

Writing and Drawing with Venus: Spectral Re-turns to a Haunted Art History Curriculum

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Abstract

This article explores some of the complexities of teaching art and design history to students in a Design Extended Curriculum Programme at a university of technology in the context of post-1994 South African society—a society troubled by the ghosts of colonial and apartheid histories that agitate the present/future. Tracking a series of diffractive pedagogical encounters, the article makes visible how, as a discipline, art history haunts the curriculum by reinforcing Western cultural superiority. The article argues that speaking-with and drawing-with dis/appeared ghosts offer new possibilities for reconfiguring art history curriculum studies that both valorise historicity and in turn open us towards different futures. The case study centres around the construction of the “Venus figure” as an embodiment of humanist Western cultural ideologies and practices that reduce the female body to an object of capture for man. Students intra-act with various representations of the Venus figure across art history through the story of Sarah Baartman, the so-called “Hottentot Venus”, whose haunting presence continues to contour, colour and texture discourses around decolonising the curriculum in South African higher education.

Keywords: animate literacies; pedagogies of hauntology; art history; affect; writing-with; drawing-with

UNISA



Education as Change

<https://upjournals.co.za/index.php/EAC>

Volume 25 | 2021 | #9069 | 26 pages

<https://doi.org/10.25159/1947-9417/9069>

ISSN 1947-9417 (Online)

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Introduction

Post-1994 South African society is haunted by colonial and apartheid ghosts that continue to agitate the present/future. In the field of South African higher education (SAHE), instances of such troublings manifested during the #RhodesMustFall and #FeesMustFall student protests (2015–2018) and challenged, among other things, the ongoing dominance of Eurocentric pedagogical and curricula discourses and practices, and called for the decolonisation of the academy. It is within this context that this article explores a hauntological pedagogical approach to the teaching and learning of art and design history within an Extended Curriculum Programme (ECP) at a university of technology. The inquiry makes visible the complexities of teaching art and design history in general, and in ECP in particular. The intention is to show how injustices, practices, structures and operations that underpinned the colonial and imperial projects are embedded in the discipline of art history and how the ramifications of these continue to impact the present and the future. The study will focus on a series of pedagogical encounters that critically engage the construction of the “Venus figure” as an embodiment of humanist Western cultural ideologies and practices that, in the name of “love” and “beauty”, reduce the female body to an object of capture for Man (Wynter 2003).¹

Drawing on Michalinos Zembylas’s (2013) pedagogies of hauntology, the article proposes strategies of working with art histories in ways that reach towards new futures rather than seeking to “fi[x] the past” (2013, 70). What follows is an inquiry into how encounters with ghosts from the past might trouble dominant discourses and generate different ways of thinking/being/becoming with the past, present, and future. This will be done by writing and drawing with the ghostly figure of Sara Baartman²—the so-called “Hottentot Venus”,³ who both haunts and is haunted by normative iterations of the figure of Venus—goddess of love and beauty. In addition to decolonising the discipline, the intention is to show how these hauntings also agitate and impact contemporary concerns such as the #BlackLivesMatter and #MeToo campaigns.

To begin, the article contextualises the Design Foundation ECP course and outlines some of the complexities associated with teaching and learning art history in South African higher education. The article then discusses the concept of hauntology (Derrida 1994), pedagogies of hauntology (Zembylas 2013) and agential realism Barad (2007,

¹ In critiquing humanism, Wynter exposes how the construction of the figure of Man is founded on Western bourgeois tenets that position the white, Christian male as human against which all others are marginalised.

² Also known as Sarah and Saartjie.

³ According to Scully and Crais (2008), “Hottentot” is a pejorative term invented by the Dutch during the 17th century. Stemming from *Huttentut*, “to stammer”, Hottentot refers to Khoekhoe pastoralist communities who spoke complex click languages. It implies that because the Khoekhoe were presumed to be without language they were of inferior intellect and culture (2008, 307).

2010, 2013, 2014, 2017, 2019). This is followed by a brief account of Sara Baartman's life and death before moving on to the case study itself.

Design Foundation ECP

The Design Foundation Programme is a one-year multi-disciplinary course that introduces students to the basics of design and the specificities of the disciplines⁴ they have chosen to study when they progress to the mainstream programmes the following year. The 2020 cohort comprised approximately 80 students of colour, the majority of whom are South African. Even though they are part of the so-called “born-free” generation,⁵ the students' lives are differentially affected by the ghosts of the past. Given that the majority of them matriculated from schools that do not offer art and design as subjects, it is crucial that we identify and prioritise what will be most useful to becoming designers in their first year of study. In addition to the aforementioned content specific to design education, the course foregrounds the relationship between ethics, epistemology and ontology in educational encounters.

In keeping with the aforementioned strategy, the aims of the design theory component of the course include the following: to support and reinforce studio practice, familiarise students with art and design history, and foreground the ethics and responsibilities of design processes, principles and practices. Moreover, guided by the call to decolonise the academy and informed by the graduate attributes—including critical thinking, resilience and empathy—that our institution strives to instil, emphasis is placed on multilayered complexity and finding new knowledges other than representational modes of knowledge that reproduce the status quo.⁶ In this regard, the following questions help define what the priorities of art history should be: How can art history be taught in ways that matter, in ways that resonate with students' lives? How can art history be put to work within the decolonisation movement? How can art history help students to become critical thinkers? How might art history activate issues of ethics and response-ability⁷ in young designers who will be shaping the future? What can art history offer young South African design students as they begin their journey of becoming designers in an increasingly violent society in which gender-based violence, poverty and unemployment are among the highest in the world. Thinking with Zembylas's (2013)

⁴ These include Jewellery Design, Fashion Design, Product Design or Visual Communication Design.

⁵ The term “born-free” refers to the generation of South Africans born after the birth of the new democracy in 1994.

⁶ See Garraway, Sabata, and Ralarala's “Strategic Developments: Graduate Attributes and Decolonisation” (2016) in *Teaching and Learning Report: Waves of Change in Teaching and Learning in Africa*.

⁷ For more on response-able pedagogies, see Bozalek and Zembylas's (2017) article titled “Towards a Response-Able Pedagogy across Higher Education Institutions in Post-Apartheid South Africa: An Ethico-Political Analysis” that draws on Barad's (2007) conceptualisation of response-ability as a yearning for social justice and Haraway's (1997) moving towards possible worlds.

pedagogies of hauntology,⁸ how might writing and drawing with the ghosts of a haunted art history curriculum open up new possibilities for addressing the ambivalence of memory, justice, and (re)conciliation in education?

