

The term *decolonize* has gained a new life in recent art activism, as a radical challenge to the Eurocentrism of museums (in light of Native, Indigenous, and other epistemological perspectives) as well as in the museum's structural relation to violence (either in its ties to oligarchic trustees or to corporations engaged in the business of war or environmental depredation). In calling forth the mid-twentieth-century period of decolonization as its historical point of reference, the word's emphatic return is rhetorically powerful, and it corresponds to a parallel interest among scholars in a plural field of postcolonial or global modernisms. The exhortation to decolonize, however, is not uncontroversial—some believe it still carries a Eurocentric bias. Indeed, it has been proposed that, for the West, de-imperialization is perhaps even more urgent than decolonization.

What does the term *decolonize* mean to you in your work in activism, criticism, art, and/or scholarship? Why has it come to play such an urgent role in the neoliberal West? How can we link it historically with the political history of decolonization, and how does it work to translate postcolonial theory into a critique of the neocolonial contemporary art world?

—Huey Copeland, Hal Foster, David Joselit, and Pamela M. Lee

## NANA ADUSEI-POKU

During my studies in Berlin, London, and Ghana, *decoloniality* was a term that appeared, but it wasn't the main focus in our discussions about books such as Frantz Fanon's *Black Skin White Masks* (1967) and *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961) or essays such as Stuart Hall's "The Spectacle of the 'Other'" (1997) or Gayatri Spivak's "Can the Subaltern Speak?" (1988). What these texts provided under the umbrella of postcolonial studies were approaches to dismantle Enlightenment paradigms and possibilities to exist as a Black person with a historical understanding of how social, gender, and racial inequalities are produced and perpetuated in one's own life. Hence for me from the outset, *decolonization* involved not only the repatriation of the land of Indigenous peoples (it is often omitted that Africans are indigenous to their lands) but, more importantly, a form of empowerment that aimed to tackle the intricacies of white supremacy in formerly colonized countries as well as colonizing countries. As a nineteen-year-old person, I learned in my first seminar on whiteness in literature, conducted by Peggy Piesche, a Black scholar of German literature and philosophy, that colonization and enslavement cannot be thought without understanding that its main seeds were planted by Enlightenment thinkers like Kant and Hegel whose theories of a just and liberal society depended on deep-rooted racial hierarchies centering and elevating the white cis male subject.<sup>1</sup> This knowledge allowed me to survive intellectually and physically in a context that was intrinsically hostile to my existence. Art history—or, rather, its disciplinary and institutional gatekeepers—did not provide the space to think about these questions in the European context, nor did it allow a mode of inquiry that even acknowledged the existence of race as a signifier, so I found my way into thinking through and with art via the Birmingham School of cultural studies and visual-culture studies. Nevertheless, the problematization of the art-historical canon, its genres, and methods was already beginning at this time: A healthy dose of poststructural scholarship paired with cultural and postcolonial studies allowed a generation to emerge that aimed to challenge and to change the dominant discourse.<sup>2</sup>

As in any other conservative discipline, not every art historian, artist, or curator is invested in decolonial thinking or practice; however, the term and its impli-

1. See Peggy Piesche, "Der 'Fortschritt' der Aufklärung—Kants 'Race' und die Zentrierung des Weißen Subjektes," in *Mythen, Masken und Subjekte: Kritische Weiszeinsforschung in Deutschland*, ed. Maureen Maisha Eggers, Peggy Piesche, and Susan Arndt (Münster: Unrast, 2005), pp. 30–40.

2. See Ann Laura Stoler, "Imperial Dispositions of Disregard," in *Along the Archival Grain: Epistemic Anxieties and Colonial Common Sense* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008), pp. 237–78; Krista Thompson, "A Sidelong Glance: The Practice of African Diaspora Art History in the United States," *Art Journal* 70, no. 3 (Fall 2011), pp. 6–31; Huey Copeland, *Bound to Appear: Art, Slavery, and the Site of Blackness in Multicultural America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013); Monique Ileweraert, *Ariel's Ecology: Plantations, Personhood, and Colonialism in the American Tropics* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2013); Jill H. Casid, *Scenes of Projection: Recasting the Enlightenment Subject* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2015); Darcy Grimaldo Grigsby, "Still Thinking about Olympia's Maid," *The Art Bulletin* 97, no. 4 (2015), pp. 430–51; and Anne Lafont, "How Skin Color Became a Racial Marker: Art Historical Perspectives on Race," *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 51, no. 1 (2017), pp. 89–113.

cations are unavoidable at the beginning of this new decade. This unavoidability is certainly due to the activism initiated at the University of Cape Town by Black LGBTQ activists in 2015 with the call to remove the statue of British colonialist and diamond merchant Cecil Rhodes from their campus, which turned into a global call to decolonize universities and their curricula and equally inspired collectives such as Decolonize This Place, the group that relentlessly agitated, both before and during the Whitney Biennial, to get Warren Kanders removed from the museum's board because of his connections to tear-gas production and its use in Palestine and elsewhere. Is the University of Cape Town with the removal of one statue or the Whitney Museum with the departure of one trustee thereby decolonized? Of course not. Nor has the unyielding scholarship devoted to rethinking the colonial repercussions in art institutions and discourses achieved its goal. Will there be a time in which curricula and institutions are decolonized? Not in the foreseeable future. The acknowledgment of privilege and one's implication in the colonial paradigm—in the exploitation of resources expropriated predominantly from people of color—is not a desirable mental space. It is far easier to fall back on binaries of good and bad and to add a session on “Indigenous art” to the syllabus. Moreover, the resources that institutions would have to invest in decolonial pedagogies work against the capitalist logic with which US universities operate. It is far easier to “diversify” the faculty—to hire a few people of color—who, though they are supposed to bring change, have no actual power to do so, as their colleagues continue, unbothered, to teach the same uninflected narratives.<sup>3</sup>

Two strands of thought have to be taken into consideration if we want to have an informed conversation about a “decolonial” art history. Art history as a discipline emerged in the eighteenth century during a long period of colonial expansion and slavery; it is therefore a product, if not a centerpiece, of a disembodied modern white self in whose formation “taste” played a major role.<sup>4</sup> The exclusion of the African gendered subject was mandatory for this project, as was the repression of any subject position that was not aligned with the dominant concept of white masculine superiority. This is why white cis women were restricted to domestic space (where they were still important to the cultivation of “taste”) and only white cis men were blessed with “genius.” Also of great importance is the understanding of time as linear and progressive in the eighteenth century, since this concept enhanced the possibility of ordering artistic output, taxonomizing it, and valuing it (or not valuing it) accordingly.<sup>5</sup> Like the art museum, then, art history itself is a colonial product. To be decolonized, it must be transformed into a dis-

3. I have published extensively on the issue of diversity and will not further develop this argument here. See Adusei-Poku, “Catch Me, If You Can!” *L'Internationale*, 2016, [http://www.internationale-online.org/research/decolonising\\_practices/38\\_catch\\_me\\_if\\_you\\_can](http://www.internationale-online.org/research/decolonising_practices/38_catch_me_if_you_can); and “WdKA Makes a Difference Reader,” *Creating010*, 2017.

4. See Joe Moran, *Interdisciplinarity* (London: Routledge, 2010), and Simon Gikandi, “Overture: Sensibility in the Age of Slavery,” in *Slavery and the Culture of Taste* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011), pp. 1–49.

5. Stefan Heidenreich, “Make Time: Temporalities and Contemporary Art,” *Manifesta Journal: MJ, Journal of Contemporary Curatorship* 9 (2010), pp. 69–79.

cipline that not only problematizes its own roots but also invests in ways of engaging with art that lie outside of its current definitions.

This leads me to the second argument. The acknowledgment of the multiplicity of art and its definitions entails a restructuring of modern-art surveys. The entire history of art of the past two centuries can no longer be narrated through the lens of European modernism, especially if its inherent white supremacy and persistent marginalizing of artists of color are not also problematized. There is nothing wrong with teaching Western art history as long as it is so problematized; I always aim to provide my students with critical tools to read against the grain and to detect a hegemonic Western perspective when they encounter it in their texts or reproduce it in their projects. Is it always successful? Of course not. It is uncomfortable work. On the one hand, the Latin American discourse on decoloniality is very popular among my students; on the other, it often marginalizes Black-liberation struggles to the point of invisibility. Perhaps this is why it is relatively easy to adopt its language in an institutional setting. Museums that adopt this language don't have to deal with their inherent racism; they merely need to find different ways to display collections of stolen Indigenous art. Hence it is mandatory in my educational practice to emphasize the connection between anti-Blackness and Indigenous genocide. My curatorial work has always centered Black-diasporic perspectives as a way to explore the longing to utilize art in order to envision a non-colonial world. We have all been touched and changed by colonial structures, and yet it is change—as Octavia Butler emphasizes—that remains the only constant.

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## BROOK ANDREW

Are we such primitives that we only see ourselves? NGAJUJUU NGAAY NGINDUUGIRR—NGINDUUGIRR NGAAY NGAJUJUU (I see you—you see me).<sup>1</sup>

I have often wondered what the human psyche and world would be like if the word *primitivism* had never been invented—BIRRAMAL-GU YANHA-Y-ANN (gone to the bush). There is a need to de-primitivize; to delete the word *primitivism* from the vocabulary of seeing other cultures. Then we can be equal and stop the objectification. This, I believe, would be more powerful than decolonizing, and then we can get on with the real business: holding sovereignty of land, of language, of bodies, and of ceremonies.

In Australia, as elsewhere, primitivism lingers as a dominant narrative, clouding the facts that we, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, are the most incarcerated people on the planet and other devastating statistics. It took a group of Indigenous Australians to congregate and create a statement for the Australian government and demand a First Nations voice enshrined in the constitution. The Uluru Statement from the Heart was handed to the Australian government on June 30, 2017, only to be rejected.<sup>2</sup> The fact of sovereignty, of ownership of the soil—that it “has never been ceded or extinguished, and co-exists with the sovereignty of the Crown”—is too challenging, because it smashes the primitivist idea and the story of discovery.

From Cook Inlet in Alaska to Cooktown in Northern Australia are monuments to the explorer Captain Cook, who visited these places in 1778 and 1770. There are lots of Cooks. Stamping the cookie cutter of Cook cooks a *mélange* of multiple sameness. These Cook statues, including the death plaque at Cook’s final resting place in Hawaii, all tell one story . . . that of a man mapping places that were already mapped. Now, dominant histories veil ancient and ongoing cosmologies, seafaring, hunting, and trade. Some of the population of these towns with their Cook statues nod and appreciate the journey of such a man and sometimes enforce the *natives* to perform rituals of memory (abusing powers that manifest in intergenerational traumas), while others shake their heads.

In my art practice, I have made works that imagine other ways of seeing, that are beyond the doctrines of primitivism and discovery. An artwork like *52 Portraits*<sup>3</sup> intends to expose the continual ignorance towards five hundred years of colonialism as a transnational history that created the modern world. It presents a contemporary vision of those designated “primitive,” ethnographic “types” photographed in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries from many different countries. Their portraits are presented alongside representations of Western cultures in a level playing

1. Capitals denote words in Wiradjuri, an Indigenous Australian language of Western New South Wales, and the Aboriginal nation of the artist’s mother.

2. Read the full statement here: <https://ulurustatement.org/the-statement>.

3. Brook Andrew, *52 Portraits*, 2013. Mixed media (52 pieces), variable dimensions. National Gallery of Victoria, Australia.

field of narratives. The confrontation with racist stereotypes, physical anthropology, and primitivist values needs radical action in visual cultures.

This is the creation of works that ignore the primitivist ideology and work beyond its framing, or even literally and metaphorically throw it into the trash heap, as Jimmie Durham has done in his powerful video work *Smashing* (2004). Durham smashes objects people give him with a stone and then records them in a museum-style registration book. These artworks destabilize European colonial legacies and express another path. This is a path that has developed through an open dialogue with materials and a refusal of the colonial reading as ethnographic in order to reimagine a different legacy. For me, this is a powerful perspective that cannot be owned by a Eurocentric mind, because that kind of mind cannot remember or even imagine a world that I create.

It's too dangerous to enter into the *academy*, wrapping itself in you and you around it. It moves stillborn within you. It prohibits any new thought without mention of its ancestors. It sits there waving a finger, set in its ways, making nonsense of something not written in its dominant ways.

To kill something is to not only treat it with respect, to create ceremony and mourning, but to honor that which was and move on. To create and continue cultural practices, make objects, smoke, respectful etiquette, and song—this is to move on. For the many objects caught up in museums and private collections amassed around the world (that desperately fearful collectors cannot let go of in light of their own demise and usefulness), we urgently need to acknowledge the non-primitivist and useful actions and power of these objects. But how do we move on from a place two hundred and fifty years later (more or less, depending on your global position) when the story has not shifted, when the story continues to be enabled through jokes and fantastical histories sold for a currency on the high-wind oceans of pedagogy, theater, and narrative-building? How does one kill primitivism if it is peddled round and round? The same as mass extinction, the story of human intervention, spinning stories through diversions and repetitive notions of power.

Restitution viewed through these cyclic behaviors always appears beyond our reach. Yet can there be a real handing over, a real forgiveness and selflessness to reach out and hand back, without retaliation or revenge for wanting something set right?

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## SAMPADA ARANKE

On the occasion of this dossier, I find myself returning to anti-colonial thinker Frantz Fanon. I return to him here not to rehearse his oft-quoted passages about violence as a cleansing force or the complex colonial formations of the Black psyche, but I turn to Fanon's theorizations of the body. It seems to me that renewed theories of and calls for decolonization require an attention to flesh as a political device, one that can be freed and embodied anew.

In "On National Culture," Fanon argues emphatically for a turn away from an internationalist and non-aligned attention to Black cultural formations popularly practiced at the time of his writing toward a more regionally attendant national cultural formation.<sup>1</sup> For Fanon, culture refers broadly to the aesthetic murmurs that have been foreclosed, subsumed, and trespassed upon by colonialism but that still remain active in the "hidden fluctuating zones" of everyday life.<sup>2</sup> Culture is the means through which the subject imagines freedom from colonial atrophy.

Fanon's considerations are organized and mediated by the figure of the colonized intellectual, who occupies a liminal space and yet is required to mediate, translate, and even generate freedom.<sup>3</sup> The colonized intellectual in this formulation is compromised by a desire projected upon him from the outside to: 1) adhere to the authorial and authoritative traditions propagated by Western epistemological values; and 2) to succumb to the feeling of never being adequately accepted or "at home" within those values. Fanon makes a counterintuitive case for the colonized intellectual's ability to translate from the life of the mind into the life of the body—from the world of ideas to the world of embodied action. The realm of the cultural appears as the life of action: the very substantial mechanisms through which revolutionary struggle can be at once imagined and embodied. For Fanon, culture's realm is the realm of the corporeal now.

Fanon insists upon the colonized intellectual's emancipation as muscular. The intellectual, overwhelmed with the realization that he has "managed to embody, or rather change bodies with, European civilization," feels that he must both "escape white culture" and "look elsewhere, anywhere," which leads to what Fanon describes as a withdrawal. He goes on to note: "This movement of withdraw-

1. This chapter was originally presented as a talk at the 1959 Second Congress of Black Artists and Writers in Rome. For more, see Azzedine Haddour, "Sartre and Fanon: On Negritude and Political Participation," *Sartre Studies International* 11, nos. 1/2 (2005), p. 292. For more on the non-aligned movement, see Vijay Prashad, *Darker Nations: A People's History of the Third World* (New York: New Press, 2007).

2. Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, trans. Richard Philcox (New York: Grove Press, 2004), p. 163.

3. The colonized intellectual often appears in Fanon's writings from *Black Skin, White Masks* forward as the ultimate colonized subject—intellectually, linguistically, and psychoanalytically. In Fanon's writings, the intellectual might be thought to be Fanon himself, as the figure shares the author's experiences. I gender the colonized intellectual accordingly with the pronouns he/him as a clear extension of Fanon's writings.

al . . . above all calls to mind a muscular reflex, a muscular contraction.” These muscular contractions give rise to a new form of aesthetic generation:<sup>4</sup>

The foregoing is sufficient to explain the style of the colonized intellectuals who make up their mind to assert this phase of liberating consciousness. A jagged style, full of imagery, for the image is the drawbridge that lets out the unconscious forces into the surrounding meadows. An energetic style, alive with rhythms bursting with life. A colorful style too, bronzed, bathed in sunlight and harsh. This style, which Westerners once found jarring, is not, as some would have it, a racial feature, but above all reflects a single-handed combat and reveals how necessary it is for the intellectual to inflict injury on himself, to actually bleed red blood and free himself from that part of his being already contaminated by the germs of decay. A swift, painful combat where inevitably the muscle had to replace the concept.<sup>5</sup>

A contraction indeed. One that spills color, style, energy; a combat that bleeds, a self-infliction that is the precondition for embodying a radical consciousness. Muscle memory, once freed from the colonized intellectual’s corporeal tension at the granular level, opens onto a transitional state toward imagination. Here, fleshly release leads to creative release. To develop imagination allows the colonized subject to, perhaps daringly, give rise to new aesthetic forms. The examples in this chapter are multiple: in wood sculpture, the transition from the single, expressionless mask to the emergence of compositions of multiple figures that occupy the same plinth; in ceramics, the emergence of ochres and other colors once restricted; in oral literature, the turn from the historical event to the speculative present as a means of generating revolutionary fervor through a usable history. These examples for Fanon result in a clear and direct engagement with a new sensibility of one’s body, one’s breath, one’s capacity. He notes: “The people’s encounter with this new song of heroic deeds brings an urgent breath of excitement, arouses forgotten muscular tensions and develops imagination.”<sup>6</sup>

So, what does this muscle memory do as an embodied source for not only a present-tense force? To flex those muscles is to reactivate a knowledge of freedom still unknown but trapped in the body; it is to engage in a speculative account for a liberation that can unearth what Fanon calls the “dense, subterranean life in perpetual renewal.”<sup>7</sup> The muscular anatomy of the colonized intellectual’s hand works as a weapon by using the past with the “intention of opening up the future, of spurring [the people] into action and fostering hope.”<sup>8</sup>

4. Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, p. 157.

5. Ibid.

6. Ibid., p. 174.

7. Ibid., p. 167.

8. Ibid.



What I'm left with is a sense that decolonization as a solely political project never guaranteed freedom. For those of us scholars trapped in institutions that have inherited these modes of colonial atrophy, perhaps we must attend to the acute muscular formations of the body as a road map to imagine and reach toward new forms of embodiment, both individual and collective. This reaching, stretching, de-knotting, craning toward forms of release might open up contours of a freedom not yet known.

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## KADER ATTIA

The decolonial question is often raised in a too general manner. There is no need for ranking de-imperialization and decolonization, except for academism's attempt to broaden the *mise en abyme* of a field of research that is still insufficient in both cases. Why? Because History is always built from individual experiences, which travel from family secrets to a collective memory.

As Frantz Fanon perfectly explained: A symptom is never individual, it is the symptom of History. So, there are as many symptoms as there are different (hi)stories. Scholars' points of view on colonialisms and imperialisms cannot always be relevant. All the less so if we consider that the position from which we express ourselves skews our perspective, and particularly the theory we are building. Most of the time, living in a Western university doesn't make it possible to understand colonialism as Fanon experienced it. Being a descendant of a colonized people helps a little bit but isn't sufficient either. For the descendants of colonized peoples, for "the Damned of the Earth," decolonize is the name of a posttraumatic symptom that constantly needs to be revealed in order to be disassembled. Today, the Damned of the Earth are the descendants of the Algerian people living in Algeria during colonialism, as well as the other descendants of colonized peoples.

After independence, these colonial subjects have become the subjects of imperialism. "While becoming independent, we have become dependent," my friend the Algerian architect Yasmine Terki once told me. She has dedicated her life to the preservation of the beautiful ancient technique of clay architecture. She fights the hegemony of concrete, glass, air conditioning, and corrugated iron in the south of Algeria, where the Sahelian architecture has, for thousands of years, been made from, and preserved with, natural elements. The colonization of African subjects' imagination has made them dependent on technologies they didn't need in the first place. All the patents for construction techniques (concrete, glass, etc.) are owned by Western companies—the former colonizers, or their imperialist avatars: China, the US, Europe, Russia, etc.

But today the correlation that exists between colonialism and imperialism is to be found not only in the practicality of patents; it is first and foremost in imagination. That's where neoliberalism has thrived in the past decades, through technoliberalism. . . . And in this architecture of control engineered, from colonialism to imperialism, to manage racialized subjectivity, from native peoples to migrants and their descendants, is the fold between colonialism and imperialism, embedded in the agenda of extraction of human values (intellectual and physical) that neoliberal capitalist derivatives need to grow.

I do not think that contemporary art is neocolonial, even if its economy is interdependent with neoliberal structures.

What I am sure of is that it has been elaborated from a narrative of denial towards the colonial legacy that moves it from inside, and this for more than a century. . . .

First of all, modern art would have never flourished in this groundbreaking way if it hadn't been inspired by the colonized cultures from Africa, America, Asia, etc.

Intellectuals and artists have indeed felt amputated from the invisible and unknown world through the Age of Reason, and seek to be connected to the unpredictable via these objects from colonized cultures and the beliefs of which they are the legacy. The intellectual prostheses embodied by these objects have allowed a kind of augmented reality. What seems to be different from today is that when Picasso was looking at an African mask or sculpture and elaborated a revolution of representation within the Western art he belonged to, he had no electronic device between his eye and the objects, but only his predator genius's agency. Without denying his visionary relevance, we have to remember that this generation of modern artists were talking, thinking, and producing from a privileged position, in comparison to colonized subjects, whose cultures have been denied. The question is whether they took it for granted or not, whether they appreciated the objects they had in front of them.

That's why, for instance, the question of restitution of artifacts comes to my mind as neither decolonial nor anti-imperial, but as the need to incarnate how much repair is irreparable (in his Ouagadougou speech French president Macron claimed that he wanted to repair the wounds of colonialism). So, in my opinion, it would make sense to translate postcolonial theory into a critique of the neocolonial contemporary art world through an elaborated reflection on restitution of artifacts to former colonized countries.

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## IAN A. BETHELL BENNETT

I grew up between various islands of the Bahamas, London, and Vancouver, and I have spent most of my adult life between Puerto Rico, London, and Nassau. The Bahamas received its independence from Great Britain on July 10, 1973. Similar to the misnomer of the Emancipation Act, this “independence” was followed by a credit and barter system that saw the rapid limitation of Blacks’ rights and their potential to progress economically. This system imposed another level of burden on Blacks as whites continued to own most of the land and dominate the market through a monopoly of capital and trade relationships, both local and abroad. This disempowerment through land and access to capital was complicated by the later creation of land grants that served to expand the space already given to white loyalist settlers, but not Black loyalists, through Crown grants to family and friends. This led to developments such as Wallace Groves’s Freeport with the establishment of the Hawksbill Creek Agreement, which ceded more land to the company through Sir Stafford Sands’s direct intervention as premier and minister of finance, under segregated, white-minority governments. The proliferation of grants of Crown land after independence continues, for example, with the expansion of Disney into Eleuthera at the apparent behest of the government. My photography has captured some of the natural beauty of the islands, and I have shared it with New Providence-bound students who think that everything beyond their local communities is outside of their control. Decolonial thinking and postcolonial critique have allowed me to demonstrate to these students that the acquisition by a private investment company of the western tip of the island, only twenty-one miles long by seven miles wide, is not far from their world. Many of these students do not see beyond their local space and thus feel delimited by power inequalities. In my teaching, I try to expose these inequalities by reference to the historical suppression of the right to vote as well as the ongoing silencing of concerns over economic justice. These concerns compound with those involving environmental, spatial, and social justice to provide an entirely different way of thinking about one’s life.

At the University of Puerto Rico I learned as much as my students when I opted to teach a class on Anglo-American literature from *Robinson Crusoe* and *The Last of the Mohicans* to texts of the early twenty-first century. We also examined laws that established “Puerto Ricanness” as well as the spatial reality and legal identity of Puerto Rico itself. Students were shocked by the level of disenfranchisement they had inherited through these legal documents. I used this same pedagogical tool in the Bahamas, where it met with more resistance as students there believed that they were truly independent. While postcolonial status has meant the removal of the designations E (European), A (African), and M (Mixed) from birth certificates and travel documents, some Black people can still be traced through a “Book of Negroes,” a record book of “slave” births during colonial days where all Blacks were registered and their identities thus imprinted upon them nonetheless. Postcolonial

authorities have learned to use the colonial tools of racial disempowerment and separation and indeed to improve upon them.

These demarcations remain either in law or in custom, and development continues to provide preferential deals for internationals over Bahamians, especially when it comes to land purchase. The Bahamas might be cast as a paradise for tourist consumption, yet most Bahamians do not experience this paradise nor do they have access to its luxuries. Unfortunately, my artistic practice is not a beautiful representation of black bodies in paradise. It shows a dark underbelly, and therefore is not always appreciated.

In the wake of Hurricane Dorian in 2019 and in the wave of neoliberal privatizations and spatial injustice, my practice is concerned to challenge both the apparent complacency and the blatant complicity of local governments in the selling off of the commons as well as the outsourcing of public services. As my writing, poetry, and art aim to show, the common space of the islands is shrinking as corporations manipulate authorities in order to manage geographic and economic relations. As one drives down the main West Bay Street of New Providence that





links east with west and sees the daily migrations of laborers across the road, one understands that anchor projects, direct foreign investment, hotel building, resort development, and high-end gated communities that purport to offer jobs to Bahamian workers in fact offer far less. Showing this in and through creative practice is essential. Developing a screen of thoughts and images that speak to these realities is especially important for young people in the global South who have to leave school in order to work.

As the US builds walls against “rapists,” the Bahamas contain “very bad people”: In the face of such actual and epistemic violence, the need to challenge concepts of sovereignty with our own voices and stories is great, all the more so in the shadow of the tourist plantation. Inhabiting a still deeply colonized space—where Black skins have inherited white masks, and the educational system remains impoverished—decolonial thought and practice are essential. As Disney mushrooms through the Bahamas, and climate change and its impact decimate communities, the need to tackle the elephant in the room is urgent. After Hurricane Joaquin in 2015, the Bahamas started to think differently about weather: The country began to wake up to the reality of the sea invading the land. Dorian made this even more real. At the same time many still sold and developed mangroves and wetlands that they knew were necessary for protection; in fact, it felt as though the speed of this development had increased and big business had redoubled its efforts to expropriate and exploit. Hurricane Matthew in 2016 revealed the inability of the Bahamian government to rebuild in the wake of disaster: The southern islands remain devastated, and years later, many on New Providence continue to live under tarpaulins.

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## ANDREA CARLSON

Before addressing decolonization or anti-imperialism, I want to consider how violent displacement is transformed. For Ojibwe People, our displacement was historically achieved at the pointy end of a knife. The word for *white people* in the Ojibwe language is *chi-mookamanag*. It translates as “long knives,” referencing the bayonets that white settlers used to force Native people into submission. The settlers had lost their humanity when they decided to physically assault Ojibwe People, causing the settlers to transform into bayonets in the minds of traumatized Ojibwe People. To restate this point, the settlers’ bodies dissolved into the background behind the objects that represented urgent physical threats. Beyond killing us, they have and continue to remove us from our land. They dug up our ancestors and continually display our funerary belongings as trophies, flattened our burial mounds, burnt our scrolls, replaced our governments, imposed Christianity on us, criminalized our ceremonies, criminalized dancing, weaponized disease, stole and steal our children, enslaved many of us, actively poison our water and land, threaten to replace everything that belongs to us, from our languages and grammars, to our knowledges and epistemologies.<sup>1</sup> Colonization is genocide. Today the bayonets have largely disappeared and the settlers have rematerialized into people again, but we can still detect invisible colonial weaponry that aims to displace us.

