (Sandahl 2018:10), and as such, facilitates neither ecological nor decolonial museum praxis; nor enables potentials for their integration, which is crucial to the South African context.

It does not recognise the diversity of worldviews within museums, and among museums' communities (Sandahl 2018:2; see Bakker & Müller 2010:54 on community identity and diversity in the heritage context). It tends to universalize, and to hide difference (Sandahl 2018:5). It evades the conflicted and contested contexts within which museums operate, amid diverse and contradictory developmental trends, and expresses a naively singular idea of 'society' (Sandahl 2018:6) that offers scant support for museums in understanding or defining their ethical, social or political accountability towards the communities which they serve (Sandahl 2018:6-7). This is arguably particularly the case in a context such as South Africa in which the entanglement of the decolonial with the ecological is under-represented within the theoretical framework that drives museums' activities (Jeffery 2017:11,22).

The present definition thus provides no ethical or intellectual guidance or support for museums as they try to address the multivalent crises of the contemporary world (Sandahl 2018:9). "Much work is yet to be done to make museum theory and practice more relevant for the present-day" (Cameron 2015:23), and the present ICOM definition of the museum does little to contribute. Cultural Landscape perspectives, however, offer potential for a reinvigorated theory and practice and renewed relevance for museums.

#### POTENTIALS FOR FRESH PERSPECTIVES ON THE MUSEUM

From the above analysis of the Museum Definition, Prospects and Potentials report (Sandahl 2018), the present ICOM definition of the Museum does not facilitate museums' engagement with the realities of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The report treats Cultural Landscapes as peripheral to museums, mentioning it only once, and as an aside (Sandahl 2018:7). The ICOM-SA and ICOMOS-SA Declaration on Cultural Landscape (ICOM 2016), however, demonstrates potentials to enable museums to address at least some of the issues identified above.

The concept of Cultural Landscapes is prevalent in international heritage work (Taylor & Lennon 2011:539). In South African museology, however, it is a relatively new and emergent perspective. The Declaration can be regarded as a foundational document in this regard. It is progressive, developed through a participatory process that collated input from 155 stakeholders. It is thus rooted in the challenges and opportunities that face South African society, the heritage and museum sector in particular (ICOM: South Africa 2016:1),

but acknowledges the influences of the international sphere, such as the contexts described by Cameron (2015). It is Cultural Landscape's combination of social rootedness with environmental sensibilities that opens potentials for an innovative mode of ecological, decolonial museological theory and practice.

The current ICOM definition of the Museum neither provides museums with a basis for critique of narrow ideas of society, such as those of the modernist conception, nor enables them to connect to the great diversity of world views expressed within conflicted and contested contexts, such as that of South African heritage (Baines 2004; MacDonald 2016:6; Noble 2008). The Declaration, however, sees diverse cultural traditions as constantly interacting, adapting and evolving within the Cultural Landscape. It further recognises the interpenetration and entanglement of South Africans' diverse backgrounds, both colonial and indigenous, and treats these as largely inseparable, which is significant to the decolonial project as it implies that the experiences of an individual cannot be isolated to a particular cultural perspective.

The Declaration thus offers a framework for intercultural dialogues and social cohesion. It envisions a heritage conservation methodology that can accommodate the complex layering of meaning that is attached to the South African Cultural Landscape (ICOM: South Africa 2016:1), and that can enable socially cohesive practices of decolonisation that allow for difference and diversity. This is in contrast to modernist pluralism in which 'differencing logics promoted discourses of separateness and inequity' (Cameron 2015:18), and contrasts with the political pressure on South African museums to adhere to a single, authorised narrative of the past and the present (Jeffery 2017:22-24; Vollgraaff 2018:385). Some of these layers of meaning inevitably integrate the cultural with the ecological, particularly when indigenous knowledge perspectives associated with sites are treated as integral to the cultural landscape (Cameron 2015:23), and thus may introduce environmental sensibilities into museum work.