Between the Spectacle to the Spectral

Jacques Derrida's theory of hauntology, which is a homophone of the French *ontology*, sheds light on the spectrality of the ghost as a figure that is "neither living nor dead, present nor absent" (1994, 63). Importantly, ghosts transgress ontological fixity such as dead/alive, absent/present and past/present. Thinking with Derrida, Zembylas conceptualises pedagogies of hauntology as both metaphor and pedagogical methodology for deconstructing the orthodoxies of academic history thinking and learning. He argues that as metaphor, hauntology evokes the figure of the ghost that both troubles the hegemonic status of representational modes of knowledge in remembrance practices and undermines their ontological frames and ideological histories. As pedagogical methodology, hauntology reframes histories of loss and absence, and uses them as points of departure that acknowledge the complexities and contradictions emerging from haunting. In so doing, Zembylas expands history learning beyond the limitations of simply studying the past in order to uncover and master unknown facts by interrogating how "the spectral constitutes an object of analysis that enables us to see history education as a promise for radical openness in the future rather than as a remembrance practice that ontologizes the ghosts of the past" (2013, 71). For this to work, he eschews the exorcising of ghosts of the past and proposes instead a welcoming "living with ghosts" in order to activate critical learning practices that open towards "a still unformulated future that extends normative notions of identity, memory, and justice" (2013, 70).

In like manner, Avery Gordon argues it is impossible to do away with the ghosts of abusive systems of power—such as slavery and colonialism—because their hauntings continue to make themselves known and their impacts felt in everyday life. For her, the meeting of the living and the lived is a "forking of the future and the past ... that alters the experience of being in time, the way we separate the past, the present, and the future" (2008, xvi). Gordon's words can be put in conversation with Karen Barad's theory of agential realism that is generated by a diffractive reading of quantum physics through contemporary theories of social justice (2017, G110). Agential realism reworks classical concepts of space, time, matter and the void, and undoes Newtonian assumptions of separability and metaphysical individualism (Barad 2017, G110). In her conceptualisation of loss as "a marking that troubles the divide between absence and presence" (2017, G106), Barad illuminates how, far from being immaterial, "hauntings are an ineliminable feature of material conditions" (2017, G107), and in so doing

⁸ Although Zembylas proposes pedagogies of hauntology in history education as a way of learning about the disappeared victims in history education, his findings resonate with concerns specific to art history (Zembylas 2013).

foregrounds the hauntological relationship within ethics, ontology and epistemology, and by implication, new possibilities for pedagogical practices and curricula design.

As a forewarning against spectacle pedagogies that reinforce representational figurations of ghosts “in a sensationalized and ideological manner”, Zembylas encourages entering into conversation with ghosts in order to trouble the relationship between spectator and the observed (2013, 69). The shift from the spectacle to the spectral gaze not only shatters binaries of the observer and the observed and breaks down distinctions between now and then, it also affects our relationality, and by implication our ethical response-ability with others across space and time. It is to these diffractive insights that we now turn.

Sylvia Wynter’s interrogation of the Western construction of Man as white European against which all else is measured—and fails to meet the standards—provides a useful starting point in understanding the machinations and repercussions of the heteronormative Western gaze (2003). Wynter focuses on two effects that are relevant to this inquiry. The first deals with the Western gaze’s denigration of difference that obliterates that which does not fit into a normative frame. Grounded in difference as other, the second effect positions the figure as fixed and trapped forever in the past. Unlike the aforementioned, a diffractive gaze interferes with the “white washing” effects of the Western gaze by opening up radical possibilities for looking and seeing that reveal multiple patterns of difference within the spectrum of white light. Significantly, these differences are not set apart from each other, rather they are read through each other. In other words, in shifting the spotlight away from the spectacle—that shines light *on* that which is separate—the diffractive gaze sheds light on the differences *within* the spectral—thereby illuminating that which would have remained unseen or foreclosed. Rather than emphasising epistemological fixity, diffractive pedagogies open towards indeterminate futures in which together with the ghost, we are all implicated.

As an alternative to returning that reflects back on and reinforces separations between subject/object, observer/observed, past/present, Barad proposes diffractive re-turning as a multiplicity of processes that “turn it over and over again—iteratively intra-acting, re-diffracting, diffracting anew, in the making of new temporalities (spacetime-matterings), new diffraction patterns” (2014, 168). In light of the above, the adoption of a thematic approach to art history lends itself to uncovering intra-active⁹ diffractive patterns that are generated through and across time. It is within this posthumanist spatio-temporality that time is disjointed and together with multiple ghosts we re-turn to events, turning them over and over in order to conjure depth, nuance, percolation and sedimentation. In like manner, and linked to the aforementioned, is Barad’s proposition of memory as the

⁹ Barad’s neologism “intra-action” signifies the mutual constitution of entangled agencies. She writes, intra-action is “in contrast to the usual ‘interaction’, which assumes that there are separate individual agencies that precede their interaction, the notion of intra-action recognizes that distinct agencies do not precede, but rather emerge through, their intra-action” (Barad 2007, 33).

“pattern of sedimented enfoldings of iterative intra-activity” that refute the “erasure of memory and the restoration of a present past” (2010, 261). Understood in this way, the world comprises ongoing re-membling as a bodily activity of re-turning to enfolded materialisations of all traces of memory that are neither held nor fixed in human subjectivity. Instead, re-membling enacts an ongoing “reconfiguring/re-articulating (of) the world” (Barad and Gandorfer 2021, 17).

Sara, Sarah, Saartje, Saartjie Baartman

McKittrick argues that Baartman’s life story not only embodies “the biased racial-sexual discourses of her day [but] also demonstrates how our present system of knowledge (the tables, the ranks, the statistics, the measurements) continue to be informed by such discourses” (2010, 115). What follows is an overview of the life and death of Sara Baartman, the construction of “Hottentot Venus” performance, and how her ghost/s continues to contour contemporary South African society.

Baartman’s birth name is not known.¹⁰ Born in the mid 1770s in the Eastern Cape, she lived the first decade of her life working on a farm¹¹ before travelling to the Cape where she worked as a wet nurse and washer woman in the Cesar household.¹² The 15 years that she spent in the Cape coincided with the transfer from Dutch to British rule in 1806. Despite the Cape’s legislation that forbade enslavement of Khoisan people, while not officially identified as a slave, for all intents and purposes, Baartman was treated as one (Scully and Crais 2008, 309). Records reveal that Baartman lived in the Cape 10 years longer than was previously thought. During this time, she gave birth to three children, all of whom died within days of being born. She also had a relationship with a Batavian drummer, Hendrik De Jongh,¹³ with whom she would live for periods of time.