As part of my art practice I discuss colonization using the English language. Even though I utter this English word almost daily, I don’t know the word for *colonization* in Ojibwemowin. There may exist words for *colonization* in Ojibwemowin, but they aren’t prominently discussed in Ojibwemowin. Ideas that are frequently discussed within the language are varying aspects of cultural revitalization. Words like *mashkiki* (medicine), *noojimo’iwewin* (healing), *nanda-gikendan* (he/she seeks to know something), and *gikendamowin* (knowledge) are terms that frequently surface in conversational Ojibwemowin. This preoccupation with health and knowledge may be described as decolonization, but it is achieved without a settler audience, without relying on colonial institutions. Our healing and language acquisition are not contingent upon a museum’s land acknowledgment, or maybe they are in a tangential way. Anishinaabe scholar Grace Dillon offers the Ojibwemowin word *bishkaabiyyang* as a term analogous with decolonization, translating it as “returning to ourselves.”<sup>2</sup> Much like the idea of *Indigenization*, a term that describes centering Indigenous People within the decolonial process, there is no return or special place afforded to non-Natives. Returning cannot mean going

1. There are some readers who, without a doubt, are thinking to themselves that this is a guilt trip, that, even though I have not compared this plight to another group’s, they might characterize this as “oppression Olympics,” or, perhaps, they are thinking that guilt is an ineffective strategy for solidarity, that it shuts down the non-Native reader. Those readers are sharpening their invisible bayonets.

2. Grace L. Dillon, *Walking the Clouds: An Anthology of Indigenous Science Fiction* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2012), p. 10.

back in linear time to someone's fantasy of an authentic, pre-invasion Native life. In this way, it is unlikely that the decolonization of the mid-twentieth-century period is something that can be returned to either, or at least not without some romantic misgivings. Returning, in that context, implies a gap in time, but that gap has not been observed by Native People, who have maintained continual resistance through decolonial means. Again, this is what Native People have been actively doing for ourselves. Museums and other institutions that haven't hired or included Native People in their power structures may have no proximity or appreciation of that *bishkaabiiyang* type of decolonization. They might even resent it if they had it. Indigenous museum workers, I see you!

My art is in museums, and that access point has given me much to agonize over. Sometimes I wonder if my inclusion is only to support settler futurity. I have a cynical theory about the perceived uptick in museum support for the discourse around decolonization: Museums were begrudgingly doing some of their most impactful, actionable decolonial work in secret, and now they want to have a conversation about decolonization as an abstraction. For instance, the Native Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA) of 1990 mandates that federally funded museums return grave-robbed burial belongings and bodies. Native activists worked hard to get this legislation passed. Museum compliance with NAGPRA was largely taken on unceremoniously or in private. Tell me what museum wants a photograph of their staff handing over hundreds of cardboard boxes of bones splashed across the "Variety" section of their local newspaper? Museums are currently embracing land acknowledgments, statements that inform guests whose land the museum occupies and what commitment the institution has to said people, but it was rare to see museums issue apologies only a few years before while returning our ancestors' grave-robbed belongings. Some museums went to court to fight against NAGPRA and the descendant communities whose things were robbed.<sup>3</sup> Without naming names, museums with the splashiest displays of decolonization are often hiding the most bodies to this day. So many institutions have come out all at once joining hands in acknowledging their participation in ongoing colonization. This tactic means that no institution is singled out above the chorus of land acknowledgments. When such normalization is deployed as a defensive posture, it should come as no surprise that Native People aren't satisfied.

I'm willing to shelve decolonization practices for a moment to refocus my distrust on anti-imperialism as a practice. What does an anti-imperialism look like? What vision rises out of those ashes? I have many visions for decolonization, because part of Indigenous futurity planning involves agency, visibility, and self-representation. An example of a decolonial museum intervention can be seen at a number of Canadian museums where didactics and museum catalogs featuring contemporary art by Native and non-Native artists are presented in the Indigenous languages of the area, as well as English. The museum may highlight that move as decolonial, but could it be considered a move towards anti-imperialism too?

3. See Repatriation Comics: <https://nagpracomics.weebly.com/the-comics.html>.



Maybe it isn't going far enough to be anti-imperial. Are anti-imperial museum interventions motivated by exposing economic ties? In many situations that would also be the work of decolonization too. Any multipronged approach would recognize the urgency of both decolonization and anti-imperialism and the undefined territory between the two.

If anti-imperialism is more urgent than decolonization, we must ask ourselves if anti-imperialism is yet another tool for displacing Native People. Even the best-intentioned decolonization efforts have displaced Native People, as non-Natives take up the work under the guise of solidarity without involving Native People whatsoever. Native People hold special interests, and we insist upon our sovereignty. Many anti-imperialists have an understandably antagonistic view of national sovereignty, but they tend to skip Native American preference for—and understanding of—sovereignty altogether. As much as nationalism is a problem, our sovereignty pulls us out of being understood in terms of race. It provides distinctions between our more than six hundred people groups. The United States government is actively working to undermine the sovereignty of Native Americans by characterizing our nations under legal definitions of race. That is neocolonialism and active genocide. If there is a desire through anti-imperialism or decolonization to recognize and stop moves to displace and disappear Native People, then urgency belongs to that work, whatever we call it.

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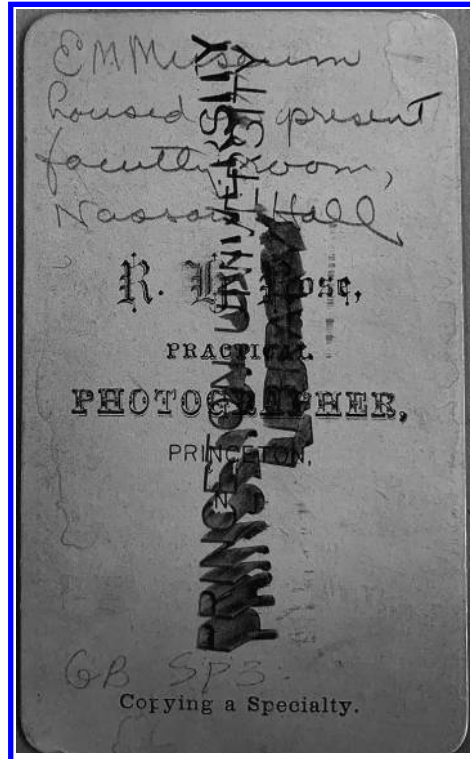
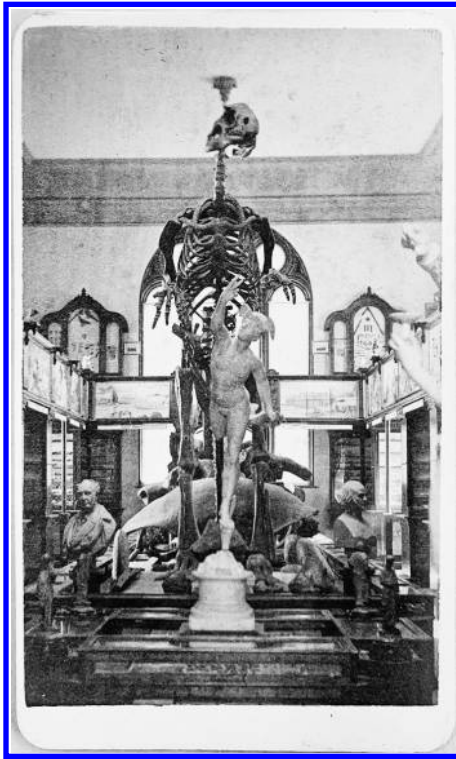
*Nuestro primer ensayo*<sup>1</sup>—our first rehearsal—took place last fall in the Ancient Americas study room in the Princeton University Art Museum, where we organized a workshop on ethical collaboration within academia.<sup>2</sup> This event was part of a larger program entitled “Rehearsals for a Reverse Anthropology,” following the artist Enrique Chagoya, who has referred to the revisualization of dominant histories as a practice of “reverse anthropology,” turning the inquisitive and acquisitive gaze back on sites of power. Each program was anchored by a work of contemporary art in the museum’s collection that helped us imagine ways of living with colonial legacies: Laura Anderson Barbata and Sheroanawe Hakihiwe’s book *Shapono* (1996), made in collaboration with the Yanomami community of Platanal, Venezuela; Cecilia Vicuña’s *Chanccani Quipu* (2012); and Enrique Chagoya’s codex print *Utopiancannibal.Org* (2000). We looked to Princeton’s archive and its material culture to examine the histories of coloniality proper to the institutional space we inhabit. We continue those investigations here with a series of annotated “objects” from Princeton University’s collections.

As part of an institution built with slave labor on stolen land, through and by the logics of colonialism and modern imperialism, we acknowledge that decolonization must entail unequivocal material restitution of Indigenous land and life, as Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang and others have advocated.<sup>3</sup> We remind ourselves and our reader that we write from the unceded territory of the Lenni-Lenape people.

1. Though “*Nuestro primer ensayo*” can literally be translated from Spanish to English as “Our first rehearsal,” the word *ensayo* means “essay,” “rehearsal,” and “attempt” all at the same time, a multivalence we have found fruitful for conceptualizing our project.

2. This project emerged as part of professors Cristina Freire and Irene Small’s seminar at Princeton University in spring 2019. We are particularly grateful to Irene Small, Bryan R. Just, and Luke Naessens for their insights and feedback on these reflections.

3. Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang, “Decolonization Is Not a Metaphor,” in *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education and Society* 1, no. 1 (2012), pp. 1–40.



*E. M. Museum of Geology and Archeology, ca. 1897.  
Image taken by Royal H. Rose. Princeton University Archives,  
Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Princeton University Library.*

1. As Princeton University Art Museum's institutional precursor, the E. M. Museum of Geology and Archeology was dedicated to exhibiting the history of the natural sciences through archaeological, geological, and paleontological artifacts gathered mainly through donations and "scientific expeditions" by university affiliates. The museum operated in Nassau Hall, at the heart of the university, from 1874 until 1909.<sup>4</sup> The first director was Princeton professor of physical geography and geology Arnold Guyot, who was succeeded in 1883 by William A. Libbey Jr., son of an affluent Princeton trustee and Guyot's mentee.

4. In 1909 the expanding collection was relocated to Guyot Hall, where it shared space with the Department of Biology and the Department of Geology. Over the next one hundred years, it would be largely dismantled; some parts were moved into storage and others were given away entirely, as with the vertebrate-fossil collection, which went to Yale University's Peabody Museum in 1985. See Harrison Blackman, "Princeton's Lost Museum: Arnold Guyot's E. M. Museum and the Great Juncture of American Natural History Museums in the Late 19th Century," *The Princeton Historical Review* 3 (Fall 2017), p. 25.

The miscellany shown in the photograph of the museum's galleries echoes the unsettling elision of fossils and anthropological photographs described in the university's 1905 handbook: "In the gallery may be found a further exhibit of fossils, many of which are fine type specimens procured in the west by the various Princeton expeditions; here, too, is an interesting series of Indian photographs."<sup>5</sup> As a whole, this museum presents an early case of cultural sedimentation where diverse times and materials have been compacted, hierarchized, and hoarded, a process mirrored on the photograph's verso through multilayered institutional markings. The co-presence of classical sculpture and dinosaur bones points to the ideology that the museum was assembled to serve: to link the US academy not only with the ancient Western tradition but with domination of the prehistoric past.

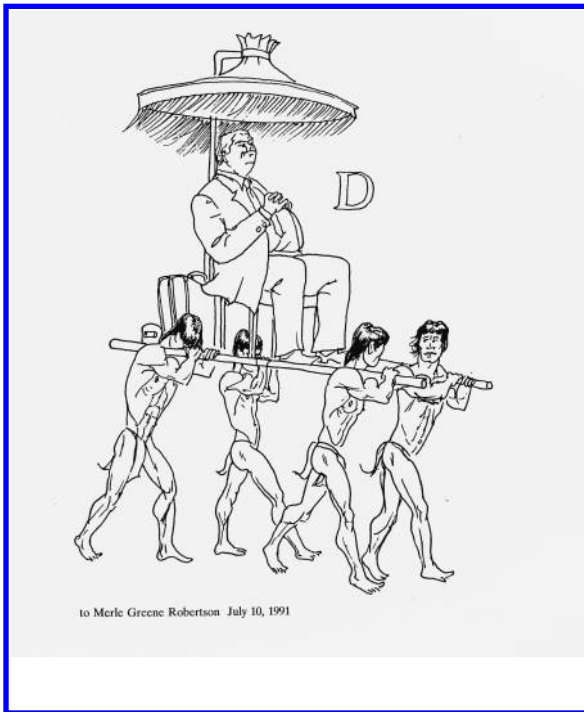
Two recent studies on Libbey and the E. M. Museum refer to their objects of research as lost or forgotten legacies: "Princeton's Lost Museum" and "William Libbey of Princeton: A Forgotten Geographer."<sup>6</sup> Forgetting, as scholar and activist Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz reminds us, is the opposite of truth.<sup>7</sup> Thus, she calls for a practice of "un-forgetting," which Alexis Shotwell has described as one that "reveals salient lines of history, dwelling with how the past shapes the present."<sup>8</sup> Here, un-forgetting is the process of examining the power structures that enabled these collections and the discursive apparatus that justified the E. M. Museum and other similar institutions. Un-forgetting is an invitation for a collective praxis of reversals; one that parses stratified museal sedimentations, even at the risk of failing.

5. John Rogers Williams, *The Handbook of Princeton* (New York: Grafton Press, 1905), pp. 46–47.

6. Blackman, "Princeton's Lost Museum"; William A. Koelsch, "William Libbey of Princeton: A Forgotten Geographer," *Middle States Geographer* 49 (2016), pp. 1–8.

7. Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz, "The Opposite of Truth Is Forgetting: An Interview with Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz by Chris Dixon," *Upping the Anti* 6 (May 2009), <https://uppingtheanti.org/journal/article/06-the-opposite-of-truth-is-forgetting>.

8. Alexis Shotwell, "Unforgetting as a Collective Tactic," in *White Self-Criticality Beyond Anti-Racism: How Does It Feel to Be a White Problem?*, ed. George Yancy (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2015), p. 62.



*Self-portrait by Gillett Griffin in a letter to Merle Greene Robertson, July 10, 1991. Gillett Griffin, Drawn from His Letters: A Collection of One Hundred and Fifty-four Drawings Drawn for His Friends (Bryn Mawr, PA: Willman Spawn, 1994), unpaginated. Graphic Arts Division, Department of Special Collections, Princeton University Library.*

2. By all accounts, the ancient art of the Americas in the Princeton University Art Museum owes its presence to its first curator of “primitive art,” Gillett G. Griffin, who was hired in 1967 to lend both his personal collection and growing expertise to the museum. Self-trained and magpie-like, Griffin had a long-standing, voracious interest in material culture that turned to the ancient world of the Americas after the first of many trips to Mexico in 1963. For the next several years, Griffin routinely bought and drove carloads of objects from there to Princeton, where he added them either to his own collection or to the museum’s, though the distinction between the two would dissolve after his death.<sup>9</sup>

Acquisition became more difficult as the market for Latin American antiquities grew and international pressure mounted to regulate their excavation and international sale.<sup>10</sup> Nonetheless, the meaningful connections Griffin cultivated

9. Forrest D. Colburn, “From Pre-Columbian Artifact to Pre-Columbian Art,” *Record of the Art Museum, Princeton University* 64 (2005), p. 38.

10. The November 1970 UNESCO Convention on the Means of Prohibiting and Preventing the Illicit Import, Export and Transfer of Ownership of Cultural Property provides the standard for archaeological acquisitions according to the American Association of Museum Directors. For the most up-to-date rules, see “Introduction to the Revisions to the 2008 Guidelines on the Acquisition of Archaeological Material and Ancient Art,” American Association of Museum Directors, accessed February 10, 2020, <https://aamd.org/sites/default/files/document/AAMD%20Guidelines%202013.pdf>. However, this standard was not adopted until 2004, and until 1983 the United States did not acknowledge the UNESCO treaty (it remains unratified). In the late 1960s and 1970s, the archaeologist Clemency Coggin penned a series of articles in scholarly and popular outlets that highlighted the market’s role in the surge of looting

with donors helped the collection flourish. Boxes of letters in the university archives document his persuasiveness, as well as his warmth and sense of humor.<sup>11</sup> Griffin's looping script is often accompanied by illustrations drawn from his travels or his imagination. In a self-portrait on a letter to the US artist, Mayanist, and archaeologist Merle Greene Robertson, Griffin pictured himself and his luggage carried on a litter supported by four Indigenous men. His muscular porters are not individualized, mostly faceless, and nude except for loincloths. They are—and the whole vignette is—a primitivist fantasy, replicating a colonial trope unrepresentative of Griffin's actual experiences in Latin America.<sup>12</sup> And yet, Griffin's 1986 polemic for *National Geographic*, entitled "In Defense of the Collector," lends credence to this vision of Indigenous subordination.<sup>13</sup> There he expressed his doubt that archaeological sites and artifacts could be properly stewarded by the descendants of those civilizations in modern Latin American countries.<sup>14</sup>

Griffin was a "man of his time," and he acted in accordance with and on behalf of the museum and the university. Times would seem to have changed. Except that in the museum—an institution defined by its defiance of time—bygone ethical paradigms linger. They present ambivalent legacies with which to reckon each time we learn from or teach with the objects acquired under their auspices.

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predominantly Mayan sites at the time. See Clemency Coggins, "Illicit Traffic of Pre-Columbian Antiquities," *Art Journal* 29, no. 3 (Fall 1969), pp. 94–114; "The Maya Scandal: How Thieves Strip Sites of Past Cultures," *Smithsonian* 1, no. 7 (October 1970), pp. 8–16; and "Archaeology and the Art Market," *Science* 175, no. 4017 (January 1972), pp. 263–66. Griffin evidently shared the concerns over looting, as he collected less from Mexico after 1970 and his papers show that he was frequently consulted to determine forgeries and vouch for the legitimacy of dealers—see *Fakery, Looting [clippings]*, Box 19, Gillett G. Griffin Papers, AC464, Princeton University Archives, Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Princeton University Library. However, Griffin ultimately disagreed with Coggins's criticism of collectors. We are grateful to Bryan R. Just for helping us understand the intricacies of the history of looting in Mesoamerica, the Latin American antiquities market over the past sixty years, and Griffin's position in relation to these issues.

11. Gillett G. Griffin Papers, Princeton University Archives, Department of Special Collections, Princeton University Library.

12. See, for example, Johann Friedrich Waldeck's *The Artist Carried in a Sillero over the Chiapas from Palenque to Ocosingo, Mexico*, ca. 1833, a painting recently acquired by the museum; <https://artmuseum.princeton.edu/collections/objects/104451>.

13. Gillett Griffin, "In Defense of the Collector," *National Geographic* 169, no. 4 (April 1986), pp. 462–65.

14. *Ibid.*, p. 462.



*Book cover, Las Aventuras de Mister Puttison Entre Los Mayas, Víctor D. Montejo, Fundación Yax Te, 1998. Drawing by E. Mari Montejo.*

3. The novel *Las aventuras de Mister Puttison entre los mayas* by Víctor D. Montejo, a Mayan writer and anthropologist, is a caricature of a US anthropologist, Mr. Puttison, visiting the Maya village of Yulwitz. After the protagonist has taken a skull from a sacred cave in order to study it, he is haunted by nightmares that are interpreted by people in the town as punishment from the ancestors, who insist that he return the artifact. Mr. Puttison dismisses their pleas and departs from the village with even more objects from the sacred site. Following this crucial moment, the novel stays with the people of Yulwitz as they mourn the loss of the material memory of their history.

*Our work is often at the other end, at the site to which those objects are taken.*

Princeton's Department of Rare Books and Special Collections houses a number of Mesoamerican objects bearing Indigenous pictographs, including the "Princeton bone," a gift from J. Lionberger Davis, class of 1900. According to the library catalog, it is a femur carved in Zapotec.<sup>15</sup> The bone shows a ritual calendar that likely belongs to Mesoamerica's Late Postclassic period, 1300–1450 CE.<sup>16</sup>

15. *Zapotec Text on Bone*, Princeton Mesoamerican Manuscripts, C0940, Manuscripts Division, Department of Special Collections, Princeton University Library. <https://findingaids.princeton.edu/collections/C0940/c002>.

16. John M. D. Pohl and Javier Urcid Serrano, "A Zapotec Carved Bone," in *Princeton University Library Chronicle* 67, no. 2 (Winter 2006), p. 225.

The “Princeton bone” became part of our conversations during the first “Rehearsals for a Reverse Anthropology.” In broad terms we discussed the gathering of Mesoamerican artifacts by anthropologists and how their knowledge is revered while Indigenous people continue to be ignored and their epistemologies marginalized or erased.<sup>17</sup> In this context, one can’t help but wonder when was the last time a Zapotec person saw the bone or held it in their hand—even as New Jersey is home to a significant Zapotec population.

*When I look again at the picture of the Princeton bone, do you think their ancestors punished the people that brought it here?*

*and what of you Latina?*

*I wonder if you feel the weight of the bone, of all the bones, as this Latina does?*

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17. Our thinking in this direction follows a few key examples: Rebecca Tsosie, “Indigenous Peoples, Anthropology, and the Legacy of Epistemic Injustice,” in *The Routledge Handbook of Epistemic Injustice* (New York: Routledge, Taylor and Francis Group, 2017), pp. 356–69; Gloria Elizabeth Chacón, *Indigenous Cosmolectics: Kab’awil and the Making of Maya and Zapotec Literatures* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2018); and Clara María Sharupi, *Reading in Shuar Language and Spanish*, lecture, Geisel Library University of California, San Diego, April 27, 2016, among others.



## IFTIKHAR DADI

*To decolonize:* a tactical maneuver of drawing upon specific conceptual tools and institutional and aesthetic practices to achieve concrete gains, no matter how small or incremental these might be: simultaneously, a *longue durée* philosophical and ethical imperative towards larger aspirational horizons.

Political decolonization has been among the most important developments of the twentieth century. It thrust major regions of the world into new arrangements that promised political sovereignty, citizenship, and individual and collective development. The latter included the enabling possibility of forging new cultural forms. We can imagine placing these on an axis whose one pole is “resistance,” the other “autonomy.” But no matter how one situates a specific cultural articulation along this line, it is emphatically not in order to evaluate it as a belated echo of hermetically framed metropolitan developments. Rather, one glimpses in them critical, archival, phenomenological, and affective modes that offer premonitions and hopes of a future beyond Eurocentrism and the wreckage wrought by colonialism.

In this brief note, I focus only on the implications of decolonization on twentieth-century art in the developing world, and in the work of minority artists in the West, an area that I have worked on for several years.<sup>1</sup> Modern art has long been global, but its practice was uneven, dependent upon educational opportunities, travel and exchange, patronage, and recognition. In the developing regions (formerly known as the Third World and now the Global South), institutional patronage and recognition have been largely absent. The aftermath of post-World War II decolonization led to intermittent state and international support for modern art. But lack of sustained museum and institutional interest and underdeveloped critical understanding globally have meant that recognition of what artists have already achieved decades ago has lagged far behind. A vicious cycle of “sanctioned ignorance,” especially in Western institutions, has long been at work—artistic work that does not adhere to Eurocentric templates is neither well understood nor written about, which, in turn, encourages institutional reluctance to support such examination.<sup>2</sup>

More fundamental questions can be posed for the modern art museum as an institution—how can it address twentieth-century developments that lie beyond

1. Iftikhar Dadi, *Modernism and the Art of Muslim South Asia* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010); Iftikhar Dadi, “Calligraphic Abstraction,” in *A Companion to Islamic Art and Architecture*, vol. 2, ed. Finbarr Barry Flood and Gülru Necipoğlu (Hoboken: Wiley-Blackwell, 2017), pp. 1292–313.

2. On “sanctioned ignorance,” see Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, “Can the Subaltern Speak?,” in *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, ed. Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1988), p. 291.

“art” proper?—with its already legible morphologies, such as easel painting, that circulate primarily in the art-school-studio-exhibition-gallery-collector circuit. I am thinking of the immense transformations in customary practices as they became imbricated with modernity, such as craft and bodily and performative regimes that entered into capitalist relations or became mediatized;<sup>3</sup> popular sensory and cultural forms that were deeply transformed and amplified via print, radio, and cinema;<sup>4</sup> and the immense realm of informal makeshift practices of making and worlding in urban centers of the Global South.<sup>5</sup> Where do these developments belong in accounts of modern culture—developments that are not small or marginal, I must stress, but most consequential in their scale and their reach? This work is still in its infancy, and much more needs to be done to methodologically question and critically expand museological framings of modern culture in relation to the Global South, as well as to create experimental assemblages to test out new propositions that might begin to address these arenas.<sup>6</sup>

To *decolonize* modern art is thus to draw critical recognition to artistic practices that have already transpired across the twentieth century, to encourage imaginative and discursive projects that address marginalized subjectivities, and to engage with initiatives that seek to reform existing institutions and establish new ones. Primarily due to the sustained efforts by postcolonial, decolonial, feminist, and queer scholars and activists, art history in recent years has become far more open in its methodology and focus;<sup>7</sup> indeed, global modernism has emerged as a vital research area in art history today.<sup>8</sup>

3. See the essays in *Prince Claus Journal* 10a (2003), special issue entitled “The Future Is Handmade: The Survival and Innovation of Crafts,” ed. Iftikhar Dadi.

4. Michael Denning, *Noise Uprising: The Audiopolitics of a World Musical Revolution* (London: Verso, 2015); Christiane Brosius, Sumathi Ramaswamy, and Yousuf Saeed, eds., *Visual Homes, Image Worlds: Essays from Tasveer Ghar, the House of Pictures* (New Delhi: Yoda Press, 2015).

5. For example, the practice of *jugaad* in South Asia. A study of *jugaad* in relation to media is Amit Rai, *Jugaad Time: Ecologies of Everyday Hacking in India* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2019). My brief note on *jugaad* is Iftikhar Dadi, “Jugaad/Jugaar,” *Aroop* 2, no. 1 (December 2017), pp. 114–15.

6. This work is only just beginning. A study that looks at unconventional fixed and mobile sites and practices as potential “museums” in Morocco is Katarzyna Pieprzak, *Imagined Museums: Art and Modernity in Postcolonial Morocco* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010). And M+, the large-scale culture complex under completion in Hong Kong, includes in its mandate the popular culture of the city.

7. The journal *Third Text*, which began in 1987, has served as a key early platform for this work.

8. Recent studies include Ming Tiampo, *Gutai: Decentering Modernism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011); Joan Kee, *Contemporary Korean Art: Tansaekhwaa and the Urgency of Method* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2013); Pedro R. Erber, *Breaching the Frame: The Rise of Contemporary Art in Brazil and Japan* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2015); Sonal Khullar, *Worldly Affiliations: Artistic Practice, National Identity, and Modernism in India, 1930–1990* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2015); Chika Okeke-Agulu, *Postcolonial Modernism: Art and Decolonization in Twentieth-Century Nigeria* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2015); Elizabeth Harney and Ruth B. Phillips, eds. *Mapping Modernisms: Art, Indigeneity, Colonialism* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2018); and Elizabeth W. Giorgis, *Modernist Art in Ethiopia* (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 2019).