The Declaration regards processes of public participation as key to the Cultural Landscape approach to heritage management, and thus museum work, as such processes are crucial to a holistic treatment of the relationships between elements of the landscape that may be man-made or natural, intangible or tangible (ICOM: South Africa 2016:2). While international Cultural Landscape theory expresses the entanglement of tangible and intangible heritage as an indicator of the fundamental links between communities, heritage and environment (Rössler 2006:334), the Declaration's vision goes further. It encourages museums to actively create channels for public consultation and participation (ICOM: South Africa 2016:3), processes through which community needs may be identified and met, simultaneous to and as part of a process of identifying potentials from indigenous knowledges.

The Museum Definition, Prospects and Potentials report (Sandahl 2018:9) notes the need for, inter-, trans-, and multidisciplinary, holistic approaches and methods, and embracing world views, cosmologies and epistemologies, which understand and interpret objects and collections within a framework of a fundamental connectivity and interrelatedness of all things, all beings, and Cultural Landscape can make a clear contribution to this. This generates potential for indigenous knowledges to influence museum work, thus contributing to decolonisation through provision of a forum for previously marginalised voices, while the knowledge and experience of these voices, rooted in a Cultural Landscape, may enable an ecological decoloniality.

The Declaration situates Cultural Landscape potentials within the debate on political transformation and the need to engage with social and economic development initiatives (ICOM: South Africa 2016:1). As such, it is positioned to enable museums to interrogate inequalities that arise from or are perpetuated by the neoliberal systems that underpin these initiatives, and thus to support communities' demands for accountability, for instance as expressed in service delivery protests (Alexander 2010; Managa 2012). The Declaration interprets the vandalism of memorials in 2015 as similarly indicative of public frustration caused by the lack of effective social and economic transformation. It sees such acts as an effort to create a new public memory, and sees transformative potentials for museums in the challenge of creating new channels of constructive debate and action to address such issues (ICOM: South Africa 2016:3).

There is potential for such new channels to explore links between the decolonial and the ecological through the ecological elements of the roots of service delivery protest, which remain largely unidentified. If the decolonial is situated within the broad context of neoliberal and neocolonial assaults on economic and personal freedom, and thus linked to synchronous assaults on the environment from the same sources, then there are implications for health, water and food security, access to energy, land, and other issues which inform service delivery protest. Such protest, then, can be read as a form of social-ecological protest that integrates decolonial and environmental issues, an interpretation which provides cultural museums with a theoretical basis and a practical approach to the complexities of human interaction with the environment in a context of sustainability, inequality and political contestation.

This presents opportunities to develop museums' agentive capacity in their engagement with communities' real needs. Most significantly for potentials to integrate ecological issues into decolonial museology, and in a move that pre-empts the 2018 ICOM Museum Definition, Prospects and Potentials report's much less explicit position (Sandahl 2018:7-8), the Declaration recognises the cultural roots of anthropogenic climate change, and the present and future impacts of it

on South Africa's environment and society and thus on the nation's cultural landscapes (ICOM South Africa 2016:3). This has clear implications for cultural museums' ecological responsibilities, and further aligns those responsibilities with the decolonial context of social transformation for the benefit of communities. These alignments provide a basis from which the theoretical framework of South African museology may be reconsidered and adapted to complex contemporary needs.

The Declaration views Cultural Landscape as a deep geological history and a celebrated biological diversity that interact with the story of human development. Thus grounded in the relationship between ecological and cultural systems (ICOM: South Africa 2016:1), it conceives the natural environment as an agentive framework within which culture evolves. The Declaration takes a progressive, non-anthropocentric stance evocative of Cameron's call for "... new social collectives that invite previously invisible nonhuman others into civic life" (Cameron 2015:22) and thus potentially destabilises modernist principles of museum work. This aligns the Declaration with international conceptions of Cultural Landscape as a meeting point of nature and culture with the capacity to disrupt the isolation of cultural museums from ecological themes (Cameron 2015:26; Wehner 2017:87). The alignment with international perspectives opens further opportunities for expansion of South Africa's underdeveloped framework of museological theory, through connections to an international theory and praxis that has made advances in this regard (Newell, Robin & Wehner 2017).