In their analysis of the complex relationship between Sara Baartman and the “Hottentot Venus” performance, Scully and Crais argue that learning to act the part credibly necessitated an erasure of Baartman’s situated subjectivity (2008, 304). Furthermore, in presenting a more complex rendering of her life, they caution against “the trope of Sara Baartman as innocent indigenous woman” (2008, 306). As a port city, the Cape was inundated with itinerant sailors whose desire for entertainment and the sale of women’s bodies became fundamental to the local economy (2008, 309). So much so that Berg Street was renamed Venus Street due to the proliferation of brothels that sprang up

¹⁰ The first known record of Baartman is from the Cape when she is identified as Saartje, a Dutch diminutive of Sara (Scully and Crais 2008, 307). Significantly, the diminutive signifies servitude.

¹¹ Her people, the Gonaqua Khoekhoe, were pastoralists who were forced into agricultural labour after the land was stolen by the Dutch (Scully and Crais 2008, 307).

¹² She initially worked in Pieter Cesar’s household before moving to his brother, Hendrik Cesar, and his wife Katharina Staal’s home. It was with Hendrik that Baartman travelled to London in 1810.

¹³ De Jongh returned to the Netherlands after the British assumed control of the colony.

(Picard 1968, 91–93).¹⁴ In response to this demand, Alexander Dunlop, a military medical doctor, began to organise events at the Slave Lodge where Baartman would perform for visiting seamen. Scully and Crais speculate that it was during these encounters that Dunlop and Hendrik Cesar realised the economic potential of Baartman’s performances and began to hatch their plan of taking her to England to perform the “Hottentot Venus”. In 1810, together with Hendrik Cesar and the recently retired Dunlop, Baartman set sail for England where, for the next five years, she was displayed first to British and then French publics as both pornographic spectacle and scientific specimen—as the “Hottentot Venus” and “Venus Noir”, respectively (Jackson 2020, 8). The move to France coincided with a shift in how Baartman was perceived. Whereas in England her performance was billed as a titillating and novel freak show, in Paris she attracted attention from scientists at the Musée d’Histoire Naturelle who alleged that her supposed abnormal genitalia were proof that the black human being was more closely related to orangutans than Man (Buikema 2017). In the year before her death, Baartman spent three days at the Musée d’Histoire Naturelle where she was observed as a specimen of curiosity. It was during this time that the notorious illustrations portraying Baartman in a manner characteristic of zoological mammalian specimens were created. Appearing first in Étienne Geoffroy Saint-Hilaire and Frédéric Cuvier’s *Histoire naturelle des mammifères*, Baartman’s anterior and lateral profiles are depicted. In her analysis of these images, Sadiya Qureshi suggests that Baartman’s pose is indicative of her dehumanised position because rather than being portrayed in a classical pose as was the norm at the time, Baartman’s figure “appears rigid with the air of a stuffed specimen rather than a live model” (Qureshi 2004, 241). The scientists had also hoped to perform physical examinations on Baartman, but their plans were thwarted when Baartman refused to oblige them. However, after her death the following year, what she had refused in life was ignored and, with permission from the powers that be, her body was delivered to the museum where naturalist Georges Cuvier performed the dissection. He made a plaster cast of her body before removing her brain and genitals, which were placed as specimens in glass jars. For the next 150 years, Baartman’s skeleton and cast of her body were exhibited on public display for all to see.

The campaign to return Baartman’s remains to her ancestral home was catalysed by two South African artists, Diana Ferrus and Willie Bester. In 1978, Ferrus, a writer who has Khoisan and slave ancestry, composed a poem for Baartman titled “I Have Come to Take You Home”.¹⁵ Inspired by Ferrus’s poem, Bester created the sculpture *Saartjie*

¹⁴ Initially named Eerste Berg Dwars Straat (First Mountain Cross Street) and then shortened to Berg Street, during the 1780s it was known as Venus Street. In 1791 it reverted to Berg Street at the insistence of Dominee Johannes Serrurier (see Picard 1968).

¹⁵ I witnessed Ferrus perform this poem at the University of the Western Cape in 2015. At this event she described the evening when, as a postgraduate student at Utrecht University and feeling isolated and homesick, she heard the plaintiff cries of Baartman’s ghost calling her from Paris. Her response was to write the poem. Ferrus was part of the delegation that escorted Baartman’s remains back to South Africa.

Baartman that the University of Cape Town (UCT) acquired in 2001. After years of fraught negotiation, in 2002 Baartman's remains were finally returned to South Africa for a ceremonial burial at Hankey in the Eastern Cape.

Some scholars have cautioned against working with Sara Baartman's story. For example, Dunton (2015), who is concerned with ethics of representation, interrogates the unequal power relations embedded in research practices. By asking "who has the power to represent—power both in the sense of status (endowed by class position, gender, race) and in the sense of access to resources" (2015, 35), Dunton alerts us to the risk that researchers might be "treating Baartman as capital" and through this process re-inscribing Baartman as an object of scientific dissection (2005, 44). While I am mindful of these concerns, as an art history instructor, I argue that it would be remiss to ignore ongoing agitations and learnings activated by iterations of Baartman's ghost that materialise within the context of South African higher education. While I am in a quandary as to whether working with Baartman's figure might further traumatise her legacy, I feel it would be irresponse-able not to tell her story because it exposes how hegemonic Western cultural normative thinking and practices both perpetuated and propped up the colonial project that continues to reinforce racial and gender stereotypes today. I also feel conflicted because I want to protect her legacy and leave her to rest, yet her story embodies violent colonial histories that have relevance today both in terms of the decolonisation of knowledge and practice but also with regard to gender-based violence in contemporary South African society.¹⁶ Given their relevance, it felt imperative to find ways in which students could become-with Baartman and the ghost of the "Hottentot Venus" in order to gain a better understanding of our haunted past and its relationship to art history.

The figure of Baartman has captured the imagination of students and artists alike. This is evident, for example, in the controversy about Bester's aforementioned piece, *Saartjie Baartman*, that was displayed in UCT's Engineering and Sciences library.¹⁷ On the anniversary of the removal of Cecil Rhodes's statue from campus, students covered Bester's sculpture arguing that "the violent objectification and sexualisation of the black body is a system, which feeds into the stereotype of racial superiority" (Naidoo 2015, 7). Seeking a respectful recontextualisation of Saartjie Baartman's spirit and legacy, protesters exposed how "violences inflicted on the black body and psychology still continue, and we will not stop until we decolonise the black body and mind!" (2015, 7). While the constraints of this article limit an elaboration of the furore arising from the "cover up", it is worth mentioning that the debates and learning opportunities "revealed the centrality of art in the project of articulating a decolonial consciousness, decolonial sensibilities and the possibilities for institutional change" (Kessi 2019, 84), as is

¹⁶ The *Crime Against Women in South Africa* report released by Stats SA in 2018 shows that the South African murder rate of women was more than five times the global average.