Examining the career of the artist Anwar Jalal Shemza (1928–1985) offers sharp insight into institutional and art-historical blockages, but also into artists' persistence in continuing their work. Shemza is exemplary of the “first wave” of UK diaspora artists.<sup>9</sup> Before moving to London in 1956, Shemza was a prolific artist and writer, an active organizer of cultural forums, and a participant in café debates in Lahore, Pakistan. Upon arriving at the Slade for advanced study, he was confronted by frameworks that placed little value on his background or his concerns. Slade students attended Ernst Gombrich's lectures that denied art-historical gravitas to “Islamic art,” undermining Shemza's confidence.<sup>10</sup> After an existential crisis, he nevertheless developed a practice that foregrounded surface as the plane of abstract experimentation.

Throughout his post-Slade career, Shemza continued to investigate the relationship between visual and textual practice in his modernist compositions, referencing especially “Islamic” visual motifs and calligraphic forms. He explored a small number of themes—city walls and architecture, electronic circuit boards, chessmen, the letter *meem* (the first letter in the name of the Prophet Muhammad in Arabic), for example. Although limiting himself to a few subjects, his investigations are technically and aesthetically innovative; he introduced references to fabrics, textiles, and textures into numerous works, which strove to extend the boundary of the orientalist discipline of “Islamic art,” on the one hand, and of modernism on the other. This is an open-ended process arrived at through deep immersion in practice. Its diasporic character is congruent with the theorization of modernism by Raymond Williams, Edward Said, and others as being fashioned from exilic experience. Nevertheless, Shemza and his fellow travelers faced sustained hostility and nonrecognition from British museums, galleries, and critics, which persistently denied them authenticity as modernists, constraining them to work tenaciously under difficult circumstances and to show in marginalized spaces.

A brief look at Shemza's last body of work, the *Roots* series (1977–1985), exemplifies many of these trajectories. The works are made in diverse media, including textiles, but share a common compositional structure—an imagined foliate form on the upper half of the picture, while the lower half depicts root forms rendered in abstracted and illegible shapes suggestive of various Arabic scripts. These works' small and movable scale recalls efforts by other artists who have grappled with exile and diaspora.<sup>11</sup> The *Roots* series creates forms of diasporic

9. Stuart Hall, “Black Diaspora Artists in Britain: Three Moments in Post-war History,” *History Workshop Journal* 61 (Spring 2006), pp. 4–5. On Shemza, see the monograph that includes five critical essays, *Anwar Jalal Shemza*, ed. Ifikhar Dadi (London: Ridinghouse, 2015).

10. “Islamic art” is itself a catachrestic signifier; the concept was decolonized through artistic practice, as I have argued elsewhere. See Ifikhar Dadi, “Introduction: Modernism in South Asian Art,” in *Modernism and the Art of Muslim South Asia* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010).

11. Amy Lyford, “Noguchi, Sculptural Abstraction, and the Politics of Japanese American Internment,” *The Art Bulletin* 85, no.1 (March 2003); T. J. Demos, *The Exiles of Marcel Duchamp* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2007).

experience based on calligraphy and ornamental designs inspired by carpets and textiles. Shemza's family had owned a carpet and military embroidery business in India before the Partition of 1947, so, like many other modernist works, this series embodies memory transformed into a new formal manifestation. But in the Western hierarchy of the arts, carpets and fabrics are considered as decorative or applied art rather than fine art.

"Islamic art" has long been characterized in art-historical scholarship precisely as decorative—"functional," according to Gombrich. The *Roots* series brings the dangerous question of ornament and its relation to modernism to a point of crisis, especially with reference to modernism's foundational yet unacknowledged reliance on the "primitive" and "decorative arts" of the non-Western world. Shemza's root forms are lettrist, suggesting a return no longer to a blood-and-soil filiation but rather to an affiliative textual transnationalism and a deeper legacy of intellectual and aesthetic exchange beyond the bounds of a Western-centered conception of globalization and modernity since 1492 CE.

Examining the work of an artist as decolonial praxis is deeply instructive methodologically. Rather than engaging with decolonization only via argument, discourse, and fact-based historicity, Shemza and others serve as a constant reminder that decolonization is equally an ongoing process with multiple valences and temporal scales. Can we conceive of it as an open-ended journey with no guarantees as to what the next step might be, and where forms of experimentation that resonate as conceptual understanding, with issues of archive and memory, and through sensory transformations, are all at play?

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JANET DEES and RYAN RICE

*Janet Dees:* Following the prompt given by the editors of *October*, I'd like to start by asking, What does the term *decolonize* mean to you and your practice as a curator, educator, and critic working in the field of contemporary art with an expressed commitment to Indigenous artists? Second, I would like to hear your thoughts on the proposition that "de-imperialization is perhaps even more urgent than decolonization."

One of the things that came to my mind was that this kind of construction may be privileging an idea of the postcolonial that's situated in thinking about European colonization in relationship to Africa, Asia, etc. but that doesn't fully take into account the colonial formations we find in the United States and Canada, where colonization is still a current condition, where Indigenous lands are still formally occupied by the settler states. Would you elaborate on this from your position and how you think these terms relate to your work?

*Ryan Rice:* The question raised around the conceptual proposition of decolonization needs to be clarified more precisely and probed further by asking, "What does that really mean to our lived experiences?" So, specifically in relation to my work and my citizenship as Haudenosaunee (Kanienkehaka/Mohawk Nation), decolonization is an aspirational horizon that has subsequently replaced the decades-long conversations brought forth from the indeterminate theories of postcolonialism. The probabilities of decolonization to some extent have been taken over as a truer objective than those of postcolonialism and have been supported within a social-justice framework. However, at this current moment and political climate in North America, Indigenous people are hesitant to celebrate the notion of decolonization because we already know it's another failed project. Simply put, the successful realization of decolonization would mean our *land back*. The reclamation or return of land and legal title is a lofty desire, and a convoluted proposition for the settler nations to comprehend, since colonial occupation is still ongoing. Regarding the suggestion of de-imperialization, I would say that it is a premature proposition in the same way postcolonialism's realizations have remained unaccomplished.

*Dees:* I think de-imperialization also opens up our thinking about how the dominance and influence that are exercised by entities other than nation-states, like multinational corporations, are continuing the kinds of extraction that existed under colonial rule.

*Rice:* Yes, imperialism is capitalist-driven, as you allude to, and complicates how we maneuver and consider moving in the direction of decolonization, because everything—which is to say, colonialism—is tied to capitalism and is based upon land being property and resource, which furthers Indigenous peoples' perpetual fight for land back.

Such complexities and capitalist sensibilities are carried over within the artistic field, which produces visual and material culture as commodities. As a result, Indigenous people have been violently severed from our cultures and our languages, strategically separated from all aspects of our heritage. A significant question related to decolonization should be: How do we recover from this legacy of imperialization and/or colonization that did not allow us to thrive and function within our cultures?

Since the assimilation process stifled our sovereignty, the determination of revitalization has been ongoing and can rightfully address decolonization as a significant Indigenous methodology that has been in place for well over a century.

*Dees:* One of the important points you make is the need for wider recognition and understanding of the fact that the acts of cultural violence you mention were intentional. Programs like Indian residential schools and other mechanisms were put in place with the sole purpose of eradicating Indigenous cultures.

*Rice:* Without being polite, it is a form of genocide. When you talk about the legislation that's been deployed against Indigenous people within nation-states—in Canada and the United States in particular—the juridical objective was and is consistent with the colonial project's ultimate ambition that we no longer exist. We would no longer be on the land and the land would be available for the settler nation to prosper. This settler-colonial occupation is still active and consistent, and so stands in contradiction to the three factors we are discussing; decolonization, postcolonialism, and de-imperialization.

*Dees:* Turning to your practice as a curator and critic over more than two decades, how does the project of decolonization, as you frame it, figure into your work?

*Rice:* I believe the moment an Indigenous curator, artist, or scholar is invited into the white-ruled gallery space, monolithic museum, or institution, there is a form of disruption taking place if that person assumes their sovereign positionality. That said, our rapport with the colonial structures and our often working in contradiction to their pervasive frameworks can be recognized as active decolonization to some extent. Our labor and presence can counteract long-standing prejudices ingrained in the space and radically destabilize the national narrative. It is a monumental task that has the capacity to achieve collaboration and reconciliation if the investment is respectful and ongoing.

Throughout my career, I have been interested in both the Indigenous absence and the Indigenous presence across the arts, education, and cultural spaces and have been active in addressing discrepancies in exhibition practices, scholarship, and representation. Our presence is significant, ironically, in museum collections globally that have left us frozen out in the past and deficient across contemporary spaces until lately. When I enter these spaces, I bring my perspective and my willingness to actively engage with what the

absence and my presence counter. It is important to recognize that the aim to decolonize a museum is to understand and uncover the colonial intentions that supported and anticipated our erasure.

*Dees:* We were just at this panel discussion in which Anishinaabekwe artist Andrea Carlson put it really well. I am paraphrasing, but the idea was that the collecting of Indigenous cultural objects was taking place to remember cultures that were at the same time being actively targeted for genocide.<sup>12</sup>

*Rice:* As Carlson stated, our material culture was pillaged intentionally—like that of other ancient civilizations—in order to study, eulogize, and display us as cultures that no longer exist and to be admired for what we were. In the contemporary space, our representations in collections are few and far between. This conscious audit is an exercise everyone needs to undertake to understand the significant gaps that would need to inform any process of decolonization going forward. I am witness to the major institutional gaps that speak volumes, yet I would argue that collections should represent the moment they realized their biases or shortfalls and not try to “fill in” historical gaps. They should preserve these absences to demonstrate their active participation in periods of cultural rejection.

*Dees:* Almost all of your work has been dedicated to supporting contemporary, living Indigenous artists, from all over the world but primarily in North America. One of the things that you and I have talked about a lot is that because of the way in which mainstream institutions have framed Indigenous peoples as existing in the past and not the present—there are, of course, many Indigenous artists, art historians, and curators who have been actively working—there has been a structural blindness to these efforts. We are now at this moment when it’s “fashionable” to be thinking about Native American art. It’s almost been framed as a rediscovery. But again, there is also this absence: of even the most recent work of the last twenty or thirty years; and of labors like yours and others who have been creating and engaging with this art all along. Can you talk about that?

*Rice:* Mainstream structural blindness is one of the most annoying things to work against because it undermines the consistent labor undertaken across our communities and professional practices.<sup>13</sup> The naive “discovery” of Indigenous art or any attention paid to it has been consistently framed with-

12. “Critical Issues in Indigenous American Art and Visual Culture Roundtable Discussion,” College Art Association Annual Conference, Chicago, February 15, 2020.

13. There are too many to enumerate in a single footnote, but here we are thinking of a few examples of seminal spaces that have contributed to and shaped a contemporary Indigenous art history, such as the American Indian Community House Gallery in New York; the Institute of American Indian Arts/Museum of Contemporary Native Arts in Santa Fe; American Indian Contemporary Arts in San Francisco; C. N. Gorman Museum at UC Davis; Grunt Gallery in Vancouver; Circle Vision and Tribe Inc. in Saskatoon; Woodland Cultural Centre in Six Nations; Urban Shaman in Winnipeg; and the Indigenous Art Centre (formerly the Indian and Inuit Art Centres) in Ottawa, among other art and cultural organizations and collectives.

in popular criticism as something that has just occurred. This impression dismisses ongoing discourse and devalues the art history amassed by Indigenous and non-Indigenous/ally practitioners. It also creates a dichotomy for the past (seen as tradition) to be rediscovered in the present, rather than a platform for creative sustainability to be understood as a continuum, and our contributions within the settler society we participate in to be recognized. In order for this conversation to be elevated in the twenty-first century, settlers need to recognize that their colonial and imperial histories are their limitations. The gaps in the scholarship, in the same fashion of museum collections, exhibitions, etc., have been significantly filled in, validated, and made accessible by Indigenous practitioners, if one has the will and interest to pursue this work.

*Dees:* One of the things that you've spoken about often is that, for lack of a better way of describing it, there have been these parallel art worlds. There is and has been a very robust, prolific, and long-standing world of Indigenous contemporary art that has, as you have said, its own spaces of exhibition and models of circulation that are very deep and very rich, and that have been running parallel alongside the "mainstream" art world. Can you talk about this, and the different pressures that have created this situation?

*Rice:* What needs to be recognized within the decolonization process are the parallel histories that exist, as you say, because a moral or true national narrative requires Indigenous history to be equally situated alongside—and thereby to push against—the restrictions set forth by imperialism. This cultural shift would force reconciliatory actions to take place and truths to be exposed. The insertion of other long-standing narratives and cultural competencies opens an incredible opportunity for justice to occur, not only locally but nationally and globally. Art, as described by Kanienkehaka practitioner Greg Staats, has become a perfect form of communication to address such discrepancies as well as aspirations.<sup>14</sup>

*Dees:* I certainly understand what you mean by insertion. But I'm also of the mind that a complete and entire rethinking is in order. There has been a move where the dominant narrative is maintained and then, for example, four Black artists and one Native artist, etc., are "inserted" and the narrative is considered diversified. I actually think the kind of decolonial model you're outlining is about a complete rethinking, which considers how the structure of the narrative changes if all of these histories are considered equally.

*Rice:* Yes, that is why to decolonize the education system is also really important because it requires the insertion of cultures within an art-history survey that have been marginalized or set aside. To recognize global cultural contributions in the context of texts written from one dominant position makes a lot

14. Audra Simpson, "Renewal in New Works from Greg Staats," exh. brochure (Gatineau: Indian Art Centre, 2000).



of people uncomfortable. Therefore, expanding the scope of criticality and of historical understanding is vital to the decolonial process and speaks to the influence of imperialization as well, because it creates and appropriately supports diversity. It may shift the fraught practice of tokenism in art spaces and help to establish an “equal” playing field.

*Dees:* As a contemporary curator, when you are brought into these mainstream art spaces, do you feel a burden or an expectation to also teach history?

*Rice:* Personally, I see it as an opportunity where we have innovatively managed to insert ourselves effectively within contemporary art practice, because it was the space that was actually more fluid and open for us to enter. As opposed to the closed access to museums (ethnographic, comprehensive, anthropological), the contemporary space made sense for us to address the realities we faced collectively. Instead of spending all of our time disputing/confronting/challenging/defying museums’ limitations, historical dominance, and arrogance to recover our visual and material culture, we have assumed continuity in the present as a process to counter what was consistently denied and discounted within the global settler-colonial narrative specific to North America.

For over fifty years, Indigenous creative practices and research initiated decolonial strategies that offered a visual language to empower change by effectively addressing colonial violence, creating the ability to move forward from a frozen gaze/memory and significant opportunities to express our concerns and desires. Gaining a foothold in and opening up contemporary spaces was a lot easier in Canada because the ecology of the art world’s regionally and nationally funded experimental infrastructure developed through artist-run and cultural centers.<sup>15</sup>

Yet authoritative or comprehensive institutional hierarchies still controlled knowledges and access to them. As recently as twenty years ago, we weren’t accessing or being toured through historical institutional collections in the way we are today. Stifling Western-framed professional credentials and “expertise” in the field impeded our right of entry and relationship to aspects of our legacy held by colonial infrastructures.

Today, we are experiencing a significant shift, with institutional doors being opened of their own volition and nudged by the endless efforts of the Indigenous community (scholars, curators, artists, etc.). This is because of the understanding that through our interaction with collections, we are going to provide an opportunity to offer substantial knowledge that is missing from settler archives. It has become somewhat of a win-win situation to establish a cooperative effort that can be framed as decolonial, and one recognized as a long time coming. This form of curatorial hospitality or proactive welcoming provides the opportunity for us to visit with visual and material culture, to further amplify the understanding of what narratives or tech-

15. See, for example, Ryan Rice, “Presence and Absence Redux: Indian Art in the 1990s,” *RACAR: Revue d’Art Canadienne/Canadian Art Review* 42, no. 2 (2017), pp. 42–53.

nologies an object holds, and how they can be used or have been used and/or how they can be properly cared for. In order for this practice to support tangible decolonization in museums, strategic institutional policy and a sustained sense of obligation are required to avoid these opportunities' becoming just random or one-off instances.

*Dees:* I want to shift to talk specifically about the work that you've done in creating and maintaining space for contemporary Indigenous artistic practice. For example, can you talk about the founding of the Aboriginal Curatorial Collective?

*Rice:* A lack of participation or interest in Indigenous visual culture by the art institution or field breeds limited knowledge, so I have consistently posed the question, "Whose art matters within those structures?" Building upon the limitations of opportunity and inclusion, a discourse developed to advance Indigenous curatorial practice is a significant means to offer a different lens and an authentic voice. The formation of the Aboriginal Curatorial Collective (ACC) circa 2006 addressed the growing curatorial profession and Indigenous scholarship that had to compete with, and at the same time counter, settler authority over Indigenous creative practices and curatorial opportunities. The ACC membership recognized the systemic barriers we faced in mainstream museums and galleries. Even with the increased capacity of Indigenous curators, many were consistently (from the 1990s to now) without employment. Less than a handful were employed in Canada and the US. The ACC progressed from the success and failures of lobbying groups specific to advancing Indigenous arts and artists—such as ATLATL in the US or Society of Canadian Artists of Native Ancestry (SCANA) in the '90s—so now it functions as a national arts service organization to support and sustain professional artistic and curatorial practices. The grass-roots infrastructure and network that drove the formation of the ACC have since become more formalized and are recognized within Canada's provincial and national granting systems.

*Dees:* I would like to pick up on this idea that if you're not participating in the Indigenous contemporary art world then you don't know what Indigenous artists are doing or what the discourse is. I am thinking about the development of our relationship over the last decade as one example. We were both living and working in Santa Fe, New Mexico, at the same time. As an African-American curator coming into that space from New York and the Northeast, I became alerted to the blind spots in my own knowledge as a contemporary curator. With the work you and others were doing at the Institute of American Indian Arts' Museum of Contemporary Native Arts and other forums, I had to confront the fact that my knowledge of contemporary Indigenous artists was limited. I had to ask why that was and to think about the structural ways my own education and networks of circulation blinded me to the ongoing work of contemporary Indigenous artists. I also had a

great opportunity. Santa Fe is where I made the commitment to “showing up” as a process of my own reeducation. I wonder, from your perspective, what are the opportunities, but also the problematics, of someone who is non-Indigenous participating within Indigenous art spaces?

*Rice:* To address and recognize that there are blind spots hindering one’s purview is a major step in the process of decolonization that comes with substantial labor and commitment. To collapse or turn the canon on its head, to address the inequities framed by marginalization or outright dismissal of culture(s), one has to be curious and willing to show up, participate, and push their prejudices aside. The job of a curator is to mediate knowledge and visual culture while addressing a public that needs to be recognized through a shifting lens. This includes local and diverse audiences, participants, and constituents beyond the elite or status quo. Institutional desires to perpetuate world-class status in their missions and mandates that deliberately favor global and/or international trends are another form of maintaining imperialism as an achievement, conceived as prestige, that keeps the circulation of Western art-historical discourse intact.

*Dees:* Is there anything else you want to add?

*Rice:* I would add that, beyond the slow-moving yet critical measures enacted by the NAGPRA (Native American Graves and Protection Act) legislation, the United States is late to the game when it comes to proactive decolonization specific to Indigenous peoples and cultures. While the US mirrors colonial histories of Canada, its recognition of the Indian residential-school legacy, the missing and murdered Indigenous-women epidemic, and a bevy of other issues (land claims, climate crisis) that are trending through a social-justice framework remains invisible within the larger contemporary social and political narrative being performed within the country. In Canada, the residential-school legacy drove the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, its findings, and 94 Calls to Action, recognizing a way forward to address genocide and the inequities perpetuated by whatever terminology or theory that has failed us (postcolonialism, de-imperialization, etc.).<sup>16</sup> In moving the country forward through a reconciliatory process, it is important to critically recognize how this end goal gets consistently positioned/coupled next to the desires to decolonize. Such a cultural shift is necessary to preserve and maintain our sovereignty yet is still volatile in the hierarchies of the arts, education, and culture sectors.

In the end, reconciliation and decolonization are still aspirational projects that require everyone to be committed. This ensures the labor is not left to the Indigenous nations permanently affected by the long-standing subjugation of colonization.

*Dees:* It should be a two-way relationship.

16. [http://trc.ca/assets/pdf/Calls\\_to\\_Action\\_English2.pdf](http://trc.ca/assets/pdf/Calls_to_Action_English2.pdf).

*Rice:* Yes, the relationship to attain decolonization is messy but requires cooperation to work. The emphasis of postcoloniality has been rather unrealistic in our case because it didn't consider the establishment of relationships that are necessary to reconcile when settler-colonizers remain intact and never abandoned their imperial dominance over our lands. The treaty relationship in North America offers a reflective context to understand the extent of nation-to-nation relations as an interpretive map to shape a decolonial path for the future.<sup>17</sup>

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17. On the history of these relationships, see Suzan Shown Harjo, ed., *Nation to Nation: Treaties Between the United States and American Indian Nations* (Washington DC: Smithsonian Institution, 2014).

NITASHA DHILLON

A decolonial turn appears to be underway in the arts and academia, as suggested by this special cluster in *October*. This should be met with caution, given the role that these institutions generally play in maintaining the status quo. Decolonization begins from a different place than the art system or the university, and points beyond them. Attempts to assimilate decolonization to professional business as usual will fail, because decolonization is a de-assimilationist project.

*Decolonize* is an active verb. It is an imperative of doing that breaks the foreclosure of imagination that settler-colonialism, racial capitalism, heteronormative patriarchy, and the nation-state (including in the postcolonial world) have attempted to achieve. Grounded in histories of struggle and everyday forms of resistance both large and small, decolonization is a practice of living that unsettles everything on the journey towards collective liberation. At its core, decolonization requires the return of the land to Indigenous peoples and for the abolition of private property. This in turn demands of us a reorientation of our relation to land, air, and water, as well as to one another. In the process of decolonization, we must work against the institutional structures and professional roles that we are accustomed to reproducing and benefiting from. For me, this has meant constantly working to de-assimilate my own position as an artist, an academic, and a temporary migrant from India working on unceded Lenape territories of Manahatta in so-called New York City. What I share below is grounded in my own singular experience of what is necessarily a collective journey with many people and movements over the past decade.<sup>1</sup>

This process first began for me while making a film in Palestine in 2010, and watching from a distance the Arab uprisings unfolding in Egypt and Tunisia. Upon my return to New York, I became involved in Occupy Wall Street, first as a documentarian and soon as an organizer. There I learned about the powers of direct action and the importance of physical space, but also the weakness of any movement that fails to center the connection of capitalism and debt to settler-colonialism, white supremacy, and empire.<sup>2</sup> This led me to research and organizing in solidarity with debt-bonded South Asian migrant workers in Abu Dhabi. Building on the work of the Gulf Labor Coalition, I was involved with the group Global Ultra-Luxury Faction (GULF), where we learned how to leverage our connections to the art system to amplify struggles across borders and hold cultural institutions accountable.<sup>3</sup> In this same post-Occupy period, I traveled to Ferguson

1. This includes in particular MTL+ Collective, made up of Amin Husain, Amy Weng, Marz Saffore, Kyle Goen, Crystal Hans, Andrew Ross, and Yates McKee. For detailed art-historical accounts of our work, see McKee, *Strike Art: Contemporary Art and the Post-Occupy Condition* (New York: Verso, 2016), and MTL Collective, "From Institutional Critique to Institutional Liberation? A Decolonial Perspective on the Crises of Contemporary Art," *October* 165 (Summer 2018), pp. 192–227.

2. See Sandy Grande, "Accumulation of the Primitive: The Limits of Liberalism and the Politics of Occupy Wall Street," *Settler Colonial Studies* 3, nos. 3–4 (September 2013).

3. See Andrew Ross, ed., *The Gulf: High Culture, Hard Labor* (New York: O/R Books, 2015), especially Paula Chakravarty and Nitasha Dhillon, "Gulf Dreams for Justice: Migrant Workers and New Political Futures."

with a Palestine solidarity contingent, enabling me to see the connection between these struggles against state violence and militarized occupation, and to consider how they might be activated together in the landscape of New York. The Standing Rock encampment brought me back to the centrality of land to life and liberation, providing a lens for understanding the true stakes of anti-gentrification movements in places like Brooklyn and the Bronx, but also those back home in India, including those of Kashmiris under military occupation.<sup>4</sup> These are some of the strands that inform the work of Decolonize This Place, founded in 2016 with the aim of building decolonial solidarities that enable us to move, as the Zapatistas say, “together but separately and in agreement.”

Decolonization has nothing to do with purity, and there is no blueprint. It is a process of experimentation that includes failures which teach us what next steps must be taken. We each start from where we are, which for us means the land we are on and the institutions we are engaged with, including artistic, cultural, and educational institutions. DTP is widely known to readers of *October* because of the actions we have done at museums, challenging the art system and pointing beyond the historical notion of “institutional critique.”<sup>5</sup> We know institutions are not neutral. We wish to see them live up to their stated missions, but we understand that by and large they are obstacles to the collective liberation of communities. As we take action to advance decolonization and transform the function and role of museums, such institutions in the immediate term become training grounds and passageways, places to challenge power and to build relationships, places of struggle and sites of organizing, infrastructures to tap and platforms for collective creativity and transformative spaces. But we have never treated the reform of existing institutions as an end in and of itself. Our sights are set on a broader horizon of self-determination in which specialized institutions like the museum, the university, and indeed academic journals like *October* would no longer be necessary, at least in anything resembling their current forms.

Today, in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, many artists and academics are grieving the loss of the world. For people in power, people whose privilege and security are the norm, the end of this world appears catastrophic. But the Eurocentric world of colonialism and racialized capitalism, the hegemonic mode of being imposed on the planet, has always had at its core the catastrophic loss of worlds. A decolonial lens allows us to see the present moment as part of an unending crisis, and with it the potential for an infinite strike against work itself, reorienting how we relate to time and value, land and space.

A year ago, powerful voices in the art system told us that the demand to remove Warren Kanders from the board of the Whitney would be disastrous for the arts, that it was better to have funding from violent oligarchs than no funding

4. See Nick Estes and Jaskiran Dhillon, eds., *Standing with Standing Rock; Voices from the #NoDapl Movement* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2019).

5. See MTL Collective, “From Institutional Critique to Institutional Liberation?”

at all. We kept hearing, “Why are you targeting Whitney and not another institution?” Now institutions are truly in ruins. The least powerful are being treated as disposable while the wealthy carry on in comfort. Class warfare is out in the open, but we are still being told that *this* is the best we can expect. The worse things get, the more urgent decolonization becomes. But we must prevent it from being reduced to a theoretical trope rather than an operational practice.

The current prominence of decolonization in the artistic landscape of New York City is due to the work of groups like American Indian Community House, Take Back the Bronx, Indigenous Kinship Collective, Chinatown Art Brigade, Comité Boricua en la Diáspora, The People’s Cultural Plan, We Keep Us Safe, Why Accountability, Art Space Sanctuary, Within Our Lifetime • United for Palestine, and South Asia Solidarity Initiative, with whom DTP has collaborated in targeting the Whitney Museum, the Natural History Museum, and the Brooklyn Museum over the past four years. Despite the widespread coverage of these campaigns, an essential part of the story has been consistently repressed: the demand put forth by community groups that institutions participate in the formation of decolonization commissions that would address working conditions, institutional governance, and, crucially, the question of land.<sup>6</sup> Land is central to struggles against displacement and dispossession, beginning with movements for Indigenous sovereignty and Black liberation. Land is the hinge that literally connects the art world to the city itself. It is for exactly this reason that the prospect of a decolonization commission has proved to be the hard limit, the unspeakable core, of contemporary art despite widespread interest in the language of decolonization from scholars, critics, curators, and nonprofits.

