The herriverse: Introducing a new kind of Research Method, one that is Structural or even Meta- insofar as it exists in the Reader's Navigation of the Curated Space and the Possible Contingent Connections as much as in the Objects being Curated; an Epistemic Construction therefore, that is obliquely but absolutely determined by Ontologically Unpredictable Exchanges.

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Abstract

A brief introduction to a new model for online archiving and journal publishing that rejects a print lineage (book or magazine) for online publication but rather embraces a screen-based genealogy, foregrounding both cinematic and gaming approaches to digital design, user experience and navigation. Visit `www.herri.org.za`.

Keywords: herri, decoloniality, relationality, digital humanities.

1 A Living Archive

"You never change things by fighting the existing reality. To change things, build a new model that makes the existing model obsolete." Buckminster Fuller [1]

herri is the name the Dutch called the seventeenth century khoi freedom fighter Autshumao [2], the first South African political prisoner, who famously escaped from incarceration on Robben Island is-land. Twice. "herri" as opposed to "Herrie" is a decolonial orthography decision that was made because the curatorial team did not believe that the Dutch spelling of the sound herri was necessary, and, inspired by the way sms messages have influenced the orthography of contemporary Afrikaaps, decided to use herri as a flag signalling a de-linking from conventional colonial spelling.

The online archival publication *herri* gives expression to an ethics and aesthetics of scholarly and artistic engagement cultivated in the Africa Open Institute. It positions South African music as the central point of reference for a politics of thinking and writing and creating. *herri* is conceived of as a living archive that demonstrates the possibilities of post-new media and integrated technologies where discrete categories like "art", "music", "film", "text" and "design" all merge into sensorial and informational abundance. Initiated in 2019 as part of the Andrew W. Mellon-funded Delinking Encounters project at the Africa Open Institute (AOI) at Stellenbosch University, herri developed into an investigation about how the notion of decolonisation and decoloniality impacts on the archive, and in its seven iterations to date, demonstrated how the archive is dispersed between artefacts, living people and their memories, and artistic imaginings of the past, present and future.

herri is foundationally built upon the notion of open access, and is freely available online to any-body. The publication uses the Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike CC BY-NC-SA license. All contributors are informed that this is the license adopted with regard to their particular content. In terms of this License "You are free to:

- Share — copy and redistribute the material in any medium or format

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Under the following terms:

- Attribution — You must give appropriate

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- NonCommercial — You may not use the material for commercial purposes.
- ShareAlike — If you remix, transform, or build upon the material, you must distribute your contributions under the same license as the original."[3]

This is a crucial aspect of the idea of decoloniality: no borders, no gates, no hindering of information in any way. The free and open exchange of deep cultural analysis and the open platforming of experimental forms across all artistic disciplines is thus a core principle of the herriverse. herri has been funded with this principle clearly stated, from such diverse sources as Afridig, the National Arts Council (NAC) and the Social Impact initiative at Stellenbosch University.

Pragmatically, *herri* was created in a university environment obsessed with branding and sensitive to criticism, within a newly-created institute (AOI) that was tolerated rather than embraced by faculty and university structures. Modes of engagement were developed between the institute as publisher, and the editorial and design team, enabling institutional existence at a remove that didn't compromise content or the freedom to experiment. The intellectual challenge of *herri* was how to act as a mediating device, or bridge, between the memories of lived experience and the digital media currently available for recording and storing those memories. Aryan Kaganof, who conceived of herri after being commissioned to do so as part of the Delinking Encounters project, saw the challenge as one of changing traditional notions of institutional archiving which involve gated communities of difficult to access physical material in unwelcoming carceral environments (think colonial structures), into an unrepentantly liberated zone, a new model of open access memory sharing which makes the existing models obsolete. In setting out to do this, *herri* at-

tempted to answer the question: What does decolonization sound and look like in this age of techno-hybridity?