The potentials for the disruption of the nature-culture binary thus enabled by the Declaration provide a foundation for the development of future-oriented models of museological work within the entangled ecological and decolonial contexts. This may contribute to the revitalisation of South African museums' social relevance and sustainability. The Declaration thus explicitly evokes the emergent potential for new and specifically South African models of museum work enabled by the Cultural Landscape approach (ICOM: South Africa 2016:2), and opens opportunities to integrate ecological potentials into the theoretical framework of decolonial museology.

From the above, there is clear potential in the Declaration's position that Cultural Landscape provides a conceptual framework for the heritage sector to develop a relational framework of role players and stakeholders (ICOM: South Africa 2016:1). The participatory development of an integrated plan that takes into account heritage conservation, spatial planning and sustainable social, economic and environmental development may be based upon the principles outlined above. This may enable potentials for a museum definition and associated theoretical and practical systems with the capacity to disrupt the modernist, binary framework that presently limits the potential for a simultaneously decolonial and ecological museological theory and practice.

## CONCLUSION

Approaches to museum work that make use of perspectives from Cultural Landscape theory potentially offer a powerful new mode of thinking for South African cultural museums that has not yet been tapped to its full capacity. Such approaches may disrupt the binarism that has traditionally characterised museum work, revitalise the underdeveloped theoretical framework of South African museology, and pave the way for new models of practice that may enable greater social relevance.

The ICOM-SA / ICOMOS-SA Declaration on Cultural Landscape, considered through the lens of Fiona Cameron's articulation of the post-humanist museum, elucidates the entanglement of decolonial and ecological issues and needs. This approach treats museums as embedded within the meeting points of human culture and the environment, and emphasises that cultural museums' ethical agency embraces both the human and the non-human because the two are not separable. This is vital to the redefinition of the Museum for the South African context. The Cultural Landscape perspective on the layering of decolonial and ecological meanings associated with landscape potentially provides museums with greater capacity to address both present and emerging needs of communities. The emphasis on communal and potentially transcultural perspectives offers museums opportunities to contribute to the development of new channels and forms of transformative public memory and activity, channels which may enable an understanding of service delivery protest as a form of environmental dissent ultimately rooted in the entanglement of the decolonial with the ecological. The ecological elements of the roots of service delivery protest remain largely unidentified, and will be explored in future work.

The instrumental treatment of the natural world is an integral part of the colonial and the neocolonial, and makes a great contribution to present social inequalities (Cameron 2015:17-18; Nixon 2011:35; Plumwood 2002:10). In order to be truly ecological in conception and execution and to inform a decoloniality with the capacity to critique and resist the neoliberal and neocolonial forces so prominent in the global South, the definition of the museum's community itself must be expanded to include the non-human in civic life (Cameron 2015:18). Cultural Landscape enables a vision of the Museum as unbounded, as part of a relational framework of places and the ecological systems that exist in and around them, of biological, geological, and other physical processes, of communities of people and the:

*More-than-human field [in which] every form one perceives – from the swallow swooping overhead to the fly on a blade of grass, and indeed the blade of grass itself – is an experiencing form, an entity with its own predilections and sensations, albeit sensations that are very different from our own (Abram 1996:16).*

Cultural Landscape thus has powerful potentials to expand the definition of the Museum, and to integrate ecological narratives into socially focused heritage discourse as a means to enrich and accelerate the decolonial imperative. The entanglement of the ecological with the decolonial provides an opportunity to connect the present neoliberal, capitalist colonisation of landscape and people to the project of ensuring individual and community freedom from oppression, from the social and ecological injustices of neoliberal economics, that are the new chapter in South Africa's stories of oppression and liberation.