Land is essential to imagining how the demand of reparations for enslavement can coexist alongside the demand for restitution of land to Indigenous people. In this regard, we note a growing consensus among Indigenous and Black organizers that “decolonization necessitates abolition.” Abolition includes the treatment of the underlying causes that give rise to the need for borders, bosses, landlords, and prisons. Stefano Harney and Fred Moten explain: “What is, so to speak, the object of abolition? Not so much the abolition of prisons but the abolition of a society that could have prisons, that could have slavery, that could have the wage, and therefore not abolition as the elimination of anything but abolition as the founding of a new society.”<sup>7</sup>

With decolonization, a realignment of power is possible and necessary, but a great deal of learning and unlearning must take place in the process. The decentering of whiteness is crucial to any project of decolonization, but it also involves challenging the discourse of diversity and the politics of identity that are so prevalent in the art system, and which leave the fundamental structures of power intact.

6. See Decolonize This Place, “After Kandlers, Decolonization Is the Way Forward,” *Hyperallergic*, July 30, 2019. <https://hyperallergic.com/511683/decolonize-this-place-after-kanders/>.

7. Fred Moten and Stefano Harney, *The Undercommons: Fugitive Planning and Black Struggle* (Brooklyn: Autonomia, 2010).

We saw this play out with Darren Walker of the Ford Foundation, who claimed that the campaign against Kanders pointed to the need for more “diversity” on museum boards at the same time as he was advocating the construction of fourteen new jails as a “humane” replacement for Rikers Island.<sup>8</sup> When prompted with this information by organizers from the No New Jails coalition, Angela Davis issued a call for protests at the Ford Foundation, echoed by hundreds of Ford fellows themselves in a public letter.<sup>9</sup> When protesters assembled at the Ford headquarters, they were met with a phalanx of NYPD, an object lesson in the historical complicity between the nonprofit-industrial complex and the forces of counterinsurgency.<sup>10</sup>

The connections forged between decolonial and abolitionist groups during the Whitney and Ford campaigns were further developed when the MTA announced that it would place five hundred new cops on the subways to combat fare evasion, an everyday survival tactic by the poor that was disingenuously scapegoated as the cause of the agency’s fiscal crisis. Predictably, this resulted in an uptick of police violence against Black and brown people on the subways, sparking in turn a series of mobilizations against the MTA and the NYPD to demand free transit, cops off the subway, and full accessibility. Utilizing a diversity of tactics including mass fare evasion, this formation organized under the banner of FTP, variously translated as Fuck the Police and Free the People.<sup>11</sup> These actions involved a diversity of aesthetics as well, as expressed in the various styles of masks worn by demonstrators in the street, provoking the NYPD to invoke archaic anti-masking statutes when snatching people during marches.

In the first months of 2020, FTP was modulating its energy, articulating FTP as not only the negation of police but also Feed the People. This was the horizon of the movement landscape when the coronavirus struck the city. As Regan de Loggans of Indigenous Kinship Collective notes, mutual aid is an everyday practice of survival and care in Black and Indigenous communities, and we should be wary of the “discovery” of mutual aid by white-dominated groups and institutions in the midst of the crisis, including those in the orbit of academia.<sup>12</sup>

Decolonization involves a recognition that academia is not the leading edge of knowledge. The knowledges that enable humanity to survive and thrive come

8. Darren Walker, “Museums Need to Step into the Future,” *The New York Times*, July 26, 2019.

9. Ruth McCambridge, “Over 200 Ford Fellows Call Out Ford Foundation President for Stance on Prisons,” *Nonprofit Quarterly*, September 30, 2019.

10. See Hakim Bishara, “‘If They Built It They Will Fill It’: Prison Abolitionists Protest Outside the Ford Foundation,” *Hyperallergic*, September 27, 2019. Also see Shellyne Rodriguez’s discussion of the role of the Ford Foundation in attempting to pacify Black movements during the 1960s, which she connects in turn to the ideology of social-practice art and its role in the gentrification of the Bronx. See “How the Bronx Was Branded,” *The New Inquiry*, December 12, 2018.

11. See MTL, “The Art of Escalation: Becoming Ungovernable on a Day of City-Wide Transit Action,” *Hyperallergic*, January 31, 2020, and Nick Pinto, “Protests Against Subway Policing Snarl Grand Central: ‘This Is About Class War,’” *Gothamist*, February 1, 2020.

12. Regan de Loggans, “Let’s Talk Mutual Aid,” [indigenoumutualaid.org](http://indigenoumutualaid.org), April 25, 2020.



from below, from the movements, from the displaced and the dispossessed. Here knowledge production shifts from the model of the individual scholar extracting data from the world, moving instead to a collectivized form of research that aims to rearrange desires and rechannel resources from the university or art system (space, printing, money, land) into supporting the work of movements. Decolonization requires us all, but it can only advance if we are willing to connect thinking to doing in ways that push us beyond our comfort zones. How will those art-world actors who have shown interest in decolonization turn this intellectual interest into a lasting material commitment? What are people willing to share? What are they willing to give up? What side will they be on as conditions worsen and movements seize the opportunity presented by the crisis?

As cultural and educational institutions enact further cuts and attempt to justify a new normal of austerity, they will undoubtedly be sites of intensifying struggle. But these struggles will also be porous with educational, artistic, and organizing activities occurring outside formal institutions in the streets and in autonomous movement spaces. Think of decolonial schools for all ages, media labs and garden beds, carpentry classes and community energy systems, art-history classes and poetry workshops, film screenings and self-defense trainings, no-cop zones and sanctuary spaces, all disarticulated from the time of the commodity, of work, and of professional specialization. These are forms of life that are already practiced as a matter of resistance and survival around the world. But physical spaces provide them with localized base camps and hubs of power where the uprisings of the future can germinate and blossom forth in a thousand ways. Such spaces can embody the shifting of relations and rearrangement of desires required for decolonization, cultivating a politics of life, land, and liberation amongst the ruins of empire.

NITASHA DHILLON joins research, aesthetics, organizing, and action as part of MTL Collective and its subsidiary groups.

HANNAH FELDMAN

*This meditation is itself untimely, because it seeks to understand as an illness, a disability, and a defect something which this epoch is quite rightly proud of, its historical culture.*

—Friedrich Nietzsche, *Untimely Meditations*, 1874

Dear David, Hal, Huey, and Pam,

Until just now, I was not quite certain I wanted to respond to your thoughtful invitation. Or, perhaps, that I could. I guess I'm still not, not really. But maybe that's a good place to start.

As it was first articulated, at least in the arena with which, as an art historian, I am most preoccupied, the mandate to “decolonize” the institution, and specifically the institution that is “History,” meant not just telling a different story from a different point of view but yielding to different epistemologies, distinctions, references, and trajectories from which to render that same or even a different story. This, at least, is the historiographic project of the militant Algerian liberationist Mohamed Chérif Sahli's 1965 *Décoloniser l'histoire: Introduction à l'histoire du Maghreb*. In a text I've described to one of you, a text about what some want to call “Algerian abstraction,” I pointed out that, from the get-go, the syntactical parallelism of the book's title floats the idea that to decolonize history *is* to introduce the Maghreb. The inverted formula is, even more significantly, also true, and hence the actual emergence of a territorial entity is made to align with the abstract frame of its historiographic traditions. For the history of the former to be introduced, the latter must be stripped of its colonial formations, including those that give priority to the intrusion and exclusion of the colonial power.<sup>1</sup> It is in this tradition and the temporal moment from which it emerged that I want to position the project of “decolonization” with regards to my own scholarship, although I do not use that term to describe what I do.

In the work I have done before now, I addressed decolonization and the decolonization of representation as situated problems insofar as they pertained specifically to the production of art, urban space, and aesthetic theory during a time in which decolonization was undoing one nation—the expanded territory of France—precisely as it was paving the way to a new one, Algeria. I did so not to upend French art, but rather with an eye to understanding *how* the shunning of that particular context came to structure the field of modern art history and the premises about representation—documentary, theoretical, aesthetic, and political—upon which it based its claims to criticality. I did not want to offer a correc-

1. Footnotes feel out of place in a letter, but I'm talking about this: “Abstract Anxieties and Algerian Abstraction,” in *Taking Shape: Abstraction from the Arab World, 1950s–1980s*, ed. Suheyla Takesh and Lynn Gumpert (New York: Grey Art Gallery, New York University, 2020), p. 87.

tive; I wanted to unravel what I saw as the problem, which is to say the perpetual blindness that periodization, categorization, and theorization can produce in normalizing, to the point of opacity, the historical elisions that result when we decide what and whose histories and events determine universal histories and their moments of rupture. To have “decolonized” the art history about which I was writing in a strategy parallel to the propositions of today’s politics—i.e., stripping museums of their most visibly odious and arguably colonizing board members, moving Faith Ringgold’s *American People Series #20: Die* to stare back at Picasso’s *Desmoiselles d’Avignon*, or hanging (temporarily) a Charles Hossein Zenderoudi instead of an agreed-upon Western modern masterpiece<sup>2</sup>—would only have furthered the logic I wanted to undo. It would have turned the decolonization the Algerians fought for into an opportunity for yet one more instance of Western domestication. Adding more voices, as my friend and anthropologist Kirsten Scheid reminds me, to “ennoble the natives” is always also an effort to prove that the “we” that is doing the adding was always noble in its own ways, and now newly noble because it means so damn well. It naturalizes as universal the cultural desiderata that issue from distinctly European investments, aesthetics, and the institutions that perpetuate them, institutions like our own. We see this now all the time in the burgeoning canon of books about the “global modern” as it sits in any number of places once considered (in the academy) as fertile territory for anthropologists but not art historians.

The appropriation of the rhetoric of “decolonization” that now issues from within—we cannot pretend we are without—a dominant, financialized, and still largely elite set of institutions, ever straining to prove their political relevance as per what now seems the hegemonic mandate to “decolonize this” and “this” and “this,” makes my skin crawl. It is not only metaphorical, as Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang reminded us in their seminal article eight years ago already; it is misguided.<sup>3</sup> The museum and related institutions, for example, are not, nor were they ever, colonized. No. They are colonizers, or least the tools—and powerful ones at that—of a historical colonial project that now perpetuates the homogenization built into the neo-imperial corporate logic of global finance. In much (but maybe I should emphasize not all) of the parlance about decolonizing curation, collecting practices, curriculum, and art-historical surveys, everything becomes the same: histories flattened, canons expanded—expansionism being one of the key components of colonial conquest—to produce an ever-multiplying roster of global “isms” always

2. Whereas much has been written about the MoMA permanent-collection rehang, much less attention has been given to the openly politically motivated temporary rehang of several pieces after the Executive Order of January 27, 2017, commonly referred to as the “travel ban.” I hope you will read Kirsten Scheid’s analysis about the logic of substitution and blindness demonstrated in this curatorial “correction” in *H-AMCA* (August 2017), <https://networks.h-net.org/node/3444/reviews/192655/scheid-museum-modern-art-installation-following-executive-order>

3. Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang, “Decolonization Is Not a Metaphor,” *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education & Society* vol. 1, no. 1 (2012), pp. 1–40.

codified by the same categories and forms invented by the people who did not recognize those “global” places as part of their “art” worlds in the first place, a position that was undergirded by models of history and narrative that reproduced the logic of progress and amelioration used to justify (and normalize) conquest of large parts of the world. We end up with variations on the same art in places that have different histories—different *colonial* histories—as we tell them from the vantage point that categorizes temporalities according to the resolved logic of the “post.” If we—by which I mean a population I will shorthand as, for example, the regular readers of this journal, or well-intentioned curators, or even some of the most earnest activists—“decolonize” the museum or the academy by expansion, adjustment, correction, boilerplate acknowledgment, or reform, then we enable, if not also author by proxy, another developmental narrative and prepare for yet another newly rewritten future postcolonialism that reaffirms the institution’s power and is, ironically, equally available to the suddenly forever-contemporaneous time of the “global.”

This seems at the heart of the complex nugget that your questions about where “decolonization” fits in my practice force me to remember: the 1960s anti-colonial movements, their historical appropriation in contemporary rhetorical strategies, neo-imperial (corporate) global capitalism, and the rise of scholarly interest in those regions that were once colonized and hence written out of the histories of art and culture that the West wrote (unless they were thought to evidence the improvements colonization brought). I would say the latter three are more or less the same: appropriation, expansion, and the institutional extractive monetization of culture. (We know our work is also fully embedded in the market, be it artistic, educational, or attached to the strange and small fame academics sometimes enjoy, even if only amongst themselves.) Forms are made regular and categories established so we can make parallels between modern here and there without ever wondering what *modern* means when it is taken out of a trajectory of historical evolution and progress, a trajectory that accords with Western and, in fact, colonial time and telling. To return to Sahli, history-writing, along with the language and linear temporalities that enable it, is, I think, both the progenitor of colonial thought and a great place to start thinking about why we can’t escape it by doing what (and where) I am doing here. Perhaps better would be to just trash it altogether.

Chronologies, proper names, and even the appropriate grammar that communicates them according to a set of tenses and future-oriented conditionals (“if . . . then”); these are all part of linear time. They are also what Jacques Derrida describes—in a text that I, very much out of fashion in my own time, constantly return to—as “codes we cast like nets over time and space in order to reduce or master differences, to arrest them, to determine them.”<sup>4</sup> But these

4. See Derrida’s scathing critique of the ideology of the American political regime, “The Time Is Out of Joint,” in *Deconstruction Is/In America: A New Sense of the Political*, ed. Anselm Haverkamp (New York: New York University Press, 1995), p. 19.

codes—these dates—are also *contre temps* and therefore *contretemps*, since they mean to fix time as still and universal. As such, they always exist in self-disagreement, out of and against the time they mean to circumscribe, since we know time moves, even if we have to admit we don't know which way. I now want to find a way in my writing to work in or perhaps inhabit the logic and space of this *contre temps*, but also the *contretemps*—which is both a dispute and disagreement but also an inopportune or embarrassing situation—it produces, telling without really narrating, explaining without certifying, knowing but being equally open to the possibility of not knowing at all: finding different epistemologies, if not also ontologies, to structure the ways a historian thinks she knows what history is. This might be a small project, and I'm not saying this should be everyone's work. But it is mine, and it means changing the syntax in which I write, the structures in which I do so, the logics by which I develop my arguments, and the temporalities in which I situate the histories that I have to always acknowledge I have only imagined and only really can. Even that I write this as a letter, and so acknowledge the difference between us and the temporal lag between my writing, your receiving, and then a larger audience of quasi-strangers almost eavesdropping, matters to me.

I don't want to decolonize the museum or the university or—good grief, no—the art world. This does not mean I do not stand behind the good work with regards to museum stewardship, administration, diversification, and inclusion that many have been doing recently. I applaud the artists and activists who labored to—and did—force Warren Kanders's resignation from the board of the Whitney. But I won't cede the point that this is what “decolonizing” is for fear of actually making that word an imperializing tool, one that continues the museum's traditional work: business as usual, just a little bit better. One arms manufacturer is easily replaced by an oil magnate, or by a CEO of a pharmaceutical company, or even a well-intentioned philanthropist whose family fortune was built on the backs of slaves just over a century ago. None of these figures is able to confront or reimagine what art does; their concerns are, of course, elsewhere. We know all this. It is an old story, and each time we give into it again we reinvest in the idea that it is those at the top who matter, that authority is legitimate. The same is true when we celebrate a new and more inclusive canon, because it always adheres to the authority of those who wrote the idea of the canon in the first place and did so according to their own priorities, buttressed by their own economic and political power (for which art has always been so dear).

I would rather see the institution—built for colonial and exploitative regimes—itsself colonized as it has colonized so many others, makers and viewers alike, all of whose differences it consistently tries to manage and discipline. I would like to see it invaded, devoured, and spat out, overtaken by different epistemologies, temporalities, languages, systems of governance, affects, architectures, and soils. I would like to see it rendered a thing amongst others, and let it live like that without the imposition of presentist politics, which risk cleansing it of all that it has done and will still do if we let it. I can't do all that. So perhaps what I can do,

in my scholarship, is ignore it: not its problems, but its rules, its grammars and lexicons (crucial cues taken here from Hortense Spillers and Brent Hayes Edwards about language and time), as well as its ways of disciplining and codifying, precisely as a way to unsettle its powers. I am trying to retrain my own mind in order to write against the structures that uphold my discipline: to be right, to adhere to a logical way of thinking that has always only allowed us to confirm what we know even if now we can know it about a new elsewhere. Ten years ago, I ran around screaming to whoever would listen, because it seemed no one would: History happened! I know that this is of course true, but it is also true that History was also imagined, imagined and imposed in the language and dreams of those who have codified and institutionalized it, which is not to say necessarily all of those who experienced it or cognized it differently.

How, then, to dream otherwise? To tell stories about what “actually” happened without making them properly Historical stories, by which I don’t mean things that happened in the (near) past but by which I do mean stories that were properly and permanently colonized by systems of thought that are of the West, systems that privilege and prioritize the ostensible rationality of presumably secular critique, categorization, teleological time, and narrative unfolding. Scholars like Vanessa Ogle have pointed out that what we commonly assume to be historical time, linear time (and most art historiography assumes time is linear—just as most colonialism depended on a linearity that positioned the colonized as backwards, behind—periodizable, ruptured according to epistemic shifts we define as such), is Western time, invented by nineteenth-century colonial authorities interested in regulating trade and commerce, the same authorities that invented the nation-state and the museum. Standardized time and the histories it enabled have perhaps always been the enemy, or at least the enemy’s tool. Walter Benjamin reminds us, after all, that in the July Revolution of 1830, the first thing the assembled masses did was shoot the clocks. Mohamed Chérif Sahli might also have encouraged them to shoot the history books these same clocks authorized.

With thanks for giving me reason to pause and to imagine starting, again,

Hannah

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## JOSH T. FRANCO

I struggle to recall feeling earnest feelings about the term *decolonize*. I know that at one point I did. I still think the prominent positioning of its cognate in the title of my dissertation is appropriate: “Marfa, Marfa: Minimalism, Rasquachismo, and Questioning ‘Decolonial Aesthetics’ in Far West Texas.”<sup>1</sup> I do not at all regret the years of graduate school spent speaking and unraveling this term alone and in quite intense conversations. I am certainly not ashamed that my name is associated with the term to a degree that I receive invitations such as this one. A questionnaire where I can revisit a notion that shaped my life? Sure.

However, as I have witnessed *decolonize* become a graphic brand for massing in streets and selling cookbooks, I find myself less and less invested. Less and less interested. (I am intensely skeptical of all large groups, whatever their politics.) I am moving on. I did not realize I was doing so until presented this opportunity to reflect. I dig into my own records to identify possible reasons for the distance from the term I now feel. I find a press clipping from the *Austin American-Statesman*: the review of *MARFITA*, the collaborative installation and performance work which I would ultimately unpack in the form of a dissertation after its culmination and premiere in 2011 (work began with my collaborators Natalie Goodnow, Alison Kuo, and Joshua Saunders in 2009). The penultimate line of critic Jeanne Claire van Ryzin’s review reads: “‘Marfita’ troubles the boundary between two distinct groups that treasure Marfa with the same depth of reverence.”<sup>2</sup> This is from the time I felt enthusiasm for *decolonize* as a discourse. This is when I was convinced it was about precisely this: “troubling boundaries.” Now I witness *decolonize* marking clear lines between activists and authority figures tensely facing off in museum lobbies. Which side of the banner do you stand on?

Clear lines are utterly unconvincing tools to me if the goal includes transformation of an unsatisfying reality. I continue to pursue the troubling of boundaries, while *decolonize* has seemingly been co-opted for the opposite purpose on a large scale. The crowds can have it. Additional years as an art historian working closely with primary sources has only confirmed that boundaries are fantasies and actual lives are indelibly networked and folded through and through. This experience is the grain of salt that sits on my tongue as I often hear myself speak about categories such as *Chicanx art* or *Minimalism*. I am attentive to this grain, maintaining and growing it until it forces my tongue to find the different language I truly desire. Perhaps it will cut off my languaging altogether. Academic terminologies and secondary textbooks might be considered fantasies as well. If I can use the word in earnest one last time, let me think this: A *decolonized* education of the future will rely exclusively on primary sources. It will trust children with artists’

1. Josh T. Franco, “Marfa, Marfa: Minimalism, Rasquachismo, and Questioning ‘Decolonial Aesthetics’ in Far West Texas” (PhD diss., Binghamton University, 2016).

2. <https://www.austin360.com/entertainment/arts—theater/little-take-marfa-culture-clash/5aoCYkWKyLCBcJA0yv1eUI/>.

love letters and sales records, and undergraduates with budget proposals and preparatory cartoons for long-gone murals. I imagine a radically intimate future for the curious, where publishing houses are artifacts, while archives are as available as city parks. There will be no secrets.

I do sense that some element of *decolonize* that captured me over a decade ago, when I was brought into the Modernity/Coloniality/Decoloniality group by the brilliant philosopher María Lugones, still remains.<sup>3</sup> But it has little to do with large social movements. For me, the impetus for remaining invested in *decolonizing* has everything to do with intimacies and quiet, barely legible body-to-body encounters.

With all of this in mind, I agonized over this questionnaire, because no desire wells up in me to think about how *de-imperialization* might be a less Eurocentric term, or how *decolonize* might offer a new tool to reconfigure modernisms (though I certainly perform the latter in much of my scholarly work). The tool may have already served its purpose and entered obsolescence. The only spark comes when I think about how my relationship with Lugones's astounding thinking and body of writing and the MCD group led me to dance, and to one particular set of experiences. *Decoloniality* opened my path to disobedience to what bothers me most about colonial scripts and modes of being: how they attempt (and constantly succeed) in placing controls on what I do as a body. So I reflect on this one dance-based project, *Cultivo de babosas / Slugs' Garden*. It is in the Slugs' Garden that I feel most unscripted as a body, which I equate with accomplishing decolonization.

In 2013, I was invited to advise on *Cultivo de babosas* by its creator, the Ecuadorian, Brussels-based professional dancer Fabián Barba. Barba and I had met the year prior at Decolonial Summer School (convened annually by Walter Mignolo and Rolando Vazquez in the Netherlands). Decolonizing was a central aspect of our relationship from the beginning. We bonded immediately. We are both older than most of the participating students but younger than the faculty, which also included Lugones that year. We also both operate as ontological borders that speak to one another: him, an Ecuadorian experiencing the friction of receiving classical and contemporary dance training in the heart of Europe, and me, a Chicano from the West Texas–Mexico border experiencing the discipline of art history in the northeastern United States.<sup>4</sup> I was recruited to the project as an art historian and dramaturge of

3. María Lugones, *Pilgrimages/Peregrinajes: Theorizing Coalition Against Multiple Oppressions* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 2003). This book changed my life. It was presented to me by philosopher Alejandro de Acosta, whose classes I took as an undergraduate at Southwestern University in Georgetown, Texas. De Acosta was himself a graduate student of Lugones's.

4. Barba describing our first encounter in the context of Decolonial Summer School: "When I met María Lugones, I met a person first, a person whose voice was present later that summer when I read her *Pilgrimages/Peregrinajes*, a book that I'm sure won't leave my thinking untouched. When I met you and you told me the story of *Marfita*, I was just amazed because even though our life experiences are quite distinct, I could somehow recognize in your story something like my dislocation working in Brussels, trying to make sense of two different and seemingly unrelated worlds. Then I also remember



sorts. I traveled to Europe that first summer to offer the dancers historical background on art therapy and performance art between rehearsals. But the unscripting began almost immediately. It was apparent to all that I could not share the space without also participating in the dance. Thus, I became a slug. I followed the instructions that we would later codify to offer newcomers when the performance was made public at different performance-art festivals in 2014 and 2017:

*To become a slug, lie down on the floor  
And close your eyes. Through the whole  
time, you'll try to dissolve your weight  
down to the floor.  
Keeping your eyes closed, you can start  
a tactile exploration of your environment.  
Do not focus on trying to recognize,  
Visualize, or name that which  
your touch will encounter.  
Let those names, images and ideas dissolve.  
Focus instead on the textures, the  
temperature and the weight or  
resistance of the bodies/objects that  
come across your way.  
Try not to prioritize your hands,  
all surfaces are open to tactile exploration.  
You can also direct your attention to  
other parts of your body which are  
already in contact with something:  
touching is also being touched.  
The sensing is the doing.  
You're creating your own experience;  
do not worry about doing this exercise  
right. If you have questions or doubts,  
let them dissolve.<sup>5</sup>*

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talking with Rolando Vazquez in María's hotel room, telling him about my struggles to establish a relation with past and history that wouldn't deny my former experience as a dancer in Quito, and he saying with his kind smile 'so funny, I've been writing about it for a while now and here you come with this,' then of course I got to read what he was writing and that brought into my practice a perspective I haven't managed to articulate, a perspective that carries the kindness of his smile, a kindness that dissolves the discomfort that often accompanies the word 'colonialism' when it appears in conversation with my colleagues in Brussels. Then there's also the sensation of understanding something of the political commitment of Walter and his project of decolonizing epistemology, a political project that involves him fully as a person. So yes, I think I found the company I was looking for. A very warm company. And yet a very disturbing company for the questions it raised. For example, what does it imply to 'decolonize aesthetics'? We certainly didn't have the time to get to the bottom of that." Fabian Barba in conversation with Josh T. Franco, "Interview: Fabian Barba," *zingmagazine*, February 2013, <http://www.zingmagazine.com/drupal/node/35720>.

5. Fabian Barba, excerpt from handout provided to participants in *Cultivo de babosas / Slugs' Garden* during the Studio Sessions organized by WorkspaceBrussels, Brussels, 2014.

Besides this script that undoes itself as such a thing, the other key elements of the work are the architecture, the Slug Farmer, and time. The Slugs' Garden is enclosed by sheets of fabric hanging on a simple wooden armature. Its unfurnished interior contains low mountains and subtle valleys of additional fabrics and soft objects. Performance shifts are three hours at minimum. As a mass of slugs perform, interweaving amongst these materials and their own bodies, the landscape transforms as well. The Farmer, typically Barba, is both an attentive cultivator and a guardian inhabitant. From this point, words are useless . . . I cannot suggest that you *imagine* what it is like to be a mass of deliberate, gentle, intelligent matter. There is no *image* to this art form. You just have to do it. And this is where I sense the decolonization in my own body begin. There is no inscribed banner to dictate my bodily politics according to a false and limited choice. This is why I remain compelled by the Garden and convinced of its decolonizing power; it forced an art historian to lose sight, to lose hold of the binary between perceiver and perceived, a binary fundamental to coloniality. Barba described this binary as he experiences it in the contemporary dance world in one of our conversations:

Reading texts on decoloniality and postcolonial theory, I became familiar with the critique of unembodied, abstract Reason and Knowledge. That is, the detachment or abstraction of the thinking subject from the situation s/he studies, as if s/he was placed in a privileged, atemporal, out-of-space point of view. . . . Certainly, my work focuses strongly in the relation between a dance practice and the cultural context in which it is produced. In a way, *contemporary dance* could be understood to be a very abstract artistic practice, detached from any specific location. Even if it tells a story or depicts characters, *contemporary dance* might be understood as a "universal language," as if thanks to its independency from spoken language, everyone could access it. If *contemporary dance* would be indeed a universal language, it wouldn't be attached to a region nor to a community of practitioners nor to a specific history; everyone could do it, everybody could join either as a dancer or as a spectator. And this is not false: Anyone can join, but at the price of inscribing oneself into a specific dance tradition. A dance tradition that is historically and geographically specific. *Contemporary dance* is not a universal practice, though it might pretend it is.<sup>6</sup>

Art history as a discipline has certainly committed the same epistemological crime of claiming (imposing) a-cultural objectivity and universality on its subjects, students, and practitioners. Of course, we have been working against this for a while now, occasionally in the pages of this very publication.