¹⁷ For a detailed analysis of Bester's sculpture see Rosemarie Buikema's article titled "The Arena of Imaginings: Sarah Bartmann and the Ethics of Representation" (2017).

evidenced in the renaming of Jameson Memorial Hall, which previously embodied imperial and colonial authority as typified in its neoclassical design, to the Sarah Baartman Hall, a reconfigured space in which Baartman's ghost now presides.¹⁸

Writing and Drawing with Venus

The case study presented here is an account of a series of lessons that ran at the beginning of Term 1 of the 2020 academic year. As part of a larger module, the programme was interrupted by an eruption of student protests culminating in a two-week closure of our campus that also coincided with the outbreak of Covid-19 and subsequent lockdown¹⁹ in South Africa, which brought face-to-face teaching to an abrupt halt for the remainder of the year. As a result, initial plans to develop the module with students were curtailed as we transitioned to remote learning.

Design ECP focuses on setting the scene for academic life, both in terms of content and pedagogical relations. Given that students are transitioning to higher education, and in many cases navigating a new city for the first time, attention is paid to putting them at ease and alleviating feelings of alienation, anxiety and overwhelmedness. With this in mind, the theory course introduces students to art history in a relatable fashion by drawing links between art history and their lived experience with a view to positioning students as central to their learning.

Given contemporary culture's emphasis on the spectacle, beauty and desire and its impact on young people's lives, the course prioritises young designers' response-ability and accountability in challenging stereotypes of beauty and desire. Considering their import, it is crucial that these concerns are foregrounded from the outset in order to track how notions of beauty, love and desire have been constructed over time. The Venus figure became the agent through which stereotypes and hegemonic discourses could be addressed, through and across space and time. It ushered forth important learnings about the performativity of the female body—and as will be shown in this inquiry, the black female body in particular.

Lesson One: Venus,²⁰ Goddess of Love and Beauty

The lesson introduces students to art history by using a diffractive methodology that reads iterations of Venus figures across time in order to show how unequal hegemonic

¹⁸ A statement released by the Chair of Council, Sipho M. Pityana and UCT Vice-Chancellor, Professor Mamokgethi Phakeng, reads: "We hope to honour her memory and restore to her name the dignity that was so brutally stolen from her in the 19th century. ... While we cannot undo the wrongs she suffered, we can lift her up as a potent symbol of the new campus community we are building" (Pityana and Phakeng 2018).

¹⁹ In 2021 I will adapt the assignment for the remote teaching and learning space. This will have implications for how group discussions are facilitated and not being able to "read" the room.

²⁰ Originally the ancient Greek Olympian goddess, Aphrodite, she was later assimilated into Roman culture and renamed Venus.

forces embedded within Western culture continue to haunt us on a daily basis. The intention is to set the scene for the course by showing how the female body is represented in art history and to trouble this gaze. To begin, students learn about the so-called *Venus of Willendorf* figurine (28 000–25 000 BCE), one of the earliest known palaeolithic limestone artefacts depicting the human figure. Discovered in 1908 (93 years after Baartman’s death) in Willendorf, an Austrian town, it was named *Venus of Willendorf* because of the sexual connotations associated with the enlarged breasts and buttocks. Continuing within a Western frame, we then look at various representations of Venus figures over time, such as the *Venus de Milo* (100 BCE), Sandro Botticelli’s *The Birth of Venus* (1486–1486), Édouard Manet’s *Olympia* (1863), and Titian’s *Venus of Urbino* (1543), in order to understand the subjugating operative mechanism of the scopical male spectator gaze as a consuming and objectifying gaze that positions women as passive beings who are looked at (Berger 1972).

Assignment 1

As written homework, students identify their understanding of love, beauty and desire, and critique stereotypes that dominate contemporary culture. Through this exercise, they trouble Western constructions of Venus as the Goddess of Love and Beauty, and make explicit the numerous nuanced and pejorative forces that continue to texture their lives.

Lesson 2: Sara Baartman and the “Hottentot Venus”

Following McKittrick’s proclamation that Baartman is a pivotal figure through which black femininity is founded because “she serves as a unitary scientific spectacle of alterity, as well as an almost seamless past-present-past theoretical avenue through which to think about contemporary narratives of the body, race, and representation” (2010, 119), this lesson focuses on Baartman’s life story and the construction of the “Hottentot Venus”. To begin, students watch a video clip of Ferrus reciting “I’ve Come to Take You Home”.²¹ This is followed by an account of Baartman’s life story. Students also view some of the cartoons and caricatures of the “Hottentot Venus” that were circulated in 18th century English and French society. The aim of this lesson is to make explicit and trouble art history’s implicated role in producing and propagating colonial ideologies. Saartjie Baartman’s story embodies the violence of the male spectator gaze (Berger 1972) and the racialised colonial gaze (McKittrick 2006) that is underpinned by racism and reinforces hierarchies that position white men as superior, civilised and the norm against which all else is measured.

Concerned with reclaiming black femininity, McKittrick encourages artists to find a present-day avenue through which Baartman might finally “talk back” (2010, 121).

²¹ Follow the link to view the poet’s performance of “I’ve Come to Take You Home”: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-pCmu4uyj5c&t=3s&ab_channel=LiefvirsuidAfrika.

With this in mind, Baartman is read through the lens of art history in order to disrupt Western hegemonic discourses and generate different narratives in which she might finally “talk back” (2010, 121). The intention is to redress past wrongs by addressing pejorative racial and gender stereotyping in the hope of uncovering future imaginaries free from deficit models that position black female bodies as subjugated and primitive. McKittrick argues that Baartman’s life story not only embodies “the biased racial-sexual discourses of her day [but] also demonstrates how our present system of knowledge (the tables, the ranks, the statistics, the measurements) continue to be informed by such discourses” (2010, 115). The diffraction of the white and black Venus figures through each other makes visible more nuanced patterns of difference that expose the complexities of the construction of gender, “race” and identity.

Assignment 2: Writing with Baartman’s Ghost

After the lecture, students perform a freewriting exercise structured in two parts. Adopting practices of “speaking with” was an attempt to disrupt the risk of reinscribing othering by “speaking for” Baartman. Students addressed her ghost in the form of written letters in which they disclosed how their encounter with her had affected them. The second part of the exercise gave Baartman an opportunity to write back to them. From the outset it was made clear that their writing was private, and would not be assessed in any way. I too performed this exercise. As a person who comes from a white settler community, I too am haunted. Acutely aware of my privileged position as a white South African who has benefitted from both the colonial and apartheid systems, I grapple with the challenges of teaching a subject that was born to reinforce white supremacy and foreground particular power relations expressed and maintained by European aesthetics. The intention is not to clear the slate and thereby reinscribe past violences, but to make visible how layers of history are sedimented in contemporary life.