In presenting a sound-mine of narratives, mythologies, ideologies, statements, ambiguities and ideas inviting excavation, herri postulates that there is not just one answer to this question. By being deliberately trans- and post-disciplinary, incorporating all forms of digital media and by working with writers, musicians, film-makers, composers and designers at the cutting edge of their fields of expertise, *herri* contributes to new knowledge, forging a South-led digital humanities voice that does not emulate what is already known. Writing in *Business Day*, Chris Thurman commented that "herri is not just a publication or a platform but an ever-expanding archive. It offers a journey down, through horizontal layers of history, but it is very much present and future-oriented, a portal between diverse settings and geographies and languages."[4]

2 An Intersectional Structure

Structurally, *herri* consists of differentiated sections, that are digitally and conceptually linked in a variety of ways with other content in each edition, but also with content in other editions. Intersectionality is an important feature of the *herri*verse. The sections have been created to allow entry into the site from different portals, not necessarily only the single front cover entrance. It is intended that eventually *herri* will be able to operate as an umbrella vehicle comprised of many smaller specialist archival projects that "piggyback" into the mainframe of the *herri* archiving system.

The '**Editorial**' section forwards positions, formulating viewpoints and positing analyses much in the way conventional editorials are expected to do with the exception that these *herri* editorials are not limited to textual contributions but have also appeared as films and as performed poetry (see: https://herri.org.za/5/khadija-tracey-heeger/).

Each issue of *herri* has a Theme, which invites writers to explore in-depth the work of a South African

music artist or genre. This kind of deep focus writing and analysis is difficult to sustain in the market-driven, product-related contemporary media environment of late capital where academic writing itself has become an entirely fungible commodity, administered by monolithic corporate behemoths. The 'Theme' section has to date featured 'Mantombi Matotiyana' (#1), 'Code Switching: From The Eoan Group to Country Conquerors' (#2), 'Night Music' (#3), 'Africa Synthesized' (#4), 'Social Impact' (#5), 'Graham Newcater' (#6) and 'Johnny Mbizo Dyani' (#7). These themes have developed organically from archival work that has been done in the Africa Open Institute or by its curator, film maker Aryan Kaganof.

The release of AOI CD 01, *Songs of Greeting, Healing and Heritage*, made this CD release the focal point for a multi-perspectival reflection on the artist/composer Mantombi Matotiyana, the heritage represented by her music, and the music itself in the 'Mantombi Matotiyana' theme (#1). Matotiyana (who was 85 at the time), created her very first CD recording of her own compositions and *herri* initiated a series of commissioned responses to the recorded work by writers, poets, composers, producers, DJs and theorists, including Njabulo Ndebele, Antjie Krog, Malaika wa Azania and Mbe Mbhele. These fifteen responses were published in the Theme section of the first issue, while the CD itself went on to win the 2020 Humanities and Social Sciences Award in the Best Music Composition/Arrangement category. The point of these commissions – a practice sustained over the course of all seven editions of *herri* – was to explore the archive as a creatively generative motor, a source of unending creative possibility both academically and in terms of artistic practice.

'How do we begin to think and speak ("do research") about a practice such as music that "lives inside people" without approaching it through a colonial lens', asks Neo Muyanga in his editorial: `https://herri.org.za/1/neo-muyanga-editorial`. In the first issue *herri* offers various perspectives on this question. Congolese rapper, artist and film-maker Baloji's multi-faceted short film *Zombies* (`https://herri.org.za/1/baloji/`) is a critique of techno-dependence, and an essay by Dutch philosopher Henk Oosterling (`https://herri.org.za/1/the-back-page/`) considers the relationship between recordings and the real, among others. *herri* itself is not exempt from this question, and the whole issue could be regarded as a meditation on its own role as medium.

Another CD release by the institute, *Streng Verbode*, this time of small-town ghoema-reggae band the Country Conquerors, twinned with a long-term archival project on the Eoan Opera Group, presented the opportunity to interrogate the notion of code switching through the juxtaposition of opera and reggae, past and present. Writing in The Conversation, Stephanie Vos explained, "It places an ostensible high next to low, what might be considered a 'white' colonial artform next to a grass-roots musical connection with the Afro-diaspora, the cosmopolitan next to the rural. Reading about the Country Conquerors and the Eoan Group side by side becomes an exercise in code-switching."[5] The design of *herri* reflects this content, through its fluidity and non-linear, non-hierarchical presentation of material. Again, the theme developed organically from turning a critical lens on the work conducted in the institute, in one way adding to the reception of the work, and in another subjecting the work to scrutiny by stakeholders from outside the university.