Toward decolonizing his field, Barba conceived of *Cultivo de babosas* as a space for de-privileging sight as the primary mode available to audiences experiencing the medium of dance. There is no audience in the Slugs' Garden. If you

6. Fabian Barba in conversation with Josh T. Franco, "Interview: Fabian Barba."

enter, you participate. This was his way around that tired so-called decolonial tactic of flipping the script. (In this case, that might mean giving a classical-dance venue in Brussels or Paris over to practitioners of syncretic Andean dance from Ecuador.) Barba understands that decolonial tactics such as these simply illuminate the porous line between innocuous novelty and political statement. In the same interview, Barba states: “It’s the relation between these different dance traditions that interests me, dance traditions that are practiced in very specific cultural contexts. They’re not artistic practices that dance freely in the air, nor that are despotically rooted to a nationalistic soil.” The distinction I am driving at resides in the “nor.” Script flipping leaves the script intact. *Cultivo de babosas* is something else. In the Garden, *the sensing is the doing*; I, for one, only ever feel so-called *decolonized* when I am a slug.

JOSH T. FRANCO is an artist and art historian from West Texas.

## DAVID GARNEAU

Most Canadians and Americans believe they live in postcolonial countries, independent since 1867 and 1776, respectively. However, First Nations, Inuit, Métis, and American Indians living in these same territories remain under imperial control. Their lands are occupied, not by Britain but by Canada and the United States. There is a growing drive to decolonize art exhibitions, museums, universities, and most everything else. If these efforts are predicated on ideas and practices from states where imperialists have actually left, they must be retooled to be meaningful in places where settlers have no such plans. This work must also be informed by Native worldviews, history, local experience, contemporary needs, desires, and agency. Settler decolonialism must center the Indigenous, must become non-colonial, if it is to be useful for Native people.

Mid-twentieth-century decolonization was revolutionary. Colonized majorities revolted against imperial minorities and regained control of their territories. Because Native populations in Northern Turtle Island are small, settler-state overthrow is unlikely. Besides, since contact, through treaties and into the present, First Nations have agreed to share the land. The agreement being, as symbolized by the Two-Row Wampum treaties, both parties will keep to their own spaces, not interfere with each other's governance, and respect the environment. These covenants have been violently disrespected. The need for change is urgent. Modernist decolonization was premised on Enlightenment models of time, of history as a linear unfolding of evolutionary progress. In the Native worldview, time is cyclical. There are daily, yearly, and life cycles. Linear time runs from yesterday to tomorrow. In Native experience, the past, present, and future flow through each other. As a result, Indigenous non-colonial action is less concerned with imagining utopias than on restoring pre-contact life ways and adapting them to present realities. Resuscitating non-colonial epistemologies and ontologies is essential, not only to Native continuance but to the survival of us all. These ways of knowing and being are more sustainable than the modes that led to our present era of environmental and ethical calamity.

For some Great Plains Elders, to decolonize is to return to pre-contact conditions. They prophesize a great vastation in which settlers and assimilated Natives are removed by extra-natural forces. Survivors restore harmony with their environment and themselves. More pragmatic folks concede that occupation is permanent and struggle to establish or maintain separatist sovereign nations within settler states. The remainder negotiate degrees of assimilation, resistance, and treaty. We participate in the dominant culture but press to exorcise colonialism's more pernicious institutions: racism, imperialism, patriarchy, predatory capitalism, and environmental degradation. In each case, Indigenous non-colonial futurisms feature a return to collective sovereignty and the restoration of natural law.

Any form of decolonization that is not premised on the return of Indigenous lands, restitution, political and cultural sovereignty, and the restoration of natural

law continues the colonial project. While non-Native allies and assimilated Natives can participate in non-colonial action, deep modes are practically inconceivable because they seem to require the surrender of unearned privilege and a degree of self-erasure and re-formation. Most choose instead to perform settler decolonialism. When deployed by non-Native, non-Black, and non-Brown people, *decolonize* signifies a recognition that one's privilege is based on the exploitation and suffering of racialized humans and other than human beings. The word announces a desire for release through atonement, reconciliation, and reform. Settler decolonialism centers the settler subject. It endeavors to tease colonial attitudes from settler minds while leaving the body intact on First Nations territories. It is beyond the settler-colonial imaginary to picture a future in these places without themselves present and centered. Settler decolonialism's preference is for personal and institutional reform, and its mode is primarily rhetorical and visual. Settler-decolonial institutions may include Indigenous bodies and teachings that align with, or that challenge but do not fundamentally disturb, settler interests. Settler decolonialism focuses on education, awareness, protest, and any other mode of display that centers white bodies (all the brighter when contrasted with of-color foils) and assures white dominance.

What does *decolonize* mean for Indigenous contemporary art and curation? Art, in the sense of special, human-made things removed from daily life and, in most cases, touch and placed in separate rooms for ocular contemplation, is a non-Native concept. Art is colonial when it apprehends traditional cultural objects never intended for that discourse and its institutions. Works of culture have their meanings in the societies, territories, and in proximity to the bodies that produce and use them. Abducted by a colonial art context, their meanings are displaced by the meanings of curators and consumers. Most contemporary Native creative production does not fit into this traditional, separatist category. Since contact, First Peoples have produced trade goods, things that reflect their culture but correspond with the needs of their new consumers. Aboriginal art is Native-produced things primarily intended for non-Native consumption, managed by non-Native people in non-Native spaces.

A third, emerging category of Native aesthetic production is Indigenous contemporary art. There are three varieties. "Indigenous" artists are typically urban, university-trained folks who employ "Western" aesthetic forms and styles to either critique anti-Indigenous racism or tell counter-colonial stories; they revive traditional forms to carry contemporary content from an Indigenous point of view; or they engage both traditional and dominant cultures to inform syncretic art forms. While most of this work is exhibited in non-Native spaces by non-Native curators, this is changing. The most significant feature of Indigenous contemporary art is that these folks understand themselves as not only belonging to a particular tribe and location, or to a larger Aboriginal polity within a colonial nation-state, but as allied with other Indigenous peoples around the world. This consciousness has led to the formation of an Indigenous art world that circulates in, through, and apart from the dominant art worlds. It is an international network of artists, curators,



*David Garneau.*  
*Academic Activism.*  
*2020.*

and critical art writers primarily from former British, English-speaking colonies (Canada, the United States, Australia, and New Zealand), but growing to include Sami and First Peoples throughout Asia, Africa, and South and Central America. The Indigenous contemporary-art world includes Indigenous-only exhibitions and issues in art magazines, artistic and curatorial collectives, conferences and other gatherings, informal and online exchanges. While traditional cultural production leans toward separatism, and Aboriginal art is an epiphenomenon of colonialism, Indigenous art is the creation of Sovereign Indigenous display territories (e.g., art displays, powwow displays, etc.).

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RENÉE GREEN and IMAN ISSA

*Renée Green:* I'm trying to think about the term *decolonize* in terms of how I've encountered it empirically within the past several years—for example, in New York in 2016 when there were banners in the former Artists Space at 55 Walker Street that read DECOLONIZE THIS PLACE. Since then more has happened, particularly in art and educational institutions. I want to think about the emergence of this term and what it has meant through time, historically and geographically. Thinking about the term in relation to long histories changes how it may be considered. It isn't a recent notion, yet it's currently being used in ways that suggest a different valence. And perhaps for some this combination of the past and the present is already active in their use of the term, yet I'm wondering how. In relation to what is "decolonize" being defined now? What does it mean? What is its significance in relation to people's lives, many kinds of people in different places and of different ages?

Depending on what one's conditions are, the term *decolonize* may or may not resonate in relation to some of the ways it's currently being invoked. I find it difficult not to think about decolonize in myriad ways, as a notion that was being tested by my ancestors and, more recently, by the generation of my parents, which includes Stuart Hall, Sylvia Wynter, Édouard Glissant, Paule Marshall, Eqbal Ahmad, Assia Djebar, and on and on. I think about them frequently now, as they are leaving us, yet their words remain, as well as memories of their actions and the challenges they faced. Their words remain for us to continue pondering and responding to in the present. Each of us has different understandings and relations to what "decolonize" can mean. So reconciling how decolonize is being used in the present is something I am wondering about. It is no simple thing. It's not simply a rhetorical expression. My immediate reaction when I thought about decolonize was "Decolonize yourself" or "Everybody decolonize themselves." What might that mean, if we really go deeply into what forms colonization can take, with long residues, in daily existence? These can create many tensions between what is said and what is enacted, between what is claimed and what is experienced.

We were both in Berlin when I received the invitation from *October*. You are now living in Berlin, after having lived many years in New York. We both continue to work in both places. The term *decolonize* came up in one of our conversations in Berlin, yet we didn't have time to probe it. From different experiences and in different places I was curious how the word or invocation of decolonize resonates. Does it? When returning to New York I talked with different friends about the term, and in Cambridge, Massachusetts, I asked my current students, "Decolonize—what is your relation to or perception of this word and its use now?"; they thought about it, but they didn't have any-

thing to say at that moment. I have yet to ask my relatives, but I'm curious about what they might think. Being in conversation seemed a way to probe the term. What do you think?

*Iman Issa:* I share the difficulty you have in thinking through the term. Personally, I haven't found it to be a useful term for unpacking concerns, nor as a conceptual basis on which to build action. The reason for this is how abstract it seems to me, and thus easily co-opted. I understand the notion of decolonization when it comes to historical writings such as those of Fanon or more recent uses of the term such as "Decolonizing Architecture," a project initiated by Alessandro Petti, Sandra Hilal, and Eyal Weizman, dealing with the concrete case study of Palestine—there the term seems substantial. This doesn't always strike me to be the case in other uses of the term. For example, I was listening to a lecture by Walter Mignolo linking the concept of decoloniality with a process of decentering art from the West, as can be detected in recent biennials where the majority of artists are from places other than Europe and the United States or in the opening of museums in the Persian Gulf, such as the Islamic Museum in Doha, where the objects on view are following a different trajectory than in Western museums. In these cases, taken as examples of welcome change, decolonization may indeed seem like an apt term, but I'm not sure if it is by default positive or emancipatory without the introduction of other elements.

In this case, I'm thinking of the term in relation to the reformation of art institutions in particular. I think a questioning of the models and structures under which artists are operating is urgent and essential. I also find that art institutions, from museums to art schools and beyond, have evolved radically, but without developing at the same time a critical awareness that matches the scale of that evolution. For many of us who haven't done the work of delving deeply into these institutions' operations and histories, and even for some who have, we are still dealing with opaque structures to which we can only ascribe platitudes. This doesn't seem to be a good vantage point from which to change things. I don't have a good term for what is, in my view, a necessary undertaking of unpacking these structures and reforming them through the introduction of precise policies, but decolonization doesn't quite cut it.

*Green:* I agree with your points, and find particularly resonant your mention of "the work of delving deeply into these institutions' operations and histories," as well as a certain opacity of structures. I'm not referring to what's been called "institutional critique," despite what it has revealed, but rather a combination of engaged ways of more deeply understanding, listening, acting wherever we are, with the knowledge that change is a continual process, requiring daily, perpetual, and enduring awareness and attention.

Being capable of understanding complexity and open to perceptions from a variety of distinct subject positions, understanding the complexity of



historical relationships of inequality which continue in accepted forms in the present, facing ignorance without defensiveness, are in my view crucial efforts. My friend Howie Chen, with whom I've been in conversation for years, and now regarding decolonize as well, said something I'd like to repeat here: "To truly decolonize an institution or self would entail a radical undoing, and I think those that are reform-minded or looking for symbolic wins are not willing to risk institution and self as part of the long chain of undos necessary to get to the true goal of decolonization in the West." What do you think about this?

*Issa:* That's a good point. If "decolonization" refers to the process of shaking up dominant structures—whether discursive or practical—that give birth to oppressive systems, then yes, that process requires a serious uprooting. What gives me the chills are those instances in which too much is conceded in the premise. For example, one can argue that universalism is a colonial self-serving concept manufactured with the aim of extending influence and exploitation, but if that assumption entails replacing the concept with an idea of regional cultures and essential, specific, "non-universal" identities, then we're fighting a lost cause—we've never left the playing field inasmuch as the supposedly different choice we are making is already specified in the original self-serving premise. It seems to me that what needs to be done is to disentangle these concepts from the systems that employed them, and not to give up on them by default. You hear all the time people declaring themselves to be for or against identity politics, as if that were a real choice. I never understand what that means. I think of identity as something that one needs to claim, a manner of existing socially and politically in the world that is not ascribed but earned. It is also almost always contingent and rarely ever essential. This idea that decolonizing institutions is to fill them with objects, people, and things that bear and act out the markers of their "specific identities" contrasted with that "bland" dominant one feels like securing colonialism with metal bolts rather than decolonizing anything.

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IMAN ISSA is an artist and professor at the Academy of Fine Arts in Vienna. She is currently based in Berlin.

## ISUMA

Isuma is an electronic-media art collective working with a preliterate oral language and postliterate video syntax in the still-colonized Inuit territory of Nunavut. That makes it difficult to explain in the Crown's literary English what *decolonize* means to us beyond inviting you to see for yourself in our work. Thirty-five years of Isuma videos are online on IsumaTV; some are on iTunes in multiple countries. Please skip to the last paragraph below to find out how to watch them.

In *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man* (1964), Marshall McLuhan offers a framework for understanding colonization as a convergent media extension of Europe's central nervous system, an explosive outreach into unoccupied territories (*terra nullius*) to accumulate wealth and exterminate, displace, or assimilate Indigenous people who live there. McLuhan saw media like the wheel, clock, movable type, and electricity as having consequences or messages that alter perception and social behavior, with an effect he calls "Narcissus as Narcosis," numbing individuals and societies to the impacts of these messages until it is too late to do anything about them. If Western civilization's media evolved as covert forces of *persuasion*, and new electronic versions of television, social networking, Internet-of-things, and artificial intelligence may be their most invasive persuaders so far, then to decolonize anything first must make potentials of noninvasive, non-persuasive media visible in a multiverse of alternate possibilities.

Numbed by Narcissus Narcosis, who can uncover alternate potentials, and by what means? Many Indigenous territories were colonized over the past five hundred years by European imperial cultures already mediated for twenty-five hundred years by their own industrializing technologies. Meanwhile, Inuit in Canada's remote eastern arctic are so recently colonized as to have become barely used to it. Inuit displacement was a by-product of the Cold War nuclear standoff over the North Pole between the United States and the Soviet Union. Distant Early Warning (DEW) Line radar sites and American air bases built across Canada's arctic in the 1950s required certainty of security and national sovereignty over a wilderness where small bands of Inuit families lived in independent, nomadic self-sufficiency without wheels, clocks, movable type, or electricity. In the 1950s and early 1960s Inuit families were forcibly removed into government-built settlements where all children were required to attend English-language schools.

In 1961, one of the last bands ordered to move was led by Noah Piugattuk and included the family of Isuma co-founder and president Zacharias Kunuk. As Zacharias says, "We went from the Stone Age to the digital age in one lifetime." Born in a sod house in 1957 into a hunting lifestyle that hadn't changed much in four thousand years, Zacharias was nine when his parents finally dropped him off to attend school in Igloolik. Three decades later, Isuma won the Caméra d'or at the 2001 Cannes Film Festival for *Atanarjuat the Fast Runner*, the first dramatic feature made in Inuktitut, recreating an Igloolik legend in digital video with a cast of local Inuit enacting how their ancestors lived centuries before foreigners arrived.

In 2019, Isuma represented Canada at the fifty-eighth Venice Biennale with *One Day in the Life of Noah Piugattuk*, reenacting in 4K Ultra-HD that spring day in 1961 when Piugattuk was told to move; and *Ataatama Nunanga (My Father's Land)*, in which Inuit tell how they lived before mining and colonization and how life is changed now. Today the multinational Baffinland iron mine lives in Piugattuk's former caribou-hunting territory. This year Baffinland is proposing to build a railroad across Baffin Island and double supertanker shipping from six to twelve million metric tons per year through arctic waters rich with seals, walrus, whales, and polar bears and past the hunting communities of Igloodik and Pond Inlet. Last summer, Isuma hosted a live webcast, *Silakut Live from the Floe Edge*—to Venice, Nunavut, and worldwide—of Inuit talking about this future near Piugattuk's old camp at Kapuivik; and then again live in November from the Nunavut Impact Review Board public hearings on the environmental impact of Baffinland's expansion. Are these media works—reenacting the past and live-webcasting the present in preliterate Inuktitut and postliterate time-based video—colonized or decolonized media?

Western civilization's path from the alphabet to industrialization, from militant colonization to surveillance capitalism, might be an evolution of persuasion as a ubiquitous, inevitable attribute of human behavior and society. However, even today not all cultures believe in persuasion as a norm of behavior or a ubiquitous community value. For example, Inuit still believe it is impolite and dysfunctional to tell other people what to think or how to behave. How can such values be made to appear in today's multiverse of electronic-media art?

You can see Isuma's 2019 Venice exhibition at [isuma.tv](http://isuma.tv). *One Day in the Life of Noah Piugattuk*, *Atanarjuat the Fast Runner*, *The Journals of Knud Rasmussen*, *My Father's Land*, and *Maliglutit (Searchers)* are on iTunes with multiple-language subtitles in Canada, the USA, France, Germany, Italy, the UK, Mexico, Australia, Bolivia, Japan, and other countries; a complete list is available at [isuma.tv/movies](http://isuma.tv/movies). Upcoming live webcasts, *Silakut Live* archives, and media related to Baffinland mining development are at [isuma.tv/live](http://isuma.tv/live). See Isuma background and video archives since 1985 at [isuma.tv/isuma](http://isuma.tv/isuma), or write to [info@isuma.tv](mailto:info@isuma.tv).

ISUMA's current members are Paul Apak Angilirq, Norman Cohn, and Zacharias Kunuk.

## ARNOLD J. KEMP

The situation of art now, reflecting the current sense of postcolonial crisis, demands thinking about the neocolonial in connection with notions of cultural difference, where every notion of difference refers back to colonial fascination with a primitive other carrying a fixed ethnic identity. The product of a larger conceptual entanglement, coexisting with concerns of anti-racism and respect for traditional land rights, decolonization is more than just a rethinking of our relationship to images and objects. In my work in art and scholarship, the term *decolonize* has a bearing on image- and object-making and the histories and places in culture in which critical artwork circulates. Much like Kerry James Marshall, I don't want to be vague about the dialogues and conversations with history that my work seeks to have. In 1993, David Hammons said to me that he didn't care whether people understood his work, that he would even prefer if people thought that his work was from outer space. Perhaps this was because outer space would be a pre-colonized place where Hammons could set the terms for the consideration of his achievement. I said to Hammons that he sounded like Sun Ra, the legendary jazz musician who claimed to be from Saturn. Hammons replied succinctly, "Exactly!" Whether it is outer space or outer consciousness, the locus of artistic activity must not be colonized if critical artists mean to go someplace where others have not.

In 1998, during a studio visit with members of the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art's Society for the Encouragement of Contemporary Art, one of the members said to me in frustration, "All of the black artists we have visited make work about slavery. My question is, why don't you?" My answer was that, since she already knew this about black people, I didn't need to make work that illustrated this fact, that didn't trouble essentialist assumptions about my race, and that didn't refuse to perform what she would recognize as art and as black. Throughout my work these refusals have been nonnegotiable. I find that in the art world the colonized consciousness is one that has to negotiate. For this reason my work has existed outside of the art market and has made its way by being successfully exhibited and critically received in an apartment (*HOW TO MAKE MIRRORS*, 2nd Floor Projects, San Francisco, April 29–June 6, 2012), in a closet (*FOR HEAVEN'S SAKE*, MEE(s), A Project Space, Portland, OR, May–June, 2012), in an empty car garage (*NOT YET SEEN*, Cherry & Lucic, Portland, OR, October 15– November 16, 2016), and in an almost derelict building (*WHEN THE SICK RULE THE WORLD [CUANDO LOS ENFERMOS GOBIERNAN EL MUNDO]*, Biquini Wax, E.P.S., Mexico City, August 5–September 5, 2017). My desire to not negotiate the terms of my colonization, to show my work in spaces started by artists for artists, has paradoxically not prevented my work from being collected by institutions such as the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the Berkeley Art Museum, the Studio Museum in Harlem, and the Portland Art Museum. It is, in fact, important that my work is shown in museums which participate in the colo-

nizing activity of building public collections, while I continue to operate in a mindset of a decolonized participant in artistic community-building.

In 2013 I met the Vancouver-based artist Raymond Boisjoly as the result of being on the jury for a biannual prize awarded to emerging artists by the University of Washington's Henry Art Gallery. During the jury's visit with Boisjoly, I found his ambitions to undo some of the structures that process his work through the filter of Indigenous art echoing my own concerns with my work being read through a lens shaped by centuries of white supremacy and xenophobia. At the end of the visit, I was not sure if I would ever hear from Boisjoly again, and then in 2014 he took up a six-week residency at the Banff Centre for Arts and Creativity in the thematic program "In Kind" Negotiations. As the lead faculty of the residency, Boisjoly designed the program and invited me and Joar Nango, an architect based in Norway, to share leadership duties. Together we welcomed ten international artists of different Indigenous identities to work through Boisjoly's notion that "there is no particular way things are supposed to have been," an open-ended framework to discuss postcolonialism. Much of the discourse revolved around undeclared or partially declared intentions—a method of not saying directly. Boisjoly's message was aspirational in framing a parallel reality where things might have gone differently. His inviting me, a black artist of Caribbean heritage and Nango of the Indigenous peoples from Sápmi, the traditional territories of Sámi, seemed at once poetic and pointedly political. The gesture of invitation was suggestive of shared alliances and strategies for survival. As Banff is located on the lands of Treaty 7 territory, where the creation of Canada's first national park imposed boundaries and displaced the territory's original stewards, the people of the Stoney Nakoda, Blackfoot, and Tsuut'ina nations, it seemed most culturally appropriate that I would only attend at the invitation of peoples related to the land. My participation ensured that the residency would make space for the participants to locate themselves within a post-identity spectrum of engagement that lay somewhere between the Indigenous and the global.

At Banff I noted that colonization allowed for a false separation between people with shared interests. So I gave lectures, led seminars, and organized social activities that exposed the residents to ways of being in the world and in the studio that made room for thinking critically about issues of identity, indigeneity, and colonization embedded in the educational, artistic, and cultural structures around us. While acknowledging the role of artists in reflecting on social and political changes necessary for the expansion of art today, I was sensitive to the group's desires to dismantle traditional divisions established between design, architecture, and visual art. I gave the group permission to intertwine each discipline with methods and processes led by improvisation. I brought other role models, such as Adrian Piper, Kathy Acker, Alice Coltrane, Ornette Coleman, and Robert Farris Thompson, to the group. We took advantage of

chance, experimentation with localized raw materials, and punk and free-jazz aesthetics, and we tuned our relationship to place. Our actions and interventions at Banff ultimately added up to new knowledge and connectedness to the environment in which we stood. On that land decolonization was an urgent relational praxis of self-affirming, space-opening, and permission-giving embodiments rooted in culture and tradition that countered ongoing legacies of colonial violence and impositions of oppressive structures.

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THOMAS J. LAX

Decolonization: An ongoing process in which lands dispossessed by settler colonialism are restituted to native peoples; the full elaboration of Indigenous life. Invocations “to decolonize” that are merely oriented toward making academic curricula more pluralistic or including works by First Nations artists in museum collections are correctives that evade true decolonization by entrenching settler futurity—in other words, by normalizing the persistence of settler nation-states. This, in part, is the case that Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang make in their essay “Decolonization Is Not a Metaphor,” in which they argue that using the term to describe these kinds of rehabilitative projects defers any claims to land beyond those set by property relations.<sup>1</sup>

I summarize this working definition to acknowledge the reservoir of resources and intellectual traditions that exist beyond art history as usually circumscribed by the US academy. (Frantz Fanon and Suzanne Césaire were assigned and passed around at my university, but I wasn’t reading them in Intro to Art History or *Art Since 1900*, where Fanon makes precisely two appearances, both more than a quarter-century after his death.<sup>2</sup>) Reciting this definition is also a means of acknowledging my own ongoing formation and a way of situating our shifting selves. Because our positions are key, I want to name our historical knots.

This questionnaire is issued by an elite magazine with a vexed history of engaging with the politics of lived experience, particularly during the AIDS crisis, and only a recent interest in meaningfully engaging questions of settler colonialism, racial capitalism, or indigeneity. I am a curator working at the Museum of Modern Art in New York, a private museum built on the fiction of autonomy—of art and of curators alike—a protection provided by a plutocratic system.<sup>3</sup> I am also a Black person, an “arrivant” to New World cosmology, according to the late poet Kamau Brathwaite.<sup>4</sup> Historically in the US, Black people have been promised expropriated land for both farming and national belonging at the expense of Indigenous people, empty offers aimed at dividing Black and Native peoples. I describe these realities not as a call-out—a social-media cancellation of someone else that makes you feel good—but as a way to call in, if you will. Let’s name the structural limits of the place from which we speak, and then push against them. Because decolonization is inextricably tied to place, its unfurling occurs location by location, including those most ensnared in power’s grips. In the thoughts that follow, I will use MoMA as an example, if only because decolonial work requires you to *dig where you stand*.<sup>5</sup>

1. Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang, “Decolonization Is Not a Metaphor,” *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education and Society* 1, no. 1 (2012), pp. 1–40.

2. Hal Foster, Rosalind Krauss, Yve-Alain Bois, Benjamin H. D. Buchloh, *Art Since 1900* (New York: Thames and Hudson, 2004), pp. 618 and 644.

3. Hal Foster, “Change at MoMA,” *London Review of Books* 41, no. 21 (November 7, 2019), <https://www.lrb.co.uk/the-paper/v41/n21/hal-foster/change-at-moma>.

4. Edward Kamau Brathwaite, *The Arrivants: A New World Trilogy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1973).

5. *Dig Where You Stand*, exhibition organized by Koyo Kouoh on the occasion of the 57th edition of the Carnegie International, Carnegie Museum of Art, Pittsburgh (October 13, 2018–March 25, 2019).

Do museums and historians simply display and describe art—or do we in fact produce it? This question—what exactly do we do?—may sound esoteric, helpless, or self-aggrandizing. But a recognition of just how the task of description is itself a mode of production might better name our entanglements with the logics of colonialism. We don't only look after artworks and write narratives about them; we reproduce ideologies scurried away in the category of art, too. The process of assembling exhibitions and accessioning artworks, for example, constructs the careers of individual makers and reinscribes ownership as the de facto model of custodianship. To do so, we buttress at least two categories that emerged through colonial contact: the rights-possessing individual, endowed with the capacity for self-expression or the free will to refuse it; and property, that fundament of racial-capitalist transmutation. These vectors of activity are not only settler colonialism's leftovers; they sustain and naturalize its claim to occupation in the present.