Assignment 3: Drawing with Baartman’s Ghost

Following the writing activity, students are invited to creatively re-dress the ghost of Baartman as a move away from the spectre of the “Hottentot Venus”. Thinking with McKittrick who, following Wynter, proposes a different approach to questions of biological determinism and “scientific racism” that explore how creative works might “intervene in, and nourish, our understandings of science” (2010, 114), students are invited to work with the images from *Histoire naturelle des mammifères*. I hoped that by drawing with Baartman’s ghost, she might be repositioned as “a figure that generates and enables a commensurately scientific and relationally creative space” (McKittrick 2010, 115). It must be noted that students were not obliged to work with these specific images, nor were they obliged to show her body. Some students opted to incorporate their freewriting into their artworks; others composed poems and narratives; a few opted not to show her body at all.

Thinking with Wynter, Nathan Snaza is concerned with how humanist practices produce one “specific genre of the human (Man) ... as if it were the only permissible way to perform being human” (2020, 132). Snaza proposes reframing the humanities as “an assemblage that articulates energies across a wide variety of actants, and (or most) of whom are not human” (2019, 2). To this end, he conceptualises animate literacies as an animate practice that offers a posthumanist critique of educational institutions by calling for an enlarged sense of affective participation in events of literacy in order to understand how literacy practices are implicated in a “particular conception of the human (Man) and in relation to imperialist states during the period of modernity” (Snaza 2019, 3). Arguing that animate literacies cannot be reduced to a particular form or methodology, Snaza conceptualises them as actants for thinking, becoming and making anew. Understood in this way, animate literacies are helpful for reconfiguring responsible pedagogies and curricula that encourage specific and situated responses rather than prescribed forms or methods. More than the standard academic literacies that many institutions foreground, animate literacies breathe life into the interstices of what literacies are and can be, by working transversally across and between the boundaries of visual, written, and spoken literacies.

In Figure 1, for example, the text performs a complex role that both covers the body and simultaneously surfaces and inscribes troubling emotions on the skin. In thinking through her artwork, the student explains that “COVER ME UP!” is written in red because “the colour screams” and “makes the mood more emotional”. She continues:

I covered her body up with her words, her emotions and feelings, I did not give her a rag or clothing because she was naked, no one sympathized with her, no one cared, she had no one but herself, not even through her own will she could help herself. The only person that even spoke to her was herself, the only person that saw her as human was herself.

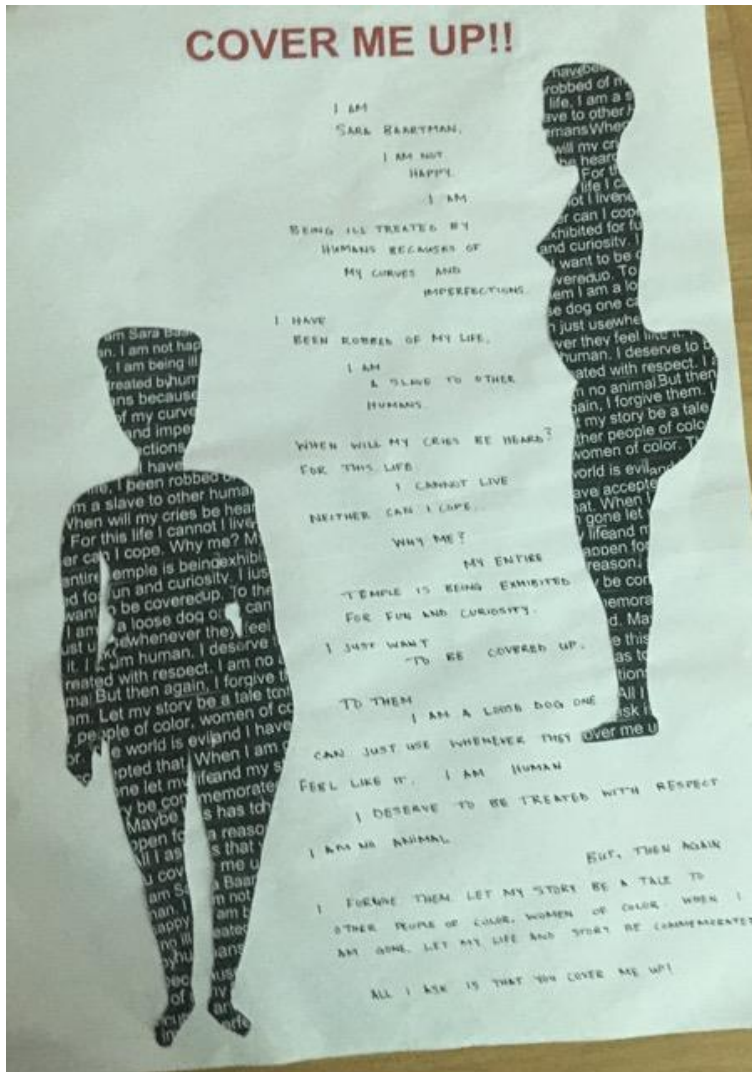


Figure 1: “COVER ME UP!”

I enjoyed the exercise of writing to Sarah and having her writing back. It was a liberating feeling and it was almost as if we were a vessel for her to express what she needed to. It was almost as if she was moving through us when we were writing to her and vice versa and it was a personal moment that I enjoyed.

In “The Emotional Box” (see Figure 2), the artist foregrounds “the emotions that Sarah Baartman went through while she was in a foreign country mistreated” in order to “let the emotions out”. Unlike the image above (Figure 1), where Sara’s body was protected by words, the student chose not to cover her “because I feel we can be more closer to her history”. She adds that the assignment affected her positively because “it makes me

to be proud for being a woman with colour and that I am worth more than anything. To love my body.”