Issue 3's Theme, 'Night Music', too, has a CD and book produced within the institute as its central pivot. This time the music of composer Arnold van Wyk (1916-1983) forms the focus of the theme. Already in this third edition of *herri*, the editor/curator sent a clear signal that South African music was not either 'Western' or 'African', 'elite' or 'popular', and in the sequence of themes, embedded in the wider sectional diversity of *herri*, enabled a syncretic-hybridic effect that proposed a South African music culture released from its apartheid ghettos of categorization.

The theme of issue 4, 'Africa Synthesized' was the result of moving a conference that would have been hosted by the Africa Open Institute into the virtual domain due to the Covid pandemic. Guest edited by Stephanie Vos and Carina Venter, this theme was *herri*'s first experiment in contracting editorial expertise from elsewhere (in this case, scholars in the university) while pursuing a scholarly discursive agenda. Transplanting the notion of a conference to the domain of a design-intensive and media-rich platform, expanded the kinds of material and presentation that would have resulted from conventionally published academic exchanges.

The theme of *herri* #5, 'Social Impact', was prompted by a funding award from the Social Impact Division of Stellenbosch University. It enabled the university to turn a critical lens on its notion of social impact, which could easily become an alibi that allows the broader academic (and managerial) project of the university to accept the responsibility for thinking through and implementing the imperatives of transformation and decolonization. This theme, more than any of the others, tested the university's threshold for receiving and nurturing critique directed against itself, by itself. This ability of the institution to generate and value dissent from within, is an important function of *herri* as it privileges forms of expression that prioritize the aesthetic insight over the functionally controlled *brand*.

The special issue of *herri* with its focus on Social Impact flowed organically out of the mission and vision of the Africa Open Institute; most emphatically its concern with music as a "weather vane" to understand and analyse social conditions fitted perfectly with this theme. The referent here was Giorgio Agamben who, in his *"What is Philosophy?"* states: "Philosophy is today possible only as a reformation of music. If we call music the experience of the Muse, that is, of the origins and the taking place of the word, then in a given society and at a given time music expresses and governs the relation humans have with the event of the word. In fact, this event - that is, the arche-event that constitutes hu-

mans as speaking beings - cannot be said within language: it can only be evoked and reminisced museically or musically. In music something comes to expression that cannot be said in language."[6]

The South African twelve-tone composer Graham Newcater celebrated his 80th birthday in 2021, and *herri* marked the occasion by publishing archival scores and recordings of his music in its 'Graham Newcater' theme issue. What was unprecedented in this theme, was the sheer amount of conventional archival score and sound material opened for open access with the permission of the composer. Again, as with the thematic focus on Arnold van Wyk in issue 3, *herri* proposed through its consistent integration of different kinds of music and art that the old categories of containment had become obsolete in the digital realm, where the esoteric and ostensibly anachronistic music of Newcater could be freely encountered juxtaposed among some of the most radically contemporary musical expressions in (South) Africa.

The thematic focus on Johnny Mbizo Dyani (issue 7) illustrated the manner in which archival depth or diachronic layering, is digitally presented as synchronous curation. Dyani's theme was built on an interview conducted by the curator/editor more than three decades ago, and engagements with his image, voice and legacy included projects funded and commissioned seven years ago. In a sense then, the Dyani theme shows how digital curation accrues depth not only from research or mobilized networks, but through sustained individual and team engagement with important people, bodies of work or ideas.

The '**Galleri**' section of *herri* foregrounds sonic, visual, photographic and film work as autonomous art works, rather than as intertextual contributions to discursive engagements.