So what should we do in addition to turning accessioned objects into shared resources, or organizing exhibitions and writing books that describe art's history as the result of the uncertainty and cunning of group improvisation and making do rather than evidence of exceptional genius? Part of this task asks us to collectively acknowledge a definition of art that understands culture's inextricable relationship to the land—the place from which materials are borrowed and the context through which meaning is understood. Land acknowledgment is of course a kind of metaphor, albeit one with material implications. (Even when decolonization is not a metaphor, the formulation is itself metaphorical; the struggles of a half-century of queer, Black, and feminist interventions in critical theory have taught us that discourse is inextricable from the material realities it is premised upon and affects.) MoMA is located on unceded Lenape land; MIT Press makes its home where the Massachusetts and their neighbors the Wampanoag and the Nipmuc Peoples have long made theirs. Together, we are on Turtle Island, and through land acknowledgment, we might pay respect to Indigenous ancestors by recognizing the legacies of settler colonialism as well as restitute land and water to present and future generations of Indigenous people.

“Land restitution” describes both a concrete form and also a cosmological shift in discourse that occurs through prefiguration and imagination—in other words, through art's tools and appropriations. Unlike the terms set by the majority of mid-twentieth-century independence movements, claims to dispossessed land are not simple juridical events.<sup>6</sup> As the Black radical tradition has demonstrated, they find footing through rhetorical contestations that in their cultural instantiations (*urgent whispers* or *frenzied shrieks*) aren't always sensible or legible, but are arguments nevertheless.<sup>7</sup> The decolonial shift from “property” to “land,” from “natural resource” to “natureculture,” requires extralegal forms of world destruction and transformation that, while real and instantiated, are also revolutions in meaning-making.

6. Saidiya Hartman, *Lose Your Mother: A Journey Along the Atlantic Slave Route* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2007).

7. Édouard Glissant, *Caribbean Discourse: Selected Essays*, trans. J. Michael Dash (Charlottesville: Caraf Books/University Press of Virginia, 1989), p. xxiii.



And perhaps most urgently: How do earlier actions to survive settler colonialism's *longue durée* offer our field the possibility for a more radical response to COVID-19, the latest moment in an extended catastrophe of nationalist self-interest, a time when the revealed fragility of our everyday lives might mobilize us to coordinated globalized actions and the redistribution of our *undercommons*?<sup>8</sup> I'm not proposing new, virus-centered content or shifts in delivery, but rather solidarity with those traditions committed to the dismantling of the hierarchies through which some human lives are valued above all other forms of life. We have an opportunity now since the category of art that MoMA buttresses is enabled by a freedom of movement and globalized circulation of goods that will diminish in the immediate wake of this crisis. What exactly will we do?

Perhaps we might look to *our innate ability to use what we have to create what we need*,<sup>9</sup> in other words, the creative resources and social technologies we have already developed to thrive in the face of planned death. This is a mantra which some Afro-descendant cultural workers such as Soul Fire Farm in New York have already relied on. In their responses to food apartheid and monocultural industrial-scale agriculture, Soul Fire Farm trains young people of color in collectively run and sustainable practices of crop diversification and provides sustainable sources of food to low-income people in southern New York. Closer to MoMA, its Sculpture Garden was already turned into an urban agricultural prototype for creating a different relationship to the land back in 2012, when, on the occasion of the exhibition *Century of the Child*, the museum's education department invited artist Fritz Haeg and a team of farmers to install an organic garden of edible plants and medicinal herbs for harvest. The garden was accompanied by one of Haeg's Domestic Integrity Fields, a crocheted circular rug made from local textiles that traveled from Northern California, where he lives on Salmon Creek Farm, which functions as a site for testing, performing, and presenting how we want to live.<sup>10</sup> I doubt that what is an acknowledged queer use of Native ritual can be meaningfully described as decolonial, but it does create a social language to bracket MoMA's non-metaphorical relationship to the land on which it currently sits. The fact that it has already happened underscores that in this moment, we don't need to invent new strategies from scratch but rather can amplify emergent alliances and raise up those forms of prefiguration some have already rehearsed.

Let's begin again by asking critical questions about our resource distribution: How might the budgets for individual artists granted new commissions at MoMA be differently directed to New York City's most vulnerable communities? Let me

8. Stefano Harney and Fred Moten, *The Undercommons: Fugitive Planning and Black Study* (Wivenhoe: Minor Compositions, 2013).

9. Linda Goode Bryant, "Making Doors: Linda Goode Bryant in Conversation with Senga Nengudi," *Ursula* 1, December 2018.

10. "Fritz Haeg on His Project for MoMA Studio: Common Senses," Inside/Out, MoMA, last modified July 11, 2012, [https://www.moma.org/explore/inside\\_out/2012/07/11/fritz-haeg-on-his-project-for-moma-studio-common-senses/](https://www.moma.org/explore/inside_out/2012/07/11/fritz-haeg-on-his-project-for-moma-studio-common-senses/).

be clear: These are not competing claims in a zero-sum game if we understand essential workers to be the implied and even primary audience who might animate the making of new artistic work. And, most immediately, how might we call on rites of mourning through our relationship to the land in the weeks and months to come to consider the ways in which the dead live amongst us? After all, museums with collections of artists who are no longer living have long been in the business of making inanimate relations live again. If we confront our extractive impacts and reciprocal relationships in more honest ways, and learn from those who have embraced the uncertainty of a decolonizing world, we just might be able to make good on the promise put forth by this prompt.

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## NANCYLUXON

Colonized bodies call out, “Where they find no room; where you leave them no room; where there is absolutely no room for them; and you dare tell me it doesn’t concern you! that it’s no fault of yours!”<sup>1</sup>

No room. No containing context. No body.

Fanon hurls these comments on bodies, their spatial extension, and their containment at the confining contexts and concepts of colonial order. Any decolonization needs to go beyond epistemic disobedience to consider the palpable lived experience of being cramped: of confinement to concepts and categories, to a Manichean colonial society, to the blind spots of colonial aphasia. How could the lived experience of decolonization be un-controlled, unraveled, undone?

The call to decolonize has become a rallying cry across a diverse set of domains: the university, philosophy, the museum, psychotherapy, and on and on. Appeals to decolonization have been most successful in challenging established historical narratives. What would it mean to resite the work of the decolonial onto psychosocial terms? To answer this question, I will argue instead for understanding it as a project that seeks to undo, an effort that slices across a range of registers, structures, and practices. Although the decolonial is often understood specifically as epistemic disobedience, I disagree: Such epistemic challenges ineluctably spill over into those claims that sustain the social and the psychological. To pursue this line of thinking, I will draw on Fanon’s account of disalienation. Disalienation is that work that seeks to undo historic traumas, the social and epistemological contexts that encase them, and to create a space of the not-yet.

Fanon is routinely invoked in work on decolonization, not only for the radicality of his thought but also for his efforts to analyze decolonization in general terms without neglecting its historical specificity. For Fanon, colonial violence is at once part of the ontological experience central to the French empire and North Africa and also something of an abstraction. As attested by his searing description of being made to “exist in triple” in a train by a pointing child, violence shades how colonial subjects inhabit their bodies.<sup>2</sup> However accurate and evocative it might be to call attention to the “atmosphere of violence, this violence rippling under the skin” of colonial life, such language itself is general enough to be faintly distancing—to render others as voyeuristic spectators beyond implication.<sup>3</sup> For all that trauma interlaces intimate and sociopolitical histories, the work that moves between these two registers and allows trauma’s

1. Frantz Fanon, “The North African Syndrome,” in *Towards the African Revolution*, trans. Haakon Chevalier (New York: Grove Press, 1967), p. 14.

2. Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, trans. Richard Philcox (New York: Grove Press, 2008), p. 92.

3. Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, trans. Richard Philcox (New York: Grove Press, 2004), p. 31.

effects to come undone can be elusive. Fanon's turn to the psychiatric hospital, however, unspools the embodied experiences contained under institutional duress—experiences that are the not-yet experience of collectivity—and pushes us to inquire further into their sheltering conditions. Even if related initially to neurological troubles, “a mental illness unfolds only within a social space that in turn explains its form.”<sup>4</sup>

In pursuing his work in North African psychiatric hospitals, Fanon turns to an unlikely institution for his pursuit of “disalienation.” Where, for many, psychiatric hospitals have an uneasy racial and colonial history, Fanon sees them through the eyes of political radicals close to Jean Oury and La Borde, the experimental clinic in France. Even more, Fanon rethinks them as the site for undoing *aliénation*. In the 1950s, thinkers from Merleau-Ponty to Sartre to Foucault wrestled over the terms of *aliénation* (a term broader than the conventional Marxist one). The mentally ill were those *aliené*—but in what sense? Perhaps one possessed a distracted spirit, was estranged from others, was disturbed “in his commerce with another,” or had been dispossessed of the freedom in one's nature. All of these associations come to haunt the experience of *aliénation* and the inability to be firmly lodged in a body. Possession, self-possession, and property uneasily and inconsistently conjoin.

A continent away in Algeria, Fanon entirely redirects this inquiry. Initially, his point of departure for thinking *aliénation* is not unlike the French. Following psychiatrist Henri Ey, Fanon considers mental illness to be a pathology of freedom. Differently from the French, however, Fanon lingers on Ey's claim that humans suffer through their coexistence with others, and he asks how the negatively defined and impoverished colonial situation both constrains and conditions self-extension in the world. What kind of social or psychic integration is possible in a disintegrating colonial world? What does it mean to “heal” in colonial structures, given that healing is often conventionally understood as a (phenomenological, epistemological, psychosocial) reintegration into modern society?

Although psychiatry ostensibly thinks trauma in terms of personal history—as the move from mental organization to defensive organization—for Fanon questions of cultural contact and colonial racism constantly intervene, disrupt this movement, and evoke the ordering and disordering of societies. The clinic is at the heart of a colonial primal scene, one that lays bare the contradiction between the imperatives of colonialism—to harm—and those of medicine—to heal. The discourse of healing risks being one of a rehabilitation that does not interrogate the racism which organizes the colonial context. To use Ey's language, it might seek a new “coexistence with others” that denies the very violence that underlies it and misrepresents such violence as healing. What would it mean for the hospital to be a site of disalienation? Answering that question, I

4. Jean Khalifa, “Fanon and Psychiatry,” in *Alienation and Freedom*, ed. Jean Khalifa and Robert J. C. Young, trans. Steven Corcoran (London: Bloomsbury, 2018), p. 201.

argue, means returning to the language of the body and its spatial extension, but undoing its collapse into property.

And so we find ourselves back with the opening words from above, wondering what happens to people in a society “where they find no room; where you leave them no room; where there is absolutely no room for them; and you dare tell me it doesn’t concern you! that it’s no fault of yours!” In his positions first at the clinic in Blida-Joinville and later at Charles-Nicolle in Tunisia, Fanon begins to experiment with the differently containing context of the psychiatric hospital. As objects construed by colonialism, Fanon’s patients are “condemned to exercise their liberty in the unreal world of phantasms.”<sup>5</sup> They are most free in the hospital context that lacks the weight and symbolic relations that anchor the exterior social world. Alternately, as subjects, they can only call attention to the reduction of their spatial presence to their mere physical body; they lack new norms and symbolic forms to organize this mass of bodies.

In the service of disalienation, then, Fanon seeks to reorganize the social relations contained within the psychiatric hospital. After a series of failed experiments with occupational therapy, Fanon adapts to the colonial context. Among other changes, he innovates the “day hospital,” in which patients shuttle back and forth between their “work” at the hospital and home life. He seeks to make doctor-patient relations less hierarchical and less visible. He implements a Moorish café that allows male Algerian patients to congregate in the afternoon. Undoing the entwinements of traumatic personal and social histories, the hospital exposes those colonial processes that generate disposability, that seek to confine and contour it, and that are the negative space that surrounds positive ideals of political subjectivity.

The hospital thus refigures *aliénation* so that it becomes the psychic experience that accompanies a broader experience of dispossession than that usually associated with Marxism. Disalienation instead centers the social relations of coexistence that organize the political categories of the colonized. It makes possible a critique of social relations that does not rest on restoring some ideal or more whole coexistence, or some legitimizing civil society distinct from politics. Instead, for the undoing of disalienation to gather force, the very dynamics of speech, embodiment, and generative agency must shift. To be sure, there are limits to Fanon’s disalienation: All of his innovative practices leave the place for gender underexamined and the category of “the colonized” relatively undifferentiated. Yet these practices open up a radically different approach to social institutions and their ability to redirect psychic and political energies.

Rather than urging epistemic disobedience, then, Fanon’s approach to decolonization is quite different. He urges a disalienation that would engage that fragile sociality subsumed by a colonial context, one that bears on the pos-

5. Frantz Fanon, “L’Hospitalisation de jour en psychiatrie: valeur et limites,” *La Tunisie médicale* 37, no. 10 (1959), pp. 689–732, 717.

session of identity and property. The goal is less a healing (in the sense of cure or liberation) than an ability to care differently for others, and to use the hospital as a way station: as the precarious site of the not-yet and the in-between, in which to cultivate those relations of care into a new symbolic form. Disalienation recognizes the suturing of the social, the psychological, *and* the epistemological under the rubrics of medicine and colonialism. If practices of knowing are to change, then the psychological attachments that hold knowledge and symbolic forms in place must also be undone and reshaped.

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## NELSON MALDONADO-TORRES

We are going through a moment when terms such as *colonization* and *decolonization*, as well as *coloniality* and *decoloniality*, are becoming prevalent in an increasing number of spaces in the arts, letters, and sciences. Based on my observations as someone who has worked on these themes for more than two decades and who has occupied positions of leadership in professional organizations and universities, I would say that this landscape is probably as full of honest discovery as of, painfully, opportunism, posturing, resentment, and immaturity, all of which can be taken as signs of decadence.<sup>1</sup>

Opportunism and posturing become evident in those who approach decoloniality as mainly a professional career, or purely as a scholarly endeavor. Resentment becomes obvious when the investment on minimizing and criticizing “the decolonial” seems higher than commitment to critiquing and dismantling the structures that do hold discursive and institutional power in the modern/colonial university. There is much superficiality and cynicism too, as it becomes obvious in the practice of those who embrace decolonial discourse while counting the days for another such recognizable grammar of analysis to get notoriety, at which point we can expect their preferred terms of analysis to change.

What makes immaturity unique in this context is that it can get to define the attitudes of those who more genuinely seek to contribute to decolonial thinking and action. In the academy, immaturity often takes the form of a certain enchantment with scholarly recognition and everything academic to the detriment of the cultivation of profound relationships with agents of decoloniality, most of whom work out of the academy. Immaturity of this kind prevents attunement to the rhythms of decolonial artistic, social, and intellectual movements that enrich each other through multiple forms of decolonial border thinking. In this scenario, the temporality of academic production and participation in academic spaces trumps the possibility of meaningful connections and relationships with decolonial knowledge producers and creators outside the academy.

I wished that honest discovery and serious engagement had a better chance to succeed and proliferate in this complicated scenario, but the modern/colonial university was not designed and is generally not prepared to serve as a fertile ground for the cultivation of decolonial consciousness. One can only hope that

1. Following Aimé Césaire, decadence can be understood as the inability of an institution or project to solve the problems that they create. This can take the form of a “collective hypocrisy that cleverly misrepresents problems, the better to legitimize the hateful solutions provided for them”—see Aimé Césaire, *Discourse on Colonialism*, trans. Joan Pinkham (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2000), pp. 31–32. For more recent accounts of decadence, see Lewis R. Gordon’s work, particularly *Disciplinary Decadence: Living Thought in Trying Times* (Boulder, CO: Paradigm Press, 2006), and “Shifting the Geography of Reason in an Age of Disciplinary Decadence,” *Transmodernity* 1 (2), pp. 95–103. It is also important to note that Césaire’s account of decadence is remarkably different from the more widely known account by Oswald Spengler. For a discussion of this point, see Nelson Maldonado-Torres, “El Caribe, la colonialidad, y el giro decolonial,” *Latin American Research Review* 55, no. 3 (2020), pp. 1–14.

academics, curators, and others who are jumping onto the bandwagon of scholarship on colonization and decolonization discover the deep significance of these themes and the need to break away from their confinement within liberal institutions of higher learning and spaces dedicated to exhibiting historical or artistic artifacts. At stake, however, is a profound redefinition of their roles as academics or curators, which entails a deep transformation of the institutions in which they work too. This is relevant as much to those who currently occupy these positions as to those in training—graduate students particularly. The decolonial turn involves the end of detached professionalism as well as resignation from the established systems of professional recognition and expertise.<sup>2</sup> These are central components of what I am calling here decolonial maturity.

The term *maturity* may sound elitist to some, or an echo of Immanuel Kant's view of Enlightenment to others. However, neither Western ageism nor developmentalism captures the most profound sense of "maturity." Also, no single body of work, including "the West," has a monopoly on the definition or assertion of its meaning and significance. I have found decolonial maturity increasingly relevant in my engagement with agents of decoloniality inside and outside the academy. I did not know how significant the category of "maturity" would become for me when I heard it many years ago in the context of discussing Black liberation from a former teacher and longtime interlocutor, Lewis R. Gordon, who has written about it in various contexts.<sup>3</sup> As time has gone by, I have also learned about this topic from the work of Vine Deloria Jr., as well as from conversations with friends and collaborators such as Catherine Walsh, Zandisiwe Radebe, Walter Altino, and Mireille Fanon-Mendès-France, among others.<sup>4</sup> Equally important has been the

2. There are some lines in the "Outline of Ten Theses on Coloniality and Decoloniality" that speak directly to this meaning of resignation and that inform some of the analysis in this reflection: "the decolonial turn involves a resignation from the order of validation of modernity/coloniality and a declaration of war against naturalized war. Through this process the *damnés* transition from isolated self-hating subjects to decolonizing agents and bridges who serve as connectors between themselves and many others. It is in this process that true love and understanding—philosophy in the most abstract but also the most concrete of senses—can flourish" (Nelson Maldonado-Torres, "Outline of Ten Theses on Coloniality and Decoloniality," Frantz Fanon Foundation: <http://fondation-frantzfanon.com/outline-of-ten-theses-on-coloniality-and-decoloniality/>). An example of resignation that informs this analysis is Frantz Fanon's "Letter to the Resident Minister (1956)," in *Toward the African Revolution: Political Essays* (New York: Grove Press, 1988), pp. 52–54. For a brilliant analysis of this letter and a thematization of the idea of "hopeful resignation" as "noncompliance" vis-à-vis submission, see Carolyn Ureña, "Fanon's Idealism: Hopeful Resignation, Violence, and Healing," *Bandung* 6 (2019), pp. 233–51.

3. See Lewis R. Gordon, *Existential Africana: Understanding Africana Existential Thought* (New York: Routledge, 2000); "Grown Folks' Business: The Problem of Maturity in Hip Hop," in *Hip Hop and Philosophy: Rhyme 2 Reason*, ed. Derrick Darby and Tommie Shelby (Peru, IL: Open Court Publishing, 2005), pp. 105–16; "Theory in Black: Teleological Suspensions in Philosophy of Culture," *Qui Parle* 18, no. 2 (2010), pp. 193–214.

4. See Vine Deloria Jr., *The Metaphysics of Modern Existence* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1979); and "Perceptions of Maturity: Reflections on Feyerabend's Point of View," in *Spirit and Reason: The Vine Deloria, Jr., Reader*, ed. Barbara Deloria, Kristen Foehner, and Sam Scinta (Golden, CO: Fulcrum, 1999),



experience that I have obtained navigating the halls of academia in different positions as well as training undergraduate and graduate students.

*Facing Anxiety, Fear, and Decadence*

Decolonial maturity includes the realization that the exploration of colonialism, decolonization, and related terms often provokes anxiety and fear.<sup>5</sup> This is particularly the case in spaces and institutions that support and promote the production, stability, and reproduction of normative subjectivities and the normative order in its conservative, liberal, and neoliberal iterations and combinations. They include museums, courts, the media, schools, and universities, among a wide variety of sites within and outside nation-states that are part of prominent archipelagoes of domination, disciplining, and control in the globalized modern/colonial world.

Like the terms *colonization* and *decolonization*, bodies of color also provoke anxiety and fear—as well as desire, as Frantz Fanon and others have explained. Anxiety and fear multiply the more such bodies appear, and the more one or more of them “misbehaves” by engaging in actions that put in question the legitimacy of the established order. These actions can consist of movements, gestures, and utterances, among other forms.

When challenging words, symbols, sounds, and movements, on the one hand, and bodies that are perceived as threatening, on the other, combine, the levels of anxiety and fear increase. The strategies to minimize the impact of those words, symbols, sounds, movements, and bodies multiply and become more violent too. Bodies of color that/who utter or gesture toward words such as *colonialism* and *decolonization* tend to appear as threatening and excessive in this context because they are perceived as getting too close to generating not only words but also discourses and practices that can invoke and/or cultivate memories of defiance as well as claim unsettled debts.<sup>6</sup> These bodies announce the possibility of open opposition, reveal desire for change, and point to the search for accountability. Each such body appears as an aggregate of blood, flesh, and bones that is willing to continually enunciate such terms, make those sounds,

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pp. 3–16. Catherine Walsh has been an ongoing interlocutor, teacher, and example of decolonial maturity. Her pedagogical practice, her teaching, and her involvement with community leaders, organizers, and collectives that seek decolonization can be taken as a pedagogy of decolonial maturity that is relevant to keep in mind in this context. I develop this idea in the upcoming “En la búsqueda de la madurez decolonial: Una carta a Catherine Walsh,” requested by Katty Hernández and Alicia Ortega for a volume dedicated to the work of Catherine Walsh. For more on Walsh’s work, visit: <http://catherine-walsh.blogspot.com>. See also, in particular, the first part of Walter D. Mignolo and Catherine Walsh, *On Decoloniality: Concepts, Analytics, Praxis* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2018), pp. 1–104.

5. The first thesis in Nelson Maldonado-Torres, “Outline of Ten Theses,” reads, “Colonialism, decolonization, and related concepts generate anxiety and fear” (p. 8).

6. I refer to bodies of color as that/who, or who/that, to make explicit that a living human body is never purely a “this” or “that.”

produce those images, and engage in such movements so as to avoid forgetfulness; each body, each person, each life also resisting losing its memories and potentially willing to bleed for the sake of restoring dignity and justice to its community and its ancestors.

In short, the connection between words that challenge the dominant order and bodies that generate anxiety announces the possibility of *counter-catastrophic acts*—actions against the catastrophe of modernity/coloniality.<sup>7</sup> In the face of the various layers of anxiety and fear provoked by the sound of certain words and the appearance of certain bodies, the institutions that produce, reproduce, and cultivate modernity/coloniality aim to minimize the possibility that the wrong bodies that/who are aligned with the wrong words, sounds, symbols, and movements control the terms that can generate oppositional discourses and practices. This is not to say that such bodies represent projects of decolonial maturity, though. A body of color that/who utters the “wrong” words but that/who does not know how to generate a consistent discourse and a practice of decolonization is as much a danger to a liberal institution as to movements for decolonization.

Without a doubt, liberal institutions prefer bodies of color who utter the “correct” words and who relativize, minimize, domesticate, and potentially eradicate or keep at bay the wrong ones. A second-best option is the recruitment of bodies who could utter, write, and publish works with the “wrong” words but who engage in the “right” practice and general orientation. The list can include “diversity and inclusion” officials who comfortably embrace the liberal ethos of their institutions as well as critical theorists who make a career out of simply criticizing it. In short, bodies of different colors, gender self-descriptions, and sexual preferences as well as self-avowed “critics” of the system are often recruited, and sometimes are motivated, to do the work of domestication and eradication. Here we are dealing not only with white anxiety and fear but also with multicolor decadence and the lack of decolonial maturity. Decadence and immaturity cross many lines: the color line, the gender line, the class line, and the political-discourse line. Fear, anxiety, and decadence combine to perpetuate catastrophe and avoid decolonial turnings that unsettle the academic space or museum and that empower decolonial agents inside and outside their walls.

7. For a more ample development of the concepts of coloniality as catastrophe and decoloniality as counter-catastrophe, see Nelson Maldonado-Torres, “Outline of Ten Theses”; Nelson Maldonado-Torres, “On Metaphysical Catastrophe, Post-Continental Thought, and the Decolonial Turn,” in *Relational Undercurrents: Contemporary Art of the Caribbean Archipelago*, edited by Tatiana Flores and Michelle A. Stephens (Los Angeles: Museum of Latin American Art, 2017), pp. 247–59; and Nelson Maldonado-Torres, “Afterword: Critique and Decoloniality in the Face of Crisis, Disaster, and Catastrophe,” in *Aftershocks of Disaster: Puerto Rico Before and After María* (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2019), pp. 332–42.

*Toward Decolonial Maturity*

Decolonial maturity in institutions of higher learning and museums is forced to emerge in a massive context of fear, anxiety, decadence, and vast immaturity. It is not an easy environment to navigate: the multiple expressions of fear, anxiety, and decadence provoke as much disgust as disorientation, particularly when the institutions insist on their fundamental goodness and excellence in spite of their very substantial and serious complicities with coloniality. Disgust and disorientation cannot but produce an overwhelming feeling of nausea for anyone who has gone through any kind of decolonial turn.<sup>8</sup> Indeed, decoloniality as an attitude and project emerges when decolonial love and decolonial rage are able to overcome nausea, along with cynicism, skepticism, bitterness, and the enchantment with immature and constant critique.<sup>9</sup>

One set of possibilities for decolonial change, and a path toward decolonial maturity in this context, lies in the efforts to connect the “wrong” words, images, and bodies that begin to appear in dominant spaces with related words, images, bodies, and practices outside of these spaces, where the struggle against colonization has been more pronounced and consistent. The potential actions include the proliferation of border zones of decolonial activity that generate vital connections among agents of decoloniality inside and outside the spaces of power. This can involve an expansion of the epistemological “cracks” and internal contradictions of hegemonic discourses such as liberalism and neoliberalism.<sup>10</sup> Most importantly, they include the creation of times and spaces for those committed to the unfinished project of decolonization to think, dream, be, and do together.

8. Nausea is a major concept in existential phenomenology. Here I draw from Fanon’s understanding of it as found in *Black Skin, White Masks*, trans. Richard Wilcox (New York: Grove Press, 2008).

9. I develop further the relationship between decolonial love and decolonial rage in “Outline of Ten Theses.”

10. On the ideas and significance of cracks and decolonial cracks, see Gloria Anzaldúa and Andrea Lunsford, “Toward a Mestiza Rhetoric: An Interview with Andrea Lunsford (1996),” in *Interviews/Entrevistas*, ed. AnaLouise Keating (New York: Routledge, 2000), pp. 251–80; Gloria Anzaldúa, *Light in the Dark/Luz en lo oscuro: Rewriting Identity, Spirituality, Reality* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2015); Catherine Walsh, “Pedagogical Notes from Decolonial Cracks,” *emisférica* 11, no. 1 (2014): <https://hemisphericinstitute.org/en/emisferica-11-1-decolonial-gesture/11-1-dossier/pedagogical-notes-from-the-decolonial-cracks.html>; and Catherine Walsh, “Decolonial Pedagogies Walking and Asking: Notes to Paulo Freire from Abya Yala,” *International Journal of Lifelong Education* 34, no. 1 (2015), pp. 9–21. For a further analysis about predominant social and existential condition of people of color and the possibilities of critique by exploring the internal contradiction of hegemonic modern/colonial systems, see W. E. B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk: Authoritative Text. Contexts. Criticisms*, ed. Henry Louis Gates Jr. and Terri Hume Oliver (New York: Norton, 1999); Paget Henry, “Africana Phenomenology: Its Philosophical Implications,” *C.L.R. James Journal* 11, no. 1 (2005), pp. 79–112; Jane Anna Gordon, “Legitimacy from Modernity’s Underside: Potentiated Double Consciousness,” *World and Knowledges Otherwise* 1, no. 3 (2006), <https://globalstudies.trinity.duke.edu/projects/wko-post-continental>; Lewis R. Gordon, *Existential Africana*; Lewis R. Gordon, “French- and Francophone-Influenced Africana and Black Existentialism,” *Yale French Studies* 135/136 (2019), pp. 119–33.