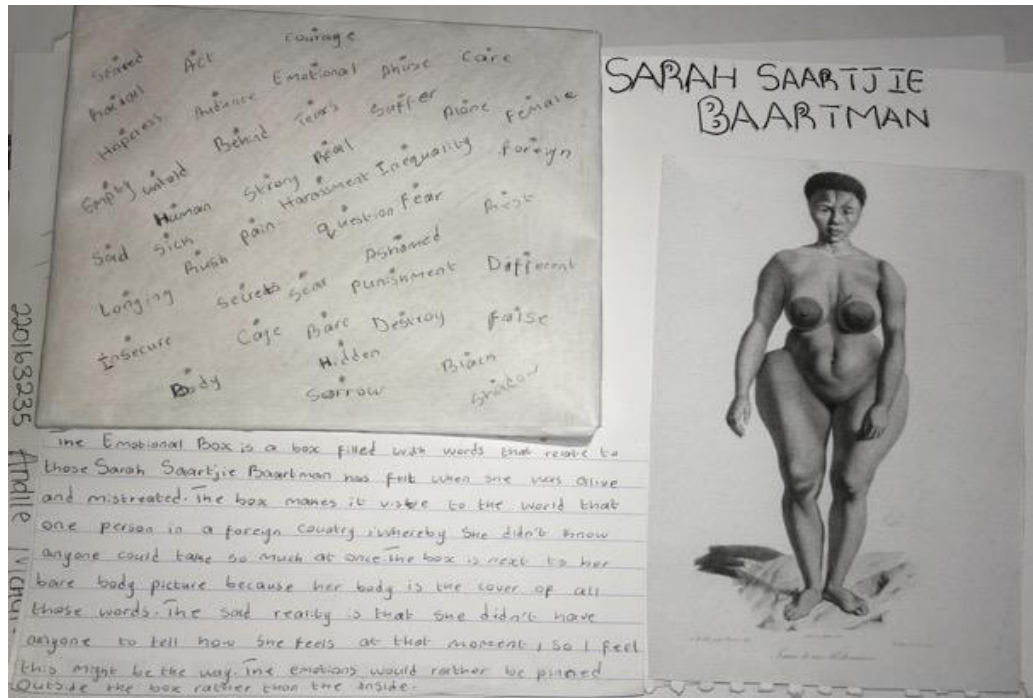


Figure 2: “The Emotional Box”

Some students sought to free Baartman from essentialising gazes that reduce her to genitalia and buttocks that “serve[d] as the central image for the black female throughout the nineteenth century” (Gilman 1985, 216) by working solely with her face. For the maker of Figure 3, for example, the exclusion of Baartman’s body, which “is no longer symbolic of who she is”, was a powerful act. In addition to the visual artwork, he also composed a poem that is written in the first person by Baartman who, like her portrait, addresses the audience directly as an act of “finally claiming what is hers, and that is her exposed body”. His poem reads:

I am not what you make me to be
 My body does not
 define me
 I can finally rest
 knowing I am no longer
 an object or some animal
 you compare me to
 I know freedom now
 Unlike you

– Sarah Baartman



Figure 3: “I am not what you make me to be”

In reconfiguring possibilities for the humanities, Snaza, as I have argued before, foregrounds the imbricatedness of academic disciplines and their disciplining effects and explores different ways of working within the humanities in order to decolonise them. For example, he cautions against critiquing “the human—Man ... without offering anything substantially different in relation to the operative model of Man” (2019, 3). In other words, by eschewing the limitations of critique alone, which reproduces the very system that it is troubling, Snaza considers how various discourses might “coalesce in their capacity not for critique but for spurring experimental forms of thinking and being ... or, still better, becoming [and] moving together” (2019, 3). These insights resonate with the concerns of the writing and drawing-with Venus assignment that set out to activate transformative co-affective encounters with Venus figures that continue to haunt the curriculum. In Figure 4 below, we see how another student also works exclusively with the face, using both clay and charcoal. She elaborates on her decision as follows:

I tried as best I could to remind people of where human discrimination and more specifically where female discrimination began, which is why I used Sarah’s face. I wanted to display her in my work but I didn’t want to show her body since she has been on display most of her life.

Sensitised to the co-affective encounter through making, she comments that charcoal's soft materiality "can create very dark and emotional lines" and describes how "upon drawing her face my hand felt light and an ocean of emotions went through my body. It was as though Sarah wrote her story through me."

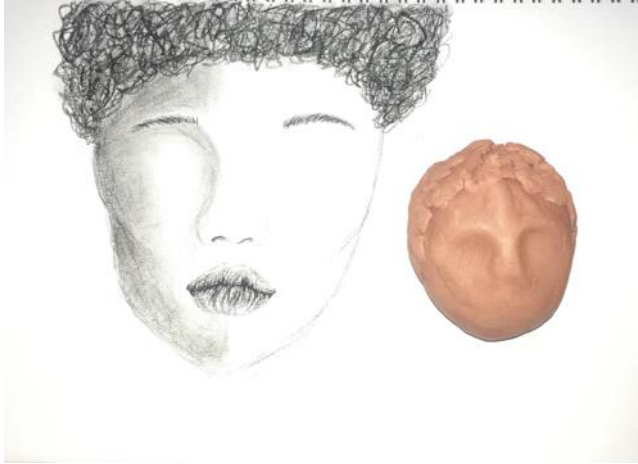


Figure 4: "It was as though Sarah wrote her story through me"

In *Becoming Human* (2020), Zakiyyah Jackson contends that black studies' interrogation of humanism challenges liberal humanism's basic unit of analysis, "Man", and simultaneously sets apart "the human" versus "the animal", while positioning the black(ened) female as abjectly animalised. Following Gilman (1985, 83–85), Jackson contends Baartman's posterior and genitals were used to reinforce categories of "female" and "woman" by positioning an idealised Western European bourgeois femininity as the normative embodiment of womanhood against the perceived abject African "female" who is paradoxically placed under the sign of lack (2020, 8).

Writing and drawing with Venus also laid bare the destructive effects of "humanising" education in the name of love and beauty—as framed within Western humanist aesthetics and ideology—and also alerted students to how "[h]umanizing education cannot proceed without simultaneously dehumanizing" (Snaza 2019, 13). The intention was to alert students to how the "Hottentot Venus" construct and simultaneous dislocation of Baartman from her homeland served to reinforce the human in Europe as contrasted with the dehumanised "Hottentot Venus". The excerpt below reveals a student's empathetic response that draws links between her contemporary lived experience as a person of colour and Baartman's treatment by 18th century Europe.

People of colour are still experiencing struggles when it comes to representation and racism. Having experienced this on a minor level, I cannot imagine how Sarah dealt with it all alone feeling isolated in a strange country, it has given me a lot of respect for Sarah and what she went through.

Figures 5a and 5b present a student's multifaceted response to Baartman's ghost. In Figure 5a Baartman materialises as a brittle puppet, precariously held together by split pins in an enactment of how her body was broken apart by the spectator gaze in life and through dissection after her death. In dismembering and re-mem-bering the *Histoire naturelle des mammifères* images, the artist activates a literal and figurative re-enactment of how Baartman was broken apart both in life and death. In Figure 5b we see Sarah as an "African Goddess", cocooned in a womb-like sack constructed with handwritten repetitions of the phrase "African Goddess". The overall effect is one of comfort and cossetting; her figure becomes an embryo, waiting to be born. Signalling an act of redemption, the student writes "we [are] all women of different races and we should always appreciate our bodies and curves".