'**Borborygmus**' (stomach rumbling, peristaltic or abdominal sounds) serves as a digital soap box, as it were, for hard to swallow material that might resist polite, academic or entrained forms of reception and engagement. It frames difficult and in some contexts unpalatable expressions of critique and af-

fect, in such a way as to ensure that the material be heard, seen and made available to a wider audience, if only by dint of the contextualising frame. The 'Borborygmus' section of *herri* forms part of a larger ethos of respecting the importance of encouraging transgression, bringing to the surface submerged or repressed material or forms of expression, and insisting that discourse and creative engagement with abrasive and potentially offensive ideas be invited, as far as possible, into the academic space. As Edward Said put it "Least of all should an intellectual be there to make his or her audiences feel good: the whole point is to be embarrassing, contrary, even unpleasant."[7], accessed Thursday 25 August 2022

Whereas 'Galleri' privileges a full spectrum of artistic creativity, it is in '**Frictions**' that newly commissioned work of edgy text – both poetry and fiction - is showcased. Issue 1, for example, features University of Johannesburg Literature Prize Winner Lesego Rampolokeng, whose writing is translated into an indigenous South African language (isiXhosa) for the first time. `https://herri.org.za/1/lesego-rampolokeng`. Again, as the collation of the two words 'fiction' and 'friction' intimate, there is an understanding that *herri* will allow contradictory, contrarian, difficult and provocative work to be published, alongside playful, wistful and lyrical pieces. In other words, there is no preferred register of publication; rather an affirmation that the space is open.

'**Claque**' is a review section where books, CDs and DVDs are analysed by practicing experts in their fields, whilst '**Ekaya**' concerns materials closely connected to the in-house scholarly production of the Africa Open Institute. '**Off the record**' is where *herri* invites writers to uncover what has hitherto been deliberately hidden or inappropriately conveyed. This is the most classically "archival" section of the *herri* architecture. '**Hotlynx**' is a fun section, a lucky-dip curation into wildy different avenues of exploration for *herri* readers, while '**Shopping**' enables readers to order and purchase books, CDs and DVDs that are relevant to the issue's concerns.

'**Contributors**' is a listing of all the *herri* team members, co-workers and writers who have contributed to the issue, while '**The Back Page**' is a section devoted to philosophical counter-narratives, reflections and possibilities. A *contra* summing up of the issue. '**The Selektah**' is a section that invites a DJ to contribute a mix and an essay.

3 Language

One of the most significant aspects of *herri* is that it is potentially a multilingual publication. By not segregating the languages onto separate pages, apartheid style, but rather criss-crossing the paragraphs with each other, *herri*'s pages give a sense of the linguistic code switching which South Africans do every day in their communications with each other. It is in this polylinguistic approach that *herri* creates new knowledge; not merely endlessly talking about decolonisation in English, but actually doing it, mediacentrically.

A navigation button allows readers to engage a text in two or more languages simultaneously. So, for example, in the Mantombi Matotiyana themed issue (#1) the Sazi Dlamini article (`https://herri.org.za/1/sazi-dlamini`) is given in isiZulu, English and the Mpondomise language, which is uMam' Mantombi's mother tongue. Many of the articles have a dual language button top right.

The pages were designed so that the articles that were available in more than one language would have these languages integrated. Instead of a full page article in English followed by a full page article in isiXhosa or seSotho, a paragraph by paragraph 'flip flopping' between languages was designed. This enables the reader to choose a language by clicking on the button of the language they prefer to read. The relational aspect of the *herri* page design, particularly (but not exclusively) with regard to language, is strongly influenced by Édouard Glissant's *Poetics of Relation* and is a concrete example of how decolonial theory has been incorporated into the nuts and bolts of web design at every level, thinking these issues through so that no design ideas are inherited from other sites. Instead, the ed-

itor and design team of Andrea Rolfes (front end user experience), Slovo Mamphaga (visual motifs), Jurgen Meekel (moving elements and colour grading) and Martijn Pantlin (full stack back end coding) worked collectively to invent their own 'African wheels', to develop their own South African design language that is indigenous and celebratory, rather than attempting to emulate models from elsewhere.