The creation of *border zones of decolonial activity* is crucial to advance common projects, as well as to obtain the critical and constructive insight needed to minimize errors and potential complicities with the hegemonic discourses, institutions, and practices. Learning how to live in border zones of decolonial activity, to make them one's home, as Gloria Anzaldúa might say, requires something much more difficult to attain than conservative patriotism, liberal tolerance, neoliberal efficiency, or the performance of critique and criticism. It requires decolonial maturity.

Contemporary examples of decolonial maturity today include important initiatives by groups such as the Blackhouse Collective in South Africa, the Colectiva Feminista en Construcción in Puerto Rico, the Frantz Fanon Foundation, and the facilitators of Decolonize This Place in New York City, among many others in the Global South—including the souths in the North. I do not have the space to do justice to this claim here. I can surely anticipate reactions from critics of these movements inside and outside of the academy. To them I would indicate that maturity does not mean perfection, and that the search for perfection, or even the desire to exercise relative power by judging others who are risking more than them in any given struggle, is, more than a mark of immaturity, a sign of decadence—a continued failure to reach decolonial maturity in modern/colonial times.<sup>11</sup> There are ways in which decolonial maturity involves critique, but a key part of maturity is to learn how, when, and what, exactly, to critique as well as who deserves to be taken as a valuable interlocutor in its exercise. I myself have found every leading figure in each of these collectives worthy of engagement, or, to be honest, more worthy than some of my most valuable interlocutors and colleagues in the academy. In light of the conversations and collaborations with them, the modern research university, this much-celebrated product of the era of European Enlightenment, appears to me more and more as a home of sometimes sophisticated and useful, yet very often problematic and immature, when not outright colonizing and, yes, racist, thinking.

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11. Relevant here is what Vanesa Contreras has referred to as the “colonialidad de la lucha” [“coloniality of the struggle”]. See Vanesa Contreras, “Colonialidad de la lucha,” *80 grados*, Sept. 6, 2019, <https://www.80grados.net/colonialidad-de-la-lucha/>.

## SALONI MATHUR

As a scholar formatively shaped by debates in postcolonial theory in the 1990s, I am acutely aware that the term *postcolonial* appears to be exhausted and overdetermined, if not fully displaced by the shift to the global. Yet it still remains one of the best ways to describe critically informed approaches to researching and writing the history of peoples whose modern experience began as subordinate subjects of the West's colonizing projects. The word *decolonize* emerges out of this historical experience and was part of its revolutionary vocabulary and interruptive procedures of thought. For me it evokes the passionate language of a long line of intellectuals and cultural practitioners from the twentieth century, such as Aimé Césaire, Stuart Hall, Frantz Fanon, Edward Said, and Ranajit Guha, who laid the groundwork for postcolonialism as an "ism" by the end of the century and transformed our understanding of modernity itself. For these thinkers the imperative to decolonize spoke more often than not to the challenges of a new national consciousness, and the urgent necessity of liberating the psyche (and national culture more broadly) from deeply imprinted conditions of subordination, rather than to the goal of independence per se. For the Kenyan novelist and theorist Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, for example, to "decolonize the mind" was to confront the question of the hegemony of language; his controversial 1986 book by that title called for African writers to embrace the habits of thought embedded in Africa's vernacular languages—to perform, in his terms, a "farewell to English."<sup>1</sup> In India, by contrast, to "decolonize the museum" was to confront, as the novelist and great art reformer of the post-Independence era Mulk Raj Anand once complained, "a bunch of half-dead warehouses inherited from the British" and to deal with the "stranglehold of an obsolete system."<sup>2</sup> These contexts may seem a far cry from last year's protests against Warren Kanders at the Whitney Museum or demands for the repatriation of imperial plunder at the Brooklyn Museum. Obviously, there is an enormous distance between the societal landscape envisioned by such postcolonial thinkers and the kinds of realities we are faced with today at the global level. If *decolonize* recalls the impassioned rhetoric of an earlier era, its current deployments by young people shouting for justice in wide-ranging spaces and sites mean that the term has clearly captured a new lease on life.

Today there is an increasingly complex ecology for the imperative to decolonize and myriad contexts for decolonial activism beyond the immediate New York locus of the social movement known as Decolonize This Place. There are calls throughout Europe and North America to decolonize knowledge, disciplines, museums, their executive boards, curricula, departments, libraries, galleries, archives, journals, presses, textbooks, and so on. As a verb, *decolonize*

1. Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, *Decolonising the Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature* (London: James Currey, 1986).

2. Mulk Raj Anand, "Museum: House of the Muses," *Marg* 19, no. 1 (December 1965), pp. 2–3.

refers to many kinds of strategies and demands: It can mean calling for repatriation and restitution of objects and land, exposing hierarchies, toppling statues, protesting the accumulation of capital in the hands of a very few at the expense of a great many, insisting on greater racial representation. Current decolonize movements are linked in important ways to the contemporary realities of Indigenous dispossession in the United States and the fight against racial injustice embodied by the Black Lives Matter movement. This, in turn, highlights the issue of historical underrepresentation and the ongoing dynamics of both real and symbolic structural violence to marginalized communities. In other words, we are talking about a range of interrogative practices and highly visible forms of public agitation and collective action that represent friction and confrontation in the domain of culture within the alarmingly regressive politics of our times. At the same time, strategies we might call decolonizing have become so ubiquitous, diffuse, and nebulous that they risk becoming emptied of meaning or, worse, being so normalized and embraced by neoliberal institutions that the concept is no longer an agent of change (the fate of the term *diversity*, for instance). There is a need at this moment for a greater alliance of forces that oppose the dominant narratives of capitalism and power—and the momentous and enduring historical legacies of colonialism and slavery that have shaped our world so profoundly—beyond the single, isolated hashtagged cause. To this extent the vast proliferation of counternarratives that continue to reinvent our relations to one another in nonessentializing terms, and the reactivation of critical vocabularies from the past to confront the needs of the present, are certainly things to be welcomed. It may also be useful to remember that for the earlier generation of postcolonial thinkers *decolonization* was more a verb than a noun. It represented, in other words, not an arrival but a beginning in the wake of independence, an ongoing process, a lived experience, a set of sight lines on a future horizon, and ultimately a lifelong project.

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## TIONA NEKKIA McCLODDEN

I have not in my thirty-nine years of life seen or experienced any genuine efforts of decolonization that could last beyond the moment of action. In recent years, the activities I've seen operating under the banner of "decolonization" within the spheres of art and culture have often put people in spaces of manipulation and fear. There is a violence perpetrated in the effort to shock people into joining a movement or to turn them into soldiers of a kind. I am not interested in following or being led by people who would ask me to put my body on the line for an abstract cause. I have witnessed and experienced a range of non-Black people calling for the decolonization of buildings, events, exhibits, etc. As a Black queer woman who was raised poor in the American South, the stakes are high for me. Because these decolonizing acts deal with issues that impact Black people, they need Black bodies on the line to succeed. In terms of the actual forms these attempts at decolonization take, the strategies enacted have become very repetitive and predictable. They are mainly good at producing discourse within journals like this one, with the accompanying credit and cultural capital usually extended to the (non-Black) organizers or leaders. This is one reason I no longer believe in collective action as the first gesture toward the larger effort toward decolonization.

For those in my lineage—my parents and elders, those of the generations post-enslavement and sharecropping—decolonization has often been tied to the struggle to be respected and paid appropriately for their work and time. I prioritize this reconfiguration of value. I feel the best thing I can do in structuring my own life and work is to focus on my bloodline, my lineage, to turn the tide away from the Christian framework which has dominated the spiritual and epistemological existence of my family. I also work to break the consumption of my family by factory-based labor, in hopes that my children, my niece, and my nephews see that they can be more than just a soldier or a worker stuck in a certain political landscape. For many people, that is as "decolonial" as things get, because it's in their face every single day. I see nothing wrong with factory labor, and I don't look down on those people, but I also understand how such landscapes can cause tremendous deterioration for individuals and communities. My family's relationship to value has been overdetermined by the wage since the Reconstruction era, and in my work, I have tried to establish a different conception of value through what I can produce with my hands.

There's an amazing short story by Henry Dumas called "The Marchers"<sup>1</sup> which I like to return to when thinking about these questions. In the story, a prisoner is set free through the actions of a crowd. As they chant about freedom, de-imperialization, and the liberation of this man, the crowd inadvertently tramples the person they set out to free. In an instant, the protagonist goes from being an individual to being a lifeless body overlooked by those who made him a symbol of their fight. This story makes me think about what it means to prioritize an abstract

1. Henry Dumas, "The Marchers," *Rope of the Wind* (New York: Random House, 1979), pp. 3–9.

cause at the risk of the individual. What are the costs of these attempts to force transcendence or liberation?

There's another text, *Meridian*, by Alice Walker,<sup>2</sup> that I've read every year for the past decade. It follows a woman named Meridian whose body deteriorates alongside her relationship to the "cause." I read it as a cautionary tale about the ways one can completely be burned out and depleted by the relationships—both romantic and platonic—that are in process during these moments of resistance. What is there to sacrifice for this larger good? Where do you rest and recover? How are you any good to anyone, let alone a cause, if you are not well? How is it that you can become a mere figure to a movement who sees you as a particular kind of vessel through which to work, to the point of breaking?

For me, these things came to a head last year because of my selection and participation as an artist in the 2019 Whitney Biennial. The opportunity was multifaceted. To be in that exhibition is to be seen as representing the best artists in the American art world, or rather industry, if only for a brief moment. The work that I produced, *I prayed to the wrong god for you*, was a piece that allowed me to practice what I have written here. I chose to produce work at the limitations of my own hands, that required only my labor, up until the moment I passed off my objects and video files to the museum and art handlers for installation. I zeroed in on where I was in my life, and I used the opportunity to consider how my subjectivity and lineage stood within and against the institution and the other works on view. I chose to step forward as my full self to disclose an aspect of my life that I had not addressed within my art practice.

The ongoing circulation of decolonization as a buzzword always brings me back to the question of impact, another buzzword. I have had to disrupt the scale of what impact means for myself and others. In the instance of the Whitney Biennial, the stance I took in refusing to participate in the predominantly white-led alarm calls of DTP, W.A.G.E., and others, poorly organized and heavily reliant on the language of neoliberal urgency, was a personal choice grounded in the knowledge that I would be standing alone, as myself, as a Black queer woman practitioner of a religion delivered to the American continent over four hundred years ago, held within the bodies, souls, and minds of enslaved African people. In doing so, I claimed the right to measure the impact of my work.

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2. Alice Walker, *Meridian* (New York: Pocket Books/Washington Square Press, 1976).



ALAN MICHELSON

*They're treating everyone like Indians now!*

—Squamish Chief Ian Campbell,  
Idle No More Rally, Vancouver 2012<sup>1</sup>

*When white persons of either sex have been taken prisoners young by the Indians, and have lived a while among them, tho' ransomed by their Friends, and treated with all imaginable tenderness to prevail with them to stay . . . yet in a Short time they become disgusted with our manner of life, and the care and pains that are necessary to support it, and take the first good Opportunity of escaping again into the Woods, from whence there is no reclaiming them.*

—Benjamin Franklin, 1753 letter<sup>2</sup>

In current parlance, *decolonize* is an appeal, an admonishment, an injunction trailing an invisible exclamation mark. In these trying times, in this trying country, it is rhetorical, sloganesque, and wildly aspirational. It is a word whose body, like the country, is founded on the opposing injunction: *Colonize*. The prefix denotes reversal or negation, as if the colossal trauma and injustice of colonization were reversible or cancelable.

*Colonize* stems from the Latin *colonus*, a farmer who farms someone else's land. The root of the word contains the root of the problem, but in an offhand, sanitized way. It conveys none of the suffering involved when one group of people arrogates to itself the right to invade another, to dispossess and destroy another, out of an imagined superiority. A more forthright description of the ongoing colonization of Turtle Island (North America) requires a shift to that stronger word *genocide*.

How does a farmer get to farm someone else's land without their consent? Via the *grab*. Via force and fraud, false justification, racist incitement, reverse blaming, and refusal of accountability. An imperious sense of entitlement and disrespect is behind the grab, whether of someone's land, labor, or genitals. The grab is foundational—George Washington's name in the Haudenosaunee language is Hanödaga:yas, meaning Town Destroyer. His Sullivan campaign literally burned us out of what became most of New York State.

1. "Hereditary Chief Ian Campbell Squamish Nation speaks at 'Idle No More' in Vancouver," Elaho—GiantBC Environmental Issues, December 25, 2012, YouTube video, 4:35, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zStL2mK2aSA>.

2. "From Benjamin Franklin to Peter Collinson, 9 May 1753," Founders Online, US National Archives and Records Administration, <https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Franklin/01-04-02-0173>. Original source: *The Papers of Benjamin Franklin*, vol. 4, July 1, 1750, through June 30, 1753, ed. Leonard W. Labaree (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1961), pp. 477–86.



*Alan Michelson. Hanödaga:yas (Town Destroyer). 2019.  
Courtesy of the artist and Peabody Essex Museum.*

Time may conceal but cannot heal all wounds, nor erase all crimes, even unacknowledged, unexpiated ones obscured by myth. The greatest grab in history, the forced transfer of 2.2 billion acres of land and resources from sovereign Native nations to the United States, has been normalized and rarely questioned, except in Native land claims. But isn't that a misnomer, aren't the 2.2 billion acres of Native land, appropriated under the guise of "discovery," the real land claim?

Setting aside, for a moment, "decolonizing" gestures such as land acknowledgment, apology, and reconciliation, what would honoring treaties look like, what would reparations to Indigenous people look like?

When I think of the word *decolonize*, I imagine a film half a millennium long played backwards. Over its course, destiny unmanifests, wagons roll east, buffalo roam, dams burst, waters clear and teem with fish, oil sinks underground, cities fall, forests rise, bullets reverse, wolves howl, birds sing, drums beat, and home-bound ships set sail under a majestic, star-filled sky.

I prefer the word *indigenize* and its associated values, like relationality, reverence, respect, and reciprocity. Take the first good opportunity of escaping into the woods.

ALAN MICHELSON is a Mohawk member of Six Nations of the Grand River whose *Alan Michelson: Wolf Nation* closed earlier this year at the Whitney Museum.

## PARTHA MITTER

India's independence in 1947 set in motion the decolonization of a raft of Asian and African nations. The postcolonial era reset global geopolitics in a different mode from the earlier global imbalance between the colonizer and the colonized, the center and the periphery. Therefore we fail to grasp the complex nature of decolonization unless we examine in depth the whole mechanism of European colonization itself. What was so special about colonial empires, which culminated in the British Empire, the largest, in the nineteenth century? Unlike previous empires, colonialism was predicated on a concrete bulwark of cultural difference. To grasp its nature and its reach we need to turn to the great intellectual revolution that came about during the European Enlightenment with its transformative impact on the globe.

Modernity in the sense of a new conception of time—linear time—emerged in the Enlightenment in tandem with a new vision of history. *Progress* became the buzzword, adding a moral dimension to development, which culminated in Hegel's grand design of the progress of the universal Spirit (*Geist*) through history.<sup>1</sup> Since antiquity, the prevalent idea had been the continuous decline of society from a mythical golden age. The doctrine of progress redefined the past in light of its perception in the present, expressing an ever-expanding optimism about the future.

Secondly, global explorations since the sixteenth century made Europeans increasingly aware of human diversity. While accepting the biblical common origin of humankind, early classifications divided *Homo sapiens* into broad groups such as white, black, yellow, and, occasionally, red (Indian). Race as we understand it only emerged in the late eighteenth century. Aided by physical anthropology and comparative philology, a pseudo-scientific definition of race gained popularity: Physical features determined language, cultural traits, and intelligence—all an inalienable inheritance. Furthermore, evolutionary doctrines secularized the Great Chain of Being—the dominant medieval classifying principle—placing humankind on a hierarchical scale. By the middle of the Victorian era, doctrines of race, hierarchy, and evolution ranked human societies on an ascending order of progress. Africans were placed at the bottom as the least developed, with the post-Enlightenment West representing the pinnacle of civilization.<sup>2</sup> This full-blown teleology, propelled by a powerful notion of difference, occupied the central space of the Western worldview. Significantly, colonization was a matter not of mere physical dominance or material superiority but of cultural appropriation. Antonio Gramsci spoke of hegemony as the willing submission of the underclass to the world image of the ruling class, an insight that may well be applied to the colonizer/colonized nexus.

1. Robert Nisbet, *History of the Idea of Progress* (New York: Basic Books, 1980), chap. 5. See also John Bagnell Bury, *The Idea of Progress: An Inquiry into Its Origin and Growth* (London: Macmillan, 1920). On Hegel, see Bury, chap. 10, and a critical evaluation of Hegel in E. H. Gombrich, *In Search of Cultural History* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969), pp. 6–14.

2. Arthur O. Lovejoy, *The Great Chain of Being* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1936); Stephen Jay Gould, *The Mismeasure of Man* (New York: Norton, 1981).

Therefore the task before us is no less than the decolonization of the mind. Strikingly, European domination manifests especially acutely in art. The roots of a linear interpretation of art history go back to Giorgio Vasari, who created the master narrative for Renaissance art. He defined Florence, Rome, and Venice as centers of innovation, categorizing peripheries as sites of delayed growth and imitation. A great painter such as Correggio from Parma had to play catch-up with the achievements of a Michelangelo or a Raphael rather than being judged on his own merit. Vasarian teleology enjoyed the added confidence of a positivist art history in the nineteenth century, as evolutionary doctrines enabled art historians to evaluate world art from its “primitive” base to its climax in Victorian painting, with “Oriental” art occupying the intervening space. Periphery is thus a matter not of geography alone but also of power and authority that affects race, class, gender, and sexual orientation.<sup>3</sup>

Linear time created its own set of inclusions and exclusions. Modernity belonged to the center, the West. In his Nobel Prize acceptance speech, Octavio Paz spoke wistfully of the incommensurate times of the center and the periphery: “For us, as Spanish Americans, the real present was not in our countries: it was the time lived by others, by the English, the French and the Germans. . . . I wanted to be a modern poet. . . . The idea of modernity is a by-product of our conception of history as a unique and linear process.”<sup>4</sup>

Needless to say, the revolutionary tenor of modernism inspired artists worldwide. Nonetheless, the art-historical narrative of modernism imposed its own exclusions and inclusions. Against the “originary” discourse of European modernism, all other modernisms were caught in the predicament of derivativeness. I have called this phenomenon “the Picasso manqué syndrome”: If the imitation was too successful, it was tantamount to aping; if, on the other hand, the imitation was imperfect, it represented a failure of learning.<sup>5</sup>

How, then, do we decolonize the mind? How, as I have described it in another context, do we decenter modernism?<sup>6</sup> What are the epistemic challenges? The commonplace is that all worthwhile ideas flow from the West to the non-West in a one-way transaction—global westernization as the inevitable unfolding of a Hegelian logic. But in order to decolonize the mind we need to adjust our mind-set. Global exchanges and crossing cultural frontiers have been powerful catalysts in paradigm shifts throughout history, multiple crisscrossings of ideas flowing in different directions. Of course, one cannot ignore the asymmetrical relations

3. Pier Luigi De Vecchi and Giancarla Periti, “Introduction,” in *Emilia e Marche nel Rinascimento: L'Identità Visiva della "Periferia,"* ed. Giancarla Periti (Azzano San Paolo: Bolis, 2005), pp. 7–11. See also Enrico Castelnuovo and Carlo Ginsberg's “Centro e periferia,” in *Storia dell'arte italiana*, vol. 1 (Turin: Einaudi, 1979), pp. 285–354.

4. Octavio Paz, [http://www.nobelprize.org/nobel\\_prizes/literature/laureates/1990/paz-lecture.html](http://www.nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/literature/laureates/1990/paz-lecture.html). My thanks to Devika Singh for drawing my attention to Paz's speech on receiving the Nobel Prize in 1990.

5. Partha Mitter, “Decentering Modernism: Art History and Avant-Garde Art from the Periphery,” *The Art Bulletin* 90, no. 4 (December 2008), p. 537.

6. *Ibid.*, pp. 531–48.

between the center and the margins, which is a fact of the global colonial order. Recent writings have sought to respond to these global challenges by proposing the concept of “cosmopolitanism” as a thread that holds human beings together, because everyone has the right to the world’s heritage.<sup>7</sup> While such Aristotelian universalism is admirable, it fails to address questions of power and visibility within an uneven global relationship.

I propose instead a “virtual cosmopolitanism.” Benedict Anderson popularized the idea of “imagined communities” in connection with nationalism; print capitalism created communities whose members may not have had direct contact with one another but shared an intellectual or social space nonetheless. I want to extend Anderson’s idea to the global level. European expansion established hegemonic languages—English, French, Spanish, and Portuguese in the colonized regions. Importantly, their spread was facilitated by print technology, which circulated ideas of modernity, often originating in the metropolis, to the peripheries. Thus the “virtual cosmopolitan” in the periphery, notably the colonies, was able to access printed texts and images emanating from the center. A cosmopolitan conjures up the vision of privilege and free mobility: a wealthy set traveling the world in luxury liners. Unlike the cosmopolitan global citizen, all that the “virtual cosmopolitan” required was access to printed material. One could not think of a better example than the worldwide circulation and transmutation of the English comic magazine *Punch*.<sup>8</sup>

Such exchanges were not necessarily reliant on power relations. Can we really circumvent the asymmetrical relations between center and periphery? What theoretical underpinnings can we apply to avoid exchanges being prejudged by a dependency syndrome? Mikhail Bakhtin coined the term *dialogic* to describe a continuous interchange with other texts: One appropriates the words of others and transforms them according to one’s creative intentions. This intertextual process is dynamic, relational, and engaged in endless redescriptions of one’s world vision (*Weltanschauung*). Bakhtin’s literary theory could be a useful tool for cross-cultural analysis of modernism. Dialogic method accommodates the coexistence of different approaches in a relativist manner; it does not erect an essentialist hierarchy of ideas and values, which is the basis of colonial discourse. This is consonant with the hybrid and cosmopolitan nature of modernism. In short, virtual cosmopolitanism is an imagined community of strangers created through the print medium because of a sense of a common project, the project of modernity. To my mind such hybrid, nonhierarchical cultural conversations across frontiers will help loosen the dominant canon of modernism and contribute toward a more open art history for the twenty-first century.

PARTHA MITTER is the author of *Much Maligned Monsters: A History of European Reactions to Indian Art* (Clarendon Press, 1977), among other books.

7. Kwame Anthony Appiah, *Cosmopolitanism* (New York: Norton, 2006).

8. Hans Harder and Barbara Mittler, eds., *Asian Punches: A Transcultural Affair* (Berlin: Springer, 2013).

STEVEN NELSON

To decolonize means studying the historical avant-garde through the art and scholarship of women and authors of color.

To decolonize means exploring Paris from the vantage point of Dakar.

To decolonize means analyzing Dakar in ways that don't center Paris.

To decolonize means understanding the construction of Central Park through the lens of Seneca Village, an African-American community destroyed for the park's construction.

To decolonize means not romanticizing or exoticizing the colonized and oppressed.

To decolonize means invoking my right to interpret Ad Reinhart's black paintings of the 1950s through their power to transport me back to my childhood, one where being called the N-word was not uncommon.

To decolonize means citing the work of women and authors of color even when you don't have to.

To decolonize means teasing out the complexity of the past without diluting or erasing it in accordance with present-day societies that are addicted to outrage yet take extraordinary steps to avoid trauma.

To decolonize means always asking "whose?" when confronted with colleagues who use abstract notions of "taste" and "aesthetic excellence" to devalue work they either don't like or don't understand.

To decolonize means moving around the classroom furniture to change the terms of engagement.

To decolonize means envisioning an audience far wider than your historically white institution of higher learning, museum, and art world.

To decolonize means knowing that you don't always have something of value to contribute to the conversation.

To decolonize means not only comprehending structural inequality but also working towards its eradication.

To decolonize means creating spaces for others' scholarship and creativity and staying out of the results.

To decolonize means recreating the world and, to summon Audre Lorde, "[seeking] new ways of being in it."<sup>1</sup>

To decolonize means not expending all of your energy educating historically white institutions, museums, and the art world about decolonization.

To decolonize means freeing ourselves first.

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1. Audre Lorde, "The Master's Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master's House," in *Sister Outsider* (Freedom, CA: Crossing Press, 1984), p. 111.

## UGOCHUKWU-SMOOTH C. NZEWI

Fred Wilson's *Mining the Museum* at the Maryland Historical Society in collaboration with the Contemporary, Baltimore (1992–93), was a revolutionary breakthrough in addressing the colonial foundation of Western museums and the institutional racism that has shaped museum practices. As significant as Wilson's intervention was in shining a critical light on what theorist Walter D. Mignolo has described as decolonial strategies, the much-maligned *Into the Heart of Africa* exhibition at the Royal Ontario Museum, Toronto, in 1989 may well be viewed as the catalyst for the type of decolonial arguments that Wilson's work proposed.<sup>1</sup> Although the exhibition set out to address the relationship between early Western collecting practice and colonialism, its display and communication strategies were deeply flawed. In sum, the exhibition was seen by members of the African-Canadian community as glorifying colonialism. Ultimately, it revealed the deep social, political, and racial gulfs surrounding the politics of representation in the museum vis-à-vis Canada's multicultural ideal. Despite the controversies that engulfed the exhibition as a result of the ambiguities in the curatorial vision, it generated considerable debate and consequently led to the seminal conference and publication *Exhibiting Cultures* in 1990–91.<sup>2</sup>

With the mainstreaming of postcolonial criticism and reflexive museology since the mid-1990s, it has since become fashionable to invite contemporary artists to engage with museums' collections, to ask tough questions without necessarily expecting "real" answers or outcomes.<sup>3</sup> Two recent artistic interventions at the Welkulturen Museum, Frankfurt, Germany, and Mu.ZEE Oostende, Belgium, are worthy of note. Seven artists were invited by the Welkulturen Museum on separate occasions in 2011 to spend time in residence in the city of Frankfurt. Set up in a nearby flat owned by the museum, the artists spent ample time going through the collection of more than 67,000 artifacts and images. The participants were Alf Bayrle (Germany [deceased]—his early works were included and his spirit was invoked by his son); Helke Bayrle (Germany); Thomas Bayrle (Germany); Antje Majewski (Germany); Marc Camille Chaimowicz (United Kingdom/France); Sunah Choi (South Korea); Otobong Nkanga (Nigeria); and Simon Popper (United Kingdom). Each artist conducted an "expedition" and "domestic field-

1. Walter D. Mignolo refers to Wilson's intervention as an "epistemically disobedient gesture" that puts form and action to decoloniality. Mignolo's "decolonial" or "decolonality" build upon what he identifies as "the process of decolonization." See Mignolo, "Museums in the Colonial Horizon of Modernity," in *Globalization and Contemporary Art*, ed. Jonathan Harris (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011), pp. 71–85.

2. Ivan Karp and Steven D. Levine, eds., *Exhibiting Cultures: The Poetics and Politics of Museum Display* (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1991).