Figure 5a: "Broken apart in life and death" **Figure 5b:** "African Goddess"

Magubane alerts us to the inherent contradiction that Gilman (1985) makes by conflating how Baartman's colour and sexual difference mark her as different while simultaneously rendering her "fundamentally the same as all other black people" (2001, 822). At the same time, she identifies the need to think through the complexities of what constitutes blackness and how it is differently construed. In other words, she argues that while it is important to critique racism and biological essentialism, it is crucial that we do not reinscribe essentialist views of what constitutes blackness. The students' spectral drawings-with Baartman's ghost reveal a myriad of manifestations of the black female body. In Figure 6 Baartman is in a bikini that, as the artist explains, covers her body "so that she can also be respected and not be taken advantage of ... [and] ... raise her self

confidence ... [and] ... remind her that she is a black woman who deserves respect". She writes:

I have learnt so much. That most of black women were being abused back then, and is still happening now but not that much. And that we as women should stand together and support each other through thick and thin. And make sure no one control [sic] us. I learnt a lot about the women who were very brave, very proud of their bodies. But had no one that believed in them and their dreams. I'm talking about those women who died because of not being a [sic] straight women.

We as women will always be treated as useless people, that we will never be strong enough like men. Or do anything without men being included in our lives. Of which that is not true, women are the strongest people in the world.

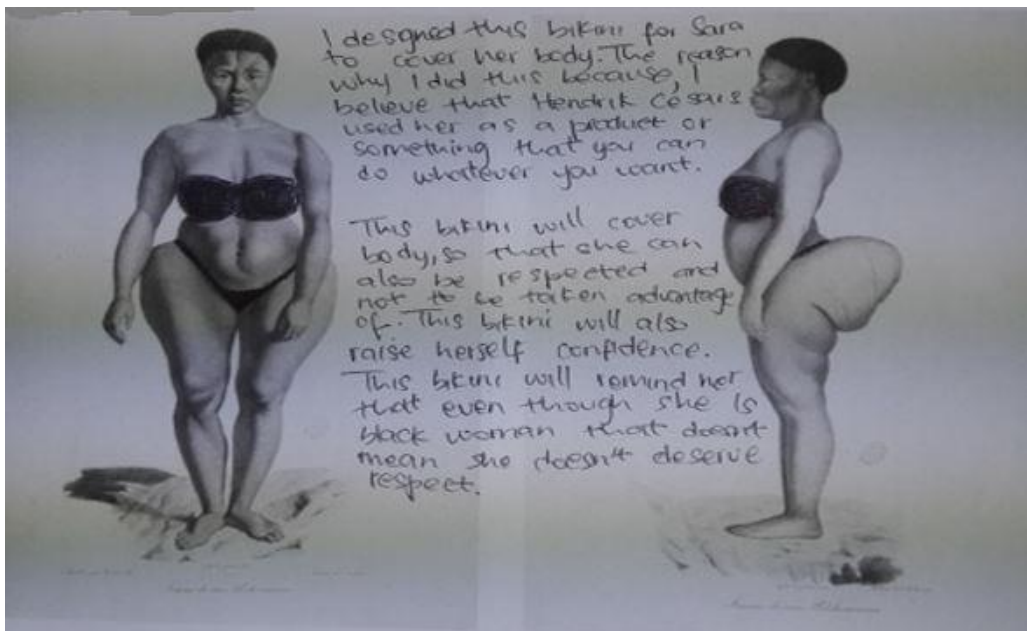


Figure 6: "Sara deserves respect"

In Figure 7, unlike an ephemeral spectre that hovers in ambiguous space, Baartman's ghost is grounded firmly in the continent, as an angelic figure of Mother Africa. The artist explains:

I made it black and white because I wanted to show its true colour and it didn't need any colour because it's beautiful on its own and it tells enough information about the picture. And I used the symbols like the angel symbol over her head showing that she's an angel now and she's standing on the continent of Africa showing that she's the mother of Africa.



Figure 7: “Mother of Africa”

Redressing is a powerful act that both addresses the past pains and injustices and pursues a justice-to-come.²² In describing his creative process, a student explains how he was “inspired by the pain that Sarah had experienced back then” and how he believed that had she remained in South Africa, she would have become a queen (see Figure 8). He places Baartman in different worlds, both modern and traditional, and chooses to depict her in ways most familiar to him, as a queen and in “modern day” traditional dress. In doing so, he wanted to show “Sarah was a very strong person [who] actually deserves

²² Barad conceptualises justice-to-come as an ongoing ethical practice that is understood as “a material set of im/possibilities with-in (of!) the world, what the world calls out for is an embodied practice of tracing the entanglements of violent histories” (2019, 539).

to be praised and honored in all manners”. Mulling over Baartman’s written response to him, he notes the following:

I have learnt Sarah wished us to all just to see and learn from her story, she wished us to learn and apply all the perseverance she had. She wants us to hold fast our ground though things change against us but we should endure and strive. She wishes all of us to be strong and humble. I had a privilege to be a vessel to express her suffering to the world. I will utilise this story to motivate others who might find themselves overwhelmed by life.



Figure 8: “She wants us to hold fast our ground”

Figure 9 shows Baartman wearing traditional Xhosa attire as is evidenced by the headdress and the skirt. The artist explains that in traditional Xhosa culture, a young woman dresses in a “respectable way to show she has dignity”. For her it was important to re-dress Sarah respectfully because she had been “displayed in a non respectable manner in Europe”. She continues:

It challenged me about the positions that woman [sic] have in the world. It also made me question how other woman [sic] look at other woman [sic]. How people treated her so badly and not feel a fraction of shame.