Here are some of the pages that feature the language button:

- `https://herri.org.za/1/ sazi-dlamini` (three languages - isiMpondo, isiZulu and English)

- `https://herri.org.za/2/ eugene-skeef` (English and isiZulu)

- `https://herri.org.za/2/ zimasa-mpemnyama` (isiXhosa and English)

- `https://herri.org.za/3/ nduduzo-makhathini` (English and isiZulu)

- `https://herri.org.za/3/ mamta-sagar` (Kannada and English)

- `https://herri.org.za/4/ lewis-nkosi-olivier-ledure` (French and English)

4   PHD

A major development facilitated through and by the digital infrastructure and attendant conceptual possibilities of *herri*, was the publication, in issue 5, of a PHD thesis by a student of Stellenbosch University, to the curatorial team's knowledge the first time that a University anywhere has allowed a student to present a PHD in a completely digital format. Contemporary artist Nicola Deane, who works across a multiplicity of platforms and media, received her PhD in Visual Arts in 2020. It is entitled *Decentering the Archive: Visual Fabrications of Sonic Memories*. Her inter-disciplinary practice-based research project engages archival material of the Documentation Centre for Music, (DOMUS),

to create audio-visual media for a conceptual art installation. Deane's research was a visually-based exploration of the sound archives of the DOMUS. In her work, she identifies similarities between the "incarceration" of women in domestic spaces and the categorisation and ordering which characterise an archive. Deane has reflected on the expanded scope afforded her by *herri* as follows:

> I started this PHD in the wake of the student protests of 2015, and wanted, therefore, to engage decolonial theories and decolonising practices for my research … In designing the dissertation for the website I gained more control of the ways in which it could be read, opening up the relations between the textual and creative outcomes of the research. The various features of *herri* allowed me to create visual reference pop-ups and links throughout the text, to embed my own film works, as well as YouTube videos that I referred to, to interrupt the text with audio files or image carousels, with the aim of integrating theory with practice and making the reading experience more interactive and multimodal.[8]

5   Institutional context

Although *herri* as a publication project has been developed to be a unique contribution to pedagogy, research and arts curatorship in South Africa and on the African continent, it functions within a context of initiatives that have recognized the necessary reciprocity between post-apartheid reconstruction of the South African social imaginary, and the pivotal role of the arts in this project. What makes *herri* unique in this respect, is that (1) it regards music as central to its intellectual and artistic explorations and (2) that it proceeds from the centrifugal energy of this focus to challenge the boundaries of research versus teaching, of arts versus theory, of institution versus civil society, of music versus the musical arts.

Because *herri* is institutionally located in one of the

foremost universities on the African continent, its primary sphere of influence is the local and institutional tertiary education space. Universities play a particularly important role in promoting and enacting structural change in South Africa, as they are nodes of institutional stability, knowledge dissemination and education. By enacting a radical agenda of decolonial thinking and creation, *herri* is pivotal in effecting structural change in its promotion of a diversity of cultural expressions. It does this by inviting contributions from a broad arts sector of civil society, and mediating these radical contributions in order to embed them in postgraduate and undergraduate education, thus enhancing the role of civil society in cultural policy making and implementation. Furthermore, *herri* is institutionally aligned in a collaborative partnership with the biggest university sound and music archive in South Africa, the Documentation Centre for Music (DOMUS). Its curation of materials in this archive - sound and images - constitutes a unique critical interaction with these materials in a digital domain where the materials are viewed and used by academics and non-academics alike.

herri showcases how collections of humanities research materials can transcend disciplinary strictures in the digital domain to constitute tapestries of meaning uniquely dependent on the digital interface. However, *herri* does not only depend on the archive to enrich existing collections of humanities research. It actively commissions, republishes and creates new materials in sound, film, image and words.