3. See, for example, Shelley Ruth Butler, "Reflexive Museology: Lost and Found," in *The International Handbooks of Museum Studies*, vol. 1, ed. Sharon Macdonald et al. (Chichester, West Sussex: John Wiley and Sons, 2015), pp. 159–82.



work” (to borrow terms used by Clémentine Deliss, former director of the museum). The artists worked in close consultation with the museum’s research curators, archivists, and librarians in selecting and responding to a range of objects that sparked their respective interests from countries including Angola, Brazil, Canada, Nigeria, New Guinea, Namibia, Peru, Samoa, the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Cameroon, and the Solomon Islands. New works created in situ were displayed in proximity to the ethnographic objects and cultural artifacts that inspired them. Field drawings and photographs of boulders produced by Alf Bayrle during an anthropological expedition to Ethiopia in the 1930s were displayed together with ethnographic stone and wood stelae from the museum’s collection. All these works and objects, new and old, made up the *Object Atlas* exhibition, on view from January 25 to September 16, 2012.

Similarly, the Mu.ZEE invited Congolese artist Sammy Baloji to organize an ambitious research-driven exhibition in the summer of 2014. Baloji’s project, *Hunting and Collecting*, considered the eponymous practices as economic activities bound to European colonialism and the history of the museum. His point of departure was a colonial photo album that once belonged to the Belgian military officer Henry Pauwels, who was contracted to supply gorillas to the Musée royal de l’Afrique centrale, Tervuren. The photo album consisted of hunting scenes, ethnographic photographs of natives, and images of the quotidian life of Belgians in the colony taken during Pauwels’s expedition in the Belgian Congo between 1911 and 1913. Yet despite their anthropological focus, Pauwels’s images capture traces of early industrial modernity in the region.

Baloji created a photomontage series combining images drawn from Pauwels’s photo album and images of Northern Kivu created by the contemporary Congolese documentary photographer Chrispin Mvano. Mvano’s pictures startlingly expose demonstrations, refugee camps, the residual effects of the intermittent civil war in the DRC, and the figures of the laborers who work in the mines. In addition, Baloji collaborated with Congolese and European artists and filmmakers, including George Senga (DRC), Sven Augustijnen (Belgium), Renzo Martens (the Netherlands), Manu Riche (Belgium), Sinzo Aanza (DRC), and Salomé Laloux-Bard (France). Together they explored the historical and contemporary relationship between Belgium and the DRC, centered on the economics of colonial extraction and the African state’s perpetual civil war. Baloji also invited Belgian historian Patricia Van Schuylenbergh to contribute essays that explored the historical impact of Belgian colonization on economic conditions in the DRC. Further, *Hunting and Collecting* interspersed works by Baloji and his collaborators juxtaposed with nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century works by Belgian artists in the Mu.ZEE’s collection.

The two exhibitions model thoughtful and creative strategies worth considering in their own rights. Yet there does seem to be a distinction between the two: In the former, ethnographic materials were set side by side with the new works they inspired; in the latter, works by Baloji and his cohort were placed in dialogue with

historical European works. Both exhibitions raised questions about how museums' institutional histories are tied to modes of colonial violence (conquest, plunder, confiscation, and accumulation) that continue to inform contemporary conditions. In the context of *Object Atlas*, Deliss argued for the reinvention of the museum to meet twenty-first-century demands, which require looking toward the future as opposed to the past (although, by her lights, the past should continue to serve as a frame of reference).

In a seminar entitled Decolonising the Museum, Deliss proposed the term *remediation* as a form of institutional self-critique for museums but also as an epistemic framework for the twenty-first-century museum, which is understood as post-ethnographic and postcolonial.<sup>4</sup> Undergirding Deliss's theorization of remediation is the notion that museums should be reimagined as sites of interrogation and critical inquiry, rather than as spaces of wonder and civic education for encountering cultures of the world through their material objects. For Deliss, the "postcolonial" museum is imagined to dig deeper into questions of "display and presentation"; to bring to the foreground what goes on behind the scenes of the museum; to resituate issues surrounding restitution and repatriation of objects to source cultures; and to address the museum's institutional histories and its objects as fertile ground for experimental research and display. She argues for a dynamic interdisciplinary museum that produces new contexts of knowledge from the inside out by remediating the institution's material and intellectual histories. Anchored on this idea is the articulation of new forms of cultural diplomacy in which the artist-as-researcher or the artist-as-curator is the museum's principal collaborator.

Deliss's remediation envisions a forward-facing blueprint for the museum—she wrote a manifesto for it—yet there are lingering concerns.<sup>5</sup> In the main, it is inexplicable that interventions (many have been construed to focus on collections with colonial legacies) such as the two discussed here perform what could be described as exorcism. It would seem that in inviting artists, especially those from previously colonized spaces, to shake things up, institutions end up affirming Western cultural imperatives and inadvertently reinforcing the imperial imagination that produced the *museum ab initio*. In other words, to what extent are artists (Western and non-Western) complicit in reinforcing the Western museum as "universal," "global," and as *the* site of artistic legitimation? Ariella Azoulay, theorist of photography and visual cultures, suggests that in addition to dealing with the violence of colonial extraction, objects also contend with the violence of naturalization in Western museums, about which average museumgoers are very much ignorant.<sup>6</sup> While the narrative of colonial

4. See Clémentine Deliss, "Collecting Life's Unknown," *Internationale*, June 11, 2015, [http://www.internationaleonline.org/research/decolonising\\_practices/27\\_collecting\\_lifes\\_unknowns](http://www.internationaleonline.org/research/decolonising_practices/27_collecting_lifes_unknowns). The article was previously presented at the seminar Decolonising the Museum, organized by Paul B. Preciado, at Museu d'Art Contemporani de Barcelona (MACBA), on December 28, 2014.

5. Clémentine Deliss, "Curating Neighborhoods: A Manifesto for the Post-Ethnographic Museum," *Modern Painters*, August 31, 2014, <http://www.blouinartinfo.com/news/story/1051849/curating-neighborhoods-a-manifesto-for-the-post-ethnographic>.

6. Ariella Aisha Azoulay, "Interview with Sabrina Alli," *Guernica*, March 12, 2020, <https://www.guernicamag.com/miscellaneous-files-ariella-aisha-azoulay/>.

extraction is central in the two artistic interventions discussed above, the violence of naturalization appears invisible, understated, or unaccounted. Thus, are such artistic interventions truly radical gestures, self-serving errands for the artist and his/her institution, or a form of cooptation that reaffirms the position of the Western museum as holding epistemological truth?

Indeed, it bears noting that when we think of the museum and artistic interventions, the space of engagement is usually presumed to be the Western context. One could ask, to what extent could remediation apply to a museum located in Africa, say Nigeria or the DRC? This begets another question: To what extent is the collaboration between artists and the museum a symbolic gesture, self-referential, and/or a guilt-sharing enterprise? These are questions that pose a moral dilemma. When we say “to decolonize,” the intention is to reverse a world shaped around Eurocentric bias. Yet the West’s ineluctable ability to co-opt is unquestionable and reinforces Azoulay’s observation that “imperialism reproduces itself through a series of *largely well-intended* [emphasis mine] curatorial practices.”<sup>7</sup>

The resurgent wave of decolonization and decoloniality in academia and the art world insists on unlearning epistemologies that were once held as inviolable. Yet it is not always clear how this is achievable when our present neoliberal world reflects its Enlightenment past that spurred imperialism and birthed the museum. For some, it is a show of solidarity in undermining or dismantling the Western order on social, economic, political, cultural, and epistemological fronts. In other words, when we say *decolonize*, do we mean real structural changes that surgically upend neoliberal capitalism and effect a clean break from such an imperialist past and the system of knowledge production that includes the museum?

Perhaps one could think of artistic interventions in museums as a form of *détournement* (the strategy of negation made famous by the Situationist International) in that they can either consciously or unconsciously highlight the inherent contradictions and duplicitousness in and of the museum. Or one might use the metaphor of *Eshu*, the Yoruba trickster god, to capture the conundrum that artists (especially postcolonial artists) are faced with when they are called upon to perform exorcism in Western museums. Their fate is no different from that of their colleagues—non-Western curators, scholars, etc.—who operate in the West and must be adept at code-switching. By and large, a “decolonial” practice must critically examine a museum’s institutional memory (ideology of practice) and its history (records of events). The two are neither the same nor interchangeable, and not always apparent or properly considered in artistic interventions.

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7. Ibid.

## ALESSANDRO PETTI

In trying to respond to this loaded question it's necessary to clarify the perspective and position from which one is seeing and speaking, as well as the experiences which have shaped one's understanding and practice of the term *decolonization*. In my experience decolonization has essentially been understood and practiced as a double movement: On one side it's a critical approach to the status quo and an antidote to normalization, while on the other side it's a movement towards the creation of meaningful and emancipatory forms of life. These movements have emerged and developed concrete meanings in the context of Palestine, where decolonization is essentially understood above all as liberation against the Israeli regime of occupation, colonization, and apartheid. In 2007, Sandi Hilal, Eyal Weizman, and I established DAAR (Decolonizing Architecture Art Residency),<sup>1</sup> an architectural and artistic collective practice which aims to imagine the reuse of colonial structures for different intentions than they were originally designed for, from evacuated military bases to refugee camps, uncompleted governmental structures, and the remains of destroyed villages. Architecture in the process of colonization and decolonization plays a crucial role in organizing spatial relations and expressing ideologies, and even when it's abandoned and left in ruins, it is mobilized as evidence of political and cultural claims. The analysis of the ways in which colonial architecture has been reutilized is a new arena for understanding broader political and cultural issues around national identity and exile, senses of belonging or alienation, and social control or urban subversion. For Decolonizing Architecture, it is not enough to simply invert the structures of power. In postcolonial India, Jawaharlal Nehru and Mahatma Gandhi had different positions on how to reuse evacuated British colonial buildings: Nehru wanted to reuse them for the new independent government, prisons as prisons, school to be continued to be used as schools, etc., while Gandhi believed that a liberated India should radically change the functions of these colonial structures in order to serve the interests of the people and liberate themselves from the inherent structure of power relations.

The difficult task of Decolonizing Architecture, therefore, is to reimagine new uses that will not be trapped by structures of power. In this sense decolonization is closer to an act of profanation to present structures of domination rather than a messianic promise of a more just future that never arrives. Giorgio Agamben points out that "to profane does not simply mean to abolish or cancel separations, but to learn to make new uses of them." To profane is to transgress lines of separation, to use them in a particular way. If to sacralize is to separate and bring common things into a separate, sacred sphere, then its inverse, to profane, is to restore the common use of these things. Reutilizing colonial architecture, therefore, does not only mean to dislocate power but to use its destructive potential to reverse its operation by subverting its uses. It is, accordingly, important to distinguish between secularization and profana-

1. [www.decolonizing.ps](http://www.decolonizing.ps).

tion. Secularization leaves the power structure intact; it simply moves it from one sphere to another. Profanation, however, manages to deactivate the power devices and restore the common use of the space that power had confiscated.

Historical processes of colonization and decolonization and today's conditions of coloniality and decoloniality, to borrow Walter Mignolo's conceptualizations, have shaped the world order and continue to sustain systems of privilege. The European colonial/modern project of exploitation, segregation, and dispossession began five hundred years ago, when the world was divided into different races and nations considered to be inferior to Europe, which remained the center of reference of culture and civilization. Perhaps the most striking example of this inherited privilege is the right of free movement granted to European descendants and negated to the rest of the world. It has to be said that the European colonial/modern project was imposed not only outside of Europe but also within Europe itself. Southern Italy, where I was born, for example, is still today considered "underdeveloped," "traditional," and "backward," the object of a failed project of modernization.

In 1940 the Fascist regime founded the "Ente di colonizzazione del latifondo siciliano" (Colonization Entity of Sicilian Latifundia) with the intention to modernize/colonize the Sicilian countryside with new, modern rural towns. The countryside was also considered "deserted" and "unproductive" and therefore needed to be "reclaimed," "civilized." A few years earlier, the "Ente di colonizzazione della Libia" (Colonization Entity of Libya) had been established with the intention of bringing modernity to Libya and erecting modern cities and architecture in Libya,



*Alessandro Petti. Verso un Ente di Decolonizzazione (Towards a decolonization entity). 2020.*

Eritrea, and Ethiopia. While architectural modernism, in particular, continues to be celebrated for its progressive social and political agenda, what the modernist rhetoric of progress and innovation obscures is its dark side, namely, its inherent homogenizing, authoritarian, and segregationist dimensions. These modernist conceptions are still present in contemporary architecture and urban planning, where, in the name of modern architecture, entire communities, forms of life, and historical sites are erased.

A critique of modernism alone is not enough, having already been conducted by postmodernism. The task of the present is, additionally, to imagine architectural forms of demodernization. Therefore, for all those who are living in modernist structures, it is time, within the larger struggle of decolonization, to focus our efforts on undermining and destabilizing the very foundational modernists' values, categories, and epistemologies that continue to permeate our realities, irrespective of geographical location and North/South divisions.

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## CHRISTOPHER PINNEY

For many years, alongside syllabi on South Asian visual culture, I've taught a course with various names including Colonial and Postcolonial Visual Culture and Visualizing Cultural Encounters. At its center is the question of how visual images have mediated global cultural encounters since 1492. The course foregrounds colonial/invaser/settler narratives which are then counterpointed by Indigenous critiques and alternatives, but I have always thought that the course itself required further decolonization through an inversion, presenting Mexican codices and Guamon Poma first *and then* Theodor de Bry, or, in a Pacific context, the "Artist of the Chief Mourner" and Mickey of Ulladulla *and then* William Hodges. That this remains an aspiration marks the covert recognition of the questionable value of reinforcing a binary from which we need an alternate route of escape. There is no question about the necessity of decolonization; the issue is how best to do it.

Is decolonization the gravedigger of colonization or does it reinscribe through some unintended dialectic the very totality from which it seeks to flee? Does it offer an adroit diagnosis of fluidity and ambivalence or (like Senghor's *Négritude*) mobilize essentializing identities, conjuring a stasis when what is required is a sense of flow? Might we see it as the last gasp of the binarism bequeathed by Edward Said's *Orientalism* as opposed to the nuance and complexity of Homi Bhabha's conjuring of the translational space of encounter and iteration? "The waiting room of history" (to recall Dipesh Chakrabarty) is not a separate territory; it is better understood as an aporia within a transculturating network. Transculturated narratives of a creole Europe have the potential to undermine the purificatory ethno-nationalist obscurities of today, the central obligation of contemporary scholarship.

Synoptic accounts such as Bernard Smith's *European Vision and the South Pacific* demand a more radical response, or supplement, than simply the documentation of oppositional subaltern archives (although I completely accept the importance of that ongoing endeavor as a baseline requirement). Instead of insisting on an inversion or mirror imaging that ultimately affirms the basic direction of established historiography, we need, as Walter Benjamin proposed in his *Theses on the Philosophy of History*, to "brush history against the grain." Stephen Greenblatt brushes textual hermeneutics against the grain when he chooses to creatively misread the famous phrase which precedes this in Thesis 7—"There is no document of civilization which is not at the same time a document of barbarism"—as evoking a sense of the ineluctable co-presence of the other.<sup>1</sup> Greenblatt's example is the role of Scythian nomadism in Herodotus (in the grain of whose voice it is possible to hear "echoes of the nomad"), but the subversive potential of co-presence may be more vividly evoked through the West Indian sugar (to recall Stuart Hall's favorite example) that rotted the teeth of generations of British schoolchildren.

1. Stephen Greenblatt, *Marvelous Possessions: The Wonder of the New World* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991), p. 128.

One of the twentieth century's clearest statements of co-presence in the visual is to be found in Benjamin's "Little History of Photography." His perfect account of the ineluctable intrusion of contingency in the photographic event<sup>2</sup> has since nourished Ariella Azoulay's claim concerning the decolonizing potential of the "civil contract of photography."<sup>3</sup> But visual de-territorialization has a much longer history. Reading backwards, we find a similar iterative contingency in all images. Take Rudolf Wittkower's famous study of the fifteen-hundred-year-long tenacity of an ancient Greek ethnography of Indian monsters—the *sciapodes*, whose grip on men's minds, he says, was "as persistent as that of the Apollo Belvedere."<sup>4</sup> Sometimes overlooked is his conclusion that this reflected a European embrace of an Indian theory of alterity and hierarchy—the *Mahabharata* described "people who cover themselves with their ears"—which was exported and normalized within Greek narratives.<sup>5</sup> This sense of the mediatory power of images, the visual as a peculiarly privileged conduit of transculturation, can derive support also from Jorge Cañizares-Esguerra's *How to Write the History of the New World*, which establishes that Spanish colonial historiography was indebted to, and learned from, native American codices and *quipus*.<sup>6</sup> As Walter Mignolo himself acknowledges, alphabetic and picture writing "were part of [a] dialogue."

That this may reflect technical aspects of translation and "filters," rather than any political openness, is indicated by Carlo Ginzburg's account of how an early-modern "repressive archive" of the Inquisition revealed the hidden lifeworld of subaltern Friulian peasants, the *benandanti*. Here incomprehension and prejudice seemed to establish the foundations of dialogical possibility. It was the Inquisitors' unknowing, Ginzburg suggested, that was the precondition for the "truly astonishing" ethnographic value of the documents. He shows the manner in which "a conflicting cultural reality may leak out" from heavily controlled texts.<sup>7</sup>

Art history ought to be especially receptive to such transculturation since it is concerned with the mimetic faculty and its intrinsic relation to alterity. Recall Benjamin: "[Man's] gift of seeing resemblances is nothing other than a rudiment of the powerful compulsion in former times to become and behave like something else."<sup>8</sup> Decolonization thus stands not only as a political demand but

2. Walter Benjamin, "Little History of Photography," in *The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility and Other Writings on Media*, ed. Michael W. Jennings, Brigid Doherty, and Thomas Y. Levin, trans. Edmund Jephcott et al. (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press), pp. 276–77.

3. Ariella Azoulay, *The Civil Contract of Photography* (New York: Zone, 2008).

4. Rudolf Wittkower, "Marvels in the East: A Study in the History of Monsters," in *Allegory and the Migration of Symbols* (New York: Thames and Hudson, 1977), p. 72.

5. *Ibid.*, p. 48.

6. Jorge Cañizares-Esguerra, *How to Write the History of the New World: Histories, Epistemologies, and Identities in the Eighteenth-Century Atlantic World* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001), p. 66.

7. Carlo Ginzburg, "The Inquisitor as Anthropologist," in *Clues, Myths, and the Historical Method*, trans. John and Anne C. Tedeschi (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989), p. 161.

8. Walter Benjamin, "On the Mimetic Faculty," in *Reflections: Essays, Aphorisms, Autobiographical Writings*, trans. Edmund Jephcott (New York: Schocken, 2007), p. 333.



also as the conduit for a discipline to reexamine the profound linkage between mimesis and alterity.

Provoked by Benjamin and also by Sarat Maharaj's notion of art as "'xeno-equipment' rigged out for attracting, conducting, [and] taking on difference"<sup>9</sup> and Michael Taussig's stress on the copy's magical embodiment of what is represented,<sup>10</sup> I would stress visualization *of* the other and visualization *as* other: mimesis as alterity; as *xeno-figure*; mimesis as fundamentally involving becoming or behaving, as Joseph Leo Koerner puts it, "like something else."<sup>11</sup>

Territory demands purification. Network implies transculturation and metaphor. Mimesis is fundamentally dependent on what is other to it. The visual is constituted through metaphor. As Italo Calvino observed, "Rarely does the eye light on a thing, and then only when it has recognized that thing as another thing: a print in the sand indicates the tiger's passage . . . a hibiscus flower, the end of winter."<sup>12</sup> This is the Other of mimesis, the compulsion to be transformed, which a history of mimesis, *when brushed against the grain*, can reveal. This is where decolonization has already collided with a philosophy of the visual.

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9. Sarat Maharaj, "Xeno-epistemics: Makeshift Kit for Sounding Visual Art as Knowledge Production and the Retinal Regimes," in *Documenta 11, Platform 5: Exhibition* (Ostfilden-Ruit: Hatje Cantz, 2002), p. 72.

10. Michael Taussig, *Mimesis and Alterity: A Particular History of the Senses* (New York: Routledge, 1993).

11. Joseph Leo Koerner, "Impossible Objects: Bosch's Realism," *RES: Anthropology and Aesthetics* 46 (Fall 2004), p. 97.

12. Italo Calvino, *Invisible Cities*, trans. William Weaver (London: Vintage, 1997), p. 13.

ELIZABETH POVINELLI

*Decolonize, v. transitive, meaning to undermine, diminish or free a space from the rule or control of a colonial power. In present continuous: decolonizing.*

We can begin with all the assumptions embedded in the word *decolonize*—say, that colonization is the correct description of the complex historical movements and phases of European dispossession of others in order to enrich, indeed create, itself in Europe and its settler states; and that colonization remains the condition of power in current places of dispossession. I myself never start with the question to use or not use a concept—but by asking, what are we doing such that the concept corresponds to and helps orient a set of practices? Let me then discuss what seems to be in the spirit of decolonizing practice in three areas of my work.

First, my academic and critical writing. As I have noted elsewhere, my work has never been intended as an ethnographic description of the human and more-than-human worlds of my Indigenous colleagues. Instead, I have intended—whether or not I have accomplished this is a different matter—to examine how forms of late-liberal settler states’ power reappear when viewed from the perspectives of these worlds.<sup>1</sup> This intention was determined by the Indigenous men and women I first met at Belyuen, a small Indigenous community across the Darwin harbor in the Northern Territory of Australia. In 1984, when I first arrived at Belyuen with a BA in Continental philosophy, the Indigenous men and women living there had been engaged in a land claim since 1976. The land claim was lodged under the Land Rights (Northern Territory) Act, 1976. The Act was widely heralded as a watershed in settler recognition of Indigenous rights. But, at its core, the legislation mirrored rather than shattered the colonial order. Under the LRA, Indigenous groups could only claim lands not already stolen (in legal discourse, “alienated”) and if the Indigenous petitioners could prove they conformed to an anthropological model of traditional ownership. In one swoop, the settler state was able to accomplish an astounding, paradoxical feat—it could place Indigenous land claims in historical time (no land that had been appropriated after the European invasion could be claimed) and it could insist that Indigenous land claims could not be based on the human and more-than-human response to the historical viciousness of European invasion (claims must be based on pre-invasion traditions). My recruitment by these Belyuen elders was not to describe their analytics of the human and ancestrally present world for the land claim, although I would also have to do that, but to engage with them in an analysis of the shape of the power apprehending them. Concepts such as late liberalism, geontopower, the

1. Some of these include Elizabeth Povinelli, *The Cunning of Recognition: Australian Multiculturalism and the Making of Indigenous Alterity* (Duke University Press, 2002); *Economies of Abandonment: Social Belonging and Endurance in Late Liberalism* (Duke University Press, 2011); and *Geontologies: A Requiem to Late Liberalism* (Duke University Press, 2016).

autological and genealogical society, the carbon imaginary, and others discussed across my writing are directly related to this ongoing work. The conditions of governance urge them—suggest they might have a potential power to expose the ongoing nature of liberal discriminatory and dispossessive power.

Second, a graphic project I am currently finishing. *The Inheritance* is an essay about a young girl, “Elizabeth,” growing up in Louisiana during the 1960s and ’70s in the midst of racial desegregation and under the shadow of her family’s fraught relationship to “Carisolo/Karezol,” their ancestral Alpine village. Through text and drawings, *The Inheritance* attempts to chronicle the gaps, absences, oversized affects, and divergences of memory and history that engulf “Elizabeth” and her siblings as her father’s family fights about what led them to flee their Alpine village during the First World War and what forms of will were necessary to survive a period of ugly nativism in the United States. As “Elizabeth” tries to make sense of the family’s violent Alpine legacy, she lives in a world that doesn’t think of her as Carisolian, but as a white Catholic living in the Bible Belt South during racial and Native American social-justice struggles. *The Inheritance* juxtaposes hand-drawn, montaged historical images and personal reflection. It does so not in order to recreate the frictions of social memory but to make explicit the differential social infrastructures of mobility and possibility—education, real estate, mobility, employment, addressivity—and to reorient the imaginary of ethnic inheritance from a past-perfect perspective to the present position we are allowed in a social infrastructure that cares for the existence of some and not of others.

Third, my film work with my Karrabing colleagues. The Karrabing Film Collective began around 2009, when the social fracturing of the land claim met the Northern Territory National Emergency Response Act, which, under the guise of preventing child sex abuse in rural Indigenous communities, flooded Indigenous spaces with new forms of state surveillance—police, welfare restrictions and compliance dictates, consumption constraints (alcohol and “pornography”)—and forcibly opened lands to modernizing economies (tourism, mining, mortgages). Members of the collective include myself and fifty-odd descendants and their partners of one of the key older women I had first met in 1984. Karrabing is a word and a concept. In Emmi, it means when the tide is as far out as it will go and beginning to return to shore. As a concept, Karrabing evokes a form of human and more-than-human original codependency. To stay in place, other things must stay in place—to hold and care for my country, I must hold and care for yours. Thus, Karrabing members are not from one clan or country—they are not split into the anthropological distinction of clan and territory. They include over ten totemic groups across adjacent countries formed out of the complex interactions of the ancestral beings and their ongoing presence within the bodies and practices of contemporary Karrabing. Karrabing means to counter ongoing colonial dispossession by mounting sustained practices of foregrounding these co-obligated modes of existence. Rather than simply or even primarily in films per se, the manifestations of the film collective spill across multiple dimensions and in

multiple directions—inward as shared memories are gathered and manifested in filmmaking, outward as affective relations to the more-than-human lands are phenomenologically deepened during filmmaking, and across as counterflows of values are redirected away from filmmaking to land sustaining.

So these are some practices that I believe fit within a decolonizing movement. But I don't intend them to be a model to be repeated. Rather I hope they invoke the kind of radical relationality and interconnectivity within difference that the concept of decolonizing evokes. In *Economies of Abandonment*, I refer to Ursula Le Guin's speculative science-fiction short story "The Ones Who Walk Away from Omelas," and more specifically to the small child locked in a subterranean broom closet whose confinement creates the conditions for a perfect society. The point I draw from this story is not that the good citizens of Omelas need to empathize with the child's confinement but that they must see her as the external organ they have created to filter their poisons.<sup>2</sup> A similar point can be drawn from Édouard Glissant's *Poetics of Relation*, which begins with the three abysses that emerged for Africans enslaved in the hulls of slave boats.<sup>3</sup> I do not think Glissant is asking those who, like the citizens of Omelas, devoured what they thought useful from those tortured in the Atlantic transit and left their excrement behind to empathically place themselves in the hull. Instead, they must understand how they are already within it differently, namely, as the beneficiaries of this terror. This form of radical relation is not one that asks for guilt or empty apologies, but for the radical action of reorientation.

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2. See Ursula K. Le Guin, "The Ones Who Walk Away from Omelas," in *New Dimensions 3*, ed. Robert Silverberg (New York: Doubleday, 1973), and my reading of it in Povinelli, "Introduction: The Child in the Broom Closet," in *Economies of Abandonment*.

3. Édouard Glissant, "The Open Boat," in *Poetics of Relation*, trans. Betsy Wing (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2010).

## ANDREW ROSS

Prison abolitionists often cite Angela Davis's declaration that the movement's goal is not simply to do away with prisons but to create the kind of society "that does not need prisons."<sup>1</sup> This notion got a good airing in the course of the George Floyd insurgency, especially in the heated debate about the demand to "defund the police." Was the goal to shrink police budgets, reduce the scope of policing, or push for abolition? There is no exact equivalent in the decolonial movement, at