## REFERENCES

- Abram, D. 1996. *The spell of the sensuous: perception and language in a more-than-human world*. New York: Vintage.
- Abungu, G. 2004. Democratising museums and heritage ten years on. *South African Museums Association Bulletin*, 40(1): 3-5.
- Adams, G.K. 2019. Rift emerges over ICOM's proposed museum definition. *Museums Journal*. Available at: <https://www.museumsassociation.org/museums-journal/news/22082019-rift-over-icom-definition> (accessed on: 3 September 2019).
- Alexander, P. 2010. Rebellion of the poor: South Africa's service delivery protests – a preliminary analysis. *Review of African Political Economy*, 37(123): 25-40.
- Alonso, M.F. 2008. Can we protect traditional knowledges? (Pp. 249-271). In B. de Sousa Santos (Ed.). *Another knowledge is possible: Beyond northern epistemologies*. London: Verso.
- Anderies, J.M., Janssen, M.A. & Ostrom, E. 2004. A framework to analyze the robustness of social-ecological systems from an institutional perspective. *Ecology and Society*, 9(1).
- Baines, G. 2004. The politics of public history in post-apartheid South Africa. Available at: [http://www.academia.edu/926698/The\\_Politics\\_of\\_Public\\_History\\_In\\_Post-Apartheid\\_South\\_Africa](http://www.academia.edu/926698/The_Politics_of_Public_History_In_Post-Apartheid_South_Africa) (accessed on: 23 January 2019).
- Bakker, K.A. & Müller, L. 2010. Intangible heritage and community identity in Post-Apartheid South Africa. *Museum International*, 62(1): 48-56.
- Ballantyne, R. & Uzzel, D. 2011. Looking back and looking forward: The rise of the visitor-centered museum. *Curator*, 54(1): 85-92.
- Bhaskar, R. 2008. *Dialectic: The pulse of freedom*. London: Verso.