Because its focus is music – a focus unreplicated in any other digital project in South Africa - these new materials create novel aesthetic and intellectual perspectives on our world and reality. In this sense, *herri* diversifies existing digital humanities research materials by extending the field of digital curation and research to music, one of the least decolonized tertiary domains in South African higher education. Music's ontological ambiguity – its existence as either performance, recording or score – has made it difficult in the pre-digital age to bring it into vi-

brant discursive interaction with other humanities and arts discourses. *herri* addresses this challenge by embracing the existence of music as/in text, visuals, dance, and hybrid forms of co-creation.

herri is already being used as an undergraduate teaching tool in South Africa at Stellenbosch University, where Prof Stephanus Muller writes, "I had a good discussion with the students yesterday regarding *herri*, with one student calling it 'a political weapon' and a good discussion ensuing from David Langemann's article[9] regarding his description of the recording and post production process, 'ideal sound' and whether that is a universal or enculturated idea. All very valuable. Also the comparison between Malaika Wa Azania and Antjie Krog's poems, and how they tell us different things about this repertoire and practice – on an affective level – was very useful."[10] The benefits continue to accrue in every single music student who is exposed to *herri*, not only as a resource, but also to the radical content and decolonial thinking cultivated in the publication.

herri is also being used by Matthew Pateman in his media lectures at Edge Hill University, UK, where he is Professor of Popular Aesthetics and Head of Department. Pateman writes, "I just completed the external review / evaluation of *herri* 2 - 4. It struck me as I was writing that one aspect which is profoundly important is the fact that the curatorial as opposed to editorial nature of herri means that the wide variety of ways of entering into a page, exiting a page and therefore having interesting and (while not at all random, nevertheless) un-motivated collisions, juxtapositions and abrasions. In my report I described how I think that creates a new kind of research method: one that is structural or even meta-insofar as it exists in the reader's navigation of the curated space and the possible contingent connections, as much as in the objects being curated."[11] Through the practical tactics of enlisting and commissioning artistic work and thus channeling institutional funding towards the cultural arts sector, as well as including this diversity of cultural expressions in postgraduate and undergraduate discursiv-

ity, *herri* effects structural change by creating unconventional interfaces between artists and institutions. Practically, it does this by changing the curriculum and challenging the structurally embedded Western canon in pedagogic practices, but also challenging structural systems of knowledge generation (through commissioning, republication, curation, directed engagement) in universities.

Because *herri* is an institutional initiative, the long-term availability of the publication is guaranteed. This means that the objectives of promoting heritage and of developing decolonial patterns of thinking and engagement with music will continue beyond any specific issue or series of issues. The impact of the *herri* online archive project is already considerable: it is suggestive of music as a radical medium through which to think and imagine not only heritage, but the current moment in all of its acute and even apocalyptic aspects. In other words, an epistemic construction that is obliquely but absolutely determined by ontologically unpredictable exchanges. As Zim Ngqawana has said, "The known has been found wanting, it has failed. We need to explore the unknown."[12]

(`www.herri.org.za`)

This article was edited for coherence by Professor Stephanus Muller.

Notes

[1] The Buckminster Fuller Reader (1972) editor James Meller, ISBN 978-0140214345

[2] Patric Mellet, Autshumao - Between What Is Said and What is Kept Silent, `https://herri.org.za/1/patric-tariq-mellet/`

[3] Creative Commons, `https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/3.0/`, accessed Wednesday 24 August 2022

[4] Chris Thurman, Business Day, 11 February, 2022

[5] Stephanie Vos, https://theconversation.com/review-herri-is-a-rare-new-arts-and-culture-journal-from-south-africa-137805

[6] Giorgio Agamben, What is Philosophy, translated by Lorenzo Chiesa, Stanford University Press, California, 2018.

[7] Edward Said, The Reith Lectures, BBC 1, https://www.lingq.com/en/learn-english-online/courses/339876/1-edward-said-representation-of-the-i-1320910/

[8] Sue Segars, `http://www.sun.ac.za/english/Lists/news/DispForm.aspx?ID=8825`

[9] `https://herri.org.za/1/david-langemann/`

[10] Stephanus Muller, email correspondence, Wednesday 13 may 2020

[11] Prof Matthew Pateman email correspondence 10 Sep 2021

[12] Zim Ngqawana interview in The Exhibition of Vandalizim, African Noise Foundation, 2010, directed by Aryan Kaganof, `https://vimeo.com/108982799`