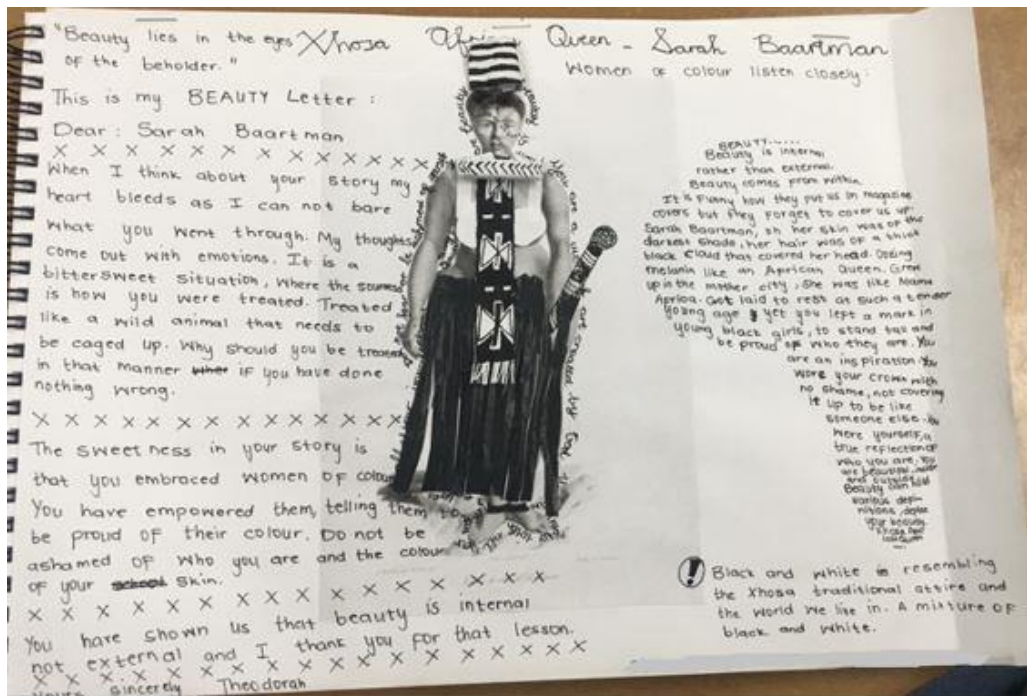


Figure 9: "Queen Sarah Baartman"

Given that the narrative of the "Hottentot Venus" is instrumental in the construction of Man as white European against which all else that is measured fails dismally, the assignment sought to elicit different stories that not only trouble the notion of Man but encourage students to think, make and do anew. Put differently, rather than simply replicate the non-critical known views on Man, the assignment elicited nuanced ongoing iterative re-memberings of the Venus figure that expanded understandings of Baartman, the construction of the "Hottentot Venus" performance, and how they their ghosts continue to inform contemporary culture and society. This resonates with Gordon who argues that in order to transform society "we must identify hauntings and reckon with ghosts ... [and] ... learn how to make contact with what is without doubt painful, difficult, unsettling" (2008, 23). The challenge was to find ways of "making contact", and to this end the assignment turned towards drawing, writing, making, poetry, and freewriting in order to accommodate different learning proclivities as well as orient students towards art historical approaches that foreground their knowledges and response-abilities to current debates. For example, as one student explains, the assignment exposed that the exploitation of women has been happening for years. He writes:

The assignment affected me in terms of learning how she was mistreated and what she was put through just because of her body. It hit close to home especially due to [the] climate we are living in now in South Africa and across the world with gender based

violence being a serious conversation and it was a sore reminder that woman have always been mistreated and in her case, in some terrible gruesome ways.

Conclusion

Inspired by Snaza's animate literacies and Jackson's becoming human (2020), the case study activated inquiry-focused learning that foregrounded particular forms of personhood and politics (Snaza 2019, 4–6) that do not rely on animal abjection to define being (human) and do not re-establish "human recognition" within liberal humanism as an antidote to racialisation (Snaza 2019, 1). Put differently, the lessons and associated assignments encouraged working with art history in ways that "don't presume Man and which enable creative, experimental practices of performing the human differently" (Snaza 2019, 4). The act of writing-with and drawing-with the ghosts of Baartman and the "Hottentot Venus" activated art history's performative role in the present. In order to do this, it was necessary to shift from a representational reading of artefacts and art history towards a diffractive reading through artefacts and art history. Writing-with and drawing-with ghosts made knowledge more accessible in the Extended Curriculum Programme by challenging both dominant representational modes of knowledge and their "ontological frames and ideological histories" (Zembylas 2013, 69), and in doing so, contributed to socially just pedagogies. In addition to circumventing barriers to language, the multimodal also encouraged students to explore and develop an affinity with forms of expression that are key to the discipline of design.

Diffractive pedagogies of hauntology exposed the differential between the "Hottentot Venus" spectacle and Sarah Baartman's ghost. The patterns of difference emanating from these ghostly entanglements shone light on the ambiguous manifestations of observation and obliteration because in order to become the "Hottentot Venus", Baartman had to "erase aspects of her personal history, experience, and identity in order to make her performance of the Venus credible to the audience that was staring at her" (Scully and Crais 2008, 304).

Students' diffractive encounter with art history foregrounded some of the complexities the course deals with in ways that matter to students' lives. For example, by responding to Venus figures from "here and now" and "then and there" (Barad 2013, 16), the case study afforded students an opportunity to think through issues of justice in the present and understand the ambiguous challenges posed by the spectacle that simultaneously captures attention and lures us away from real life (Debord 2004, 117). This is crucial for becoming-designers as they grapple with ethical dilemmas brought about by contemporary culture's promotion of the spectacle gaze that reinforces inequality and othering. Understood in this way, the intra-active encounter with Baartman offered transformative potential within contemporary society as students threaded her story through issues such as gender-based violence, racism and decoloniality that continue to contour their lives today. The adoption of this approach contributed to ECP students becoming producers rather than receivers of knowledge. As one student reflects:

I learnt from this assignment that art history is a great way of showing us how we got to where we are and what has influenced our culture today [and] that even though it can affect us in negative ways, it is important to know what has happened in history so that we can learn from it and so that we can understand why things happened and how those things affect us in our day to day lives.

The act of re-membling Saartjie Baartman also touched on a number of ethical challenges arising out of the representation of the black female body. These include the risk of perpetuating additional trauma to the ghost of Saartjie Baartman as well as the potential risk of triggering students' own trauma, both past and present. The intention was not to cause further violences. To the contrary, together with students, it explored whether speaking-with and drawing-with the ghosts that dis/appeared throughout art history might reconfigure curriculum studies to "reclaim a sense of historicity" and open us to the "not yet formulated possibilities of the future" (Zembylas 2013, 85). As students and I re-turned to the iterative visual and conceptual representations of Venus throughout art history, we encountered iterative haunting presences of Venus that contour, colour and texture the discourses around decolonising the curriculum in South African higher education and Extended Curriculum Programmes in particular. Moreover, as was shown, the act of drawing-with and writing-with the ghost of Sara Baartman and the "Hottentot Venus" activated entangled personal narratives and collective memories. Living in the ruins of colonialism, imperialism and apartheid, while Baartman's bare bones have been laid to rest in the Eastern Cape, the re-turnings of the "Hottentot Venus" and Baartman's ghosts materialise "mourning as promise for a different future" (Zembylas 2013, 83).

Acknowledgements

I thank the 2020 ECP students who shared their artworks and insights that gave life to this article. Thanks too to the anonymous reviewers whose incisive and insightful comments I have incorporated into the article.

To my supervisors, Vivienne Bozalek and Kathrin Thiele, thank you for your ongoing guidance in my PhD project.

Finally I would like to acknowledge Sara, Sarah, Saartjie Baartman whose legacy is a constant reminder of the need to decolonise the academy and do academia differently.

This work is based on the research supported by the National Research Foundation of South Africa (Grant Number: 120845).

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