- Boast, R. 2011. Neocolonial collaboration: museum as contact zone revisited. *Museum Anthropology*, 34(1): 56-70.
- Buoro, A. & Porto, C. 2017. The known dilemma. *ICOM News Magazine*. Available at <http://icom.museum/media/icom-news-magazine/the-known-dilemma/> (accessed on: 31 March 2017).
- Cameron, F.R. 2015. Ecologizing experimentations: A method and manifesto for composing a post humanist museum (Pp. 16-33). In F.R. Cameron & B. Neilson (Eds.). *Climate Change and Museum Futures*. London: Routledge.
- Connelly, S. 2007. Mapping sustainable development as a contested concept. *Local Environment*, 12(3): 259-278.
- Corsane, G. 2004. Transforming museums and heritage in postcolonial and post-apartheid South Africa: The impact of processes of policy formulation and new legislation. *Social Analysis*, 48(1): 5-15.
- Cultural Landscapes. Available at: <https://whc.unesco.org/en/culturallandscape/> (accessed on: 18 June 2019).
- Dondolo, L. 2005. Museums and communities: the reconstruction of museums and their practices in post-apartheid South Africa. *South African Museums Association Bulletin*, 31(1): 68-71.
- Ehrenfeld, J.R. & Hoffman, A.J. 2013. *Flourishing a frank conversation about sustainability*. Stanford, California: Stanford University Press.
- Fleming, D. 2005. Managing change in museums. Keynote Address at the Museum and Change International Conference, 8-10 November 2005. Available at: <http://www.intercom.museum/conferences/2005/> (accessed on: 23 January 2017).
- Fleming, D. 2006. The museum as social enterprise. The First Stephen E. Weil Memorial Lecture, INTERCOM Annual Meeting, Taipei, 2 November. Available at: <http://www.intercom.museum/Taiwan2006a.html> (accessed on: 13 March 2017).
- Freudenheim, T. 2014. Going green in Nepal. *Curator*, 57(3): 281-293.
- Greenberg, J., Knight, G. & Westersund, E. 2011. Spinning climate change: Corporate and NGO public relations strategies in Canada and the United States. *International Communication Gazette*, 73(65): 65-82.
- Helland, L.E.F. & Lindgren, T. 2016. What goes around comes around: from the coloniality of power to the crisis of civilization. *Journal of World Systems Research*, 22(2): 430-462.
- ICOM Statutes. 2007. Available at: <http://archives.icom.museum/statutes.html> (accessed on: 19 June 2019).
- ICOM: South Africa. 2016. Declaration on museums and Cultural Landscapes. Available at: [http://network.icom.museum/fileadmin/user\\_upload/minisites/icom-south-africa/pdf/Declaration\\_on\\_Museums\\_and\\_Cultural\\_Landscapes\\_FINAL\\_2.0.pdf](http://network.icom.museum/fileadmin/user_upload/minisites/icom-south-africa/pdf/Declaration_on_Museums_and_Cultural_Landscapes_FINAL_2.0.pdf) (accessed on: 10 June 2019).
- Jeffery, T. 2017. Future-proofing South Africa's cultural museums: climate change, heritage discourse and Cultural Landscapes. *South African Museums Association Bulletin*, 39: 19-28.
- Kekana, M. 2018. Mpumalanga tops world nitrogen dioxide air pollution charts. *Mail and Guardian: Environment*. Available at: <https://mg.co.za/article/2018-10-30-mpumalanga-tops-world-nitrogen-dioxide-air-pollution-charts> (accessed on: 11 November 2018).
- Levitz, C. & Mathers, K. 2000. A poverty of theory, a wealth of activity: museology and South African museums. *South African Museums Association Bulletin*, 24(1): 18-21.
- Macdonald, S. 2016. Is 'difficult heritage' still difficult? Why public acknowledgment of past perpetration may no longer be so unsettling to collective identities. *Museum International*, 67(1-4): 6-22.
- Managa, A. 2012. Unfulfilled promises and their consequences: A reflection on local government performance and the critical issue of poor service delivery in South Africa. *Policy Brief*, 76: 1-8.
- Marschall, S. 2005. Making money with memories: The fusion of heritage, tourism and identity formation in South Africa. *Historia* 50(1): 103-122.
- Martin, M. 2000. Theory into practice, practice into theory. *South African Museums Association Bulletin*, 24(1): 11-17.
- Meskel, L. 2012. *The nature of heritage: The new South Africa*. Sussex: Wiley-Blackwell.
- Midgley, G. & Barnard, P. 2009. Climate change and biodiversity (Pp. 1-2). In M. de Villiers (Ed.). *Birds and environmental change: Building an early warning system in South Africa*. Pretoria: South African National Biodiversity Institute.
- Museum Definition. 2019. Available at: <https://icom.museum/en/activities/standards-guidelines/museum-definition/> (accessed on: 14 June 2019).
- Newell, J., Robin, L. & Wehner, K. (Eds.). 2017. *Curating the future: Museums, communities and climate change*. London: Routledge.

- Nixon, R. 2011. *Slow violence and the environmentalism of the poor*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press.
- Noble, A. 2008. Memorialising the Freedom Charter: Contested imaginations for the development of Freedom Square at Kliptown, 1991-2006. *South African Journal of Art History*, 23(1): 13-32.
- Oreskes, N. 2004. Beyond the ivory tower: The scientific consensus on climate change. *Science* 3. Available at <http://www.sciencemag.org/content/306/5702/1686.full> (accessed on: 7 March 2017).
- Paulse, J. 2019. Sarah Baartman Remembrance Centre project at standstill. *SABC News*, 15 January. Available at <http://www.sabcnews.com/sabcnews/sarah-baartman-remembrance-centre-project-at-standstill/> (accessed on: 28 January 2019).
- Plumwood, V. 2002. Decolonising relationships with nature. *Philosophy Activism Nature*, 2: 7-30.
- Rankin, E. 2013. Creating/curating cultural capital: Monuments and museums for post-apartheid South Africa. *Humanities*, 2(1): 72-98.
- Rassool, C. 2000. The rise of heritage and the reconstitution of history in South Africa. *Kronos*, 26(1): 1-21.
- Rössler, M. 2006. World heritage cultural landscapes. *Landscape Research*, 31(4): 333-353.
- Roux, N. 2018. A house for dead people: memory and spatial transformation in Red Location, South Africa. *Social & Cultural Geography*, 19(4): 407-428.
- Sandahl, J. 2018. International Council of Museums Standing Committee for Museum Definition, Prospects and Potentials: Report and Recommendations. Available at: [https://icom.museum/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/MDPP-report-and-recommendations-adopted-by-the-ICOM-EB-December-2018\\_EN-2.pdf](https://icom.museum/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/MDPP-report-and-recommendations-adopted-by-the-ICOM-EB-December-2018_EN-2.pdf) (accessed on: 19 June 2019).
- Shoba, N. 2005. Community museums: An insight into the socio-economic, environmental and cultural impacts on community museums in the Eastern Cape. *South African Museums Association Bulletin*, 31(1): 26.
- Skiti, S. 2015. Sad monument a blot on memory of Cradock Four. *Sunday Times*, 15 May. Available at <https://www.timeslive.co.za/sunday-times/news/2015-05-24-sad-monument-a-blot-on-memory-of-cradock-four/> (accessed on: 30 April 2019).
- Soudien, C. 2008. Emerging discourses around identity in new South African museum exhibitions. *Interventions*, 10(2): 207-221.
- Spies, D. 2015. Cradock Four memorial neglected, forgotten. *News 24*, 7 April. Available at <https://www.news24.com/SouthAfrica/News/Cradock-Four-memorial-neglected-forgotten-20150407> (accessed on: 30 April 2019).
- Taylor, K. & Lennon, J. 2011. Cultural landscapes: A bridge between culture and nature? *International Journal of Heritage Studies*, 17(6): 537-554.
- Tichmann, P. 2010. The changing role of museums. Available at: [http://www.maltwood.uvic.ca/cam/publications/other\\_publications/Tichmann\\_Paul\\_Changing%20role%20of%20museum.pdf](http://www.maltwood.uvic.ca/cam/publications/other_publications/Tichmann_Paul_Changing%20role%20of%20museum.pdf) (accessed on: 13 March 2017).
- Vollgraaff, H. 2015. A vision for museums in South Africa: A review of policy proposals. *South African Museums Association Bulletin*, 37: 41-54.
- Vollgraaff, H. 2018. Revitalising the South African museum sector: New museological trends (Pp. 372-395). In P. Ngulube (Ed.), *Handbook of research on heritage management and preservation*. Hershey PA: IGI Global.
- Walker, B., Holling, C. S., Carpenter, S.R. & Kinzig, A. 2004. Resilience, adaptability and transformability in social-ecological systems. *Ecology and Society*, 9(2): 5-14.
- Wehner, K. 2017. Towards an ecological museology: Responding to the animal-objects of the Australian Institute of Anatomy Collection (Pp. 85-100). In J. Newell, L. Robin & K. Wehner (Eds.) *Curating the future: Museums, communities and climate change*. London: Routledge.
- Weil, S. 1999. From being about something to being for somebody: The ongoing transformation of the American museum. *Daedalus*, 128(3): 229-258.
- Witz, L., Rassool, C. & Minkley, G. 2001. Repackaging the past for South African tourism. *Daedalus*, 130(1): 277-296.
- Zuma, B. 2018. The extent to which South African museums surrendered to political undertones. *Museum International*, 70(3-4): 38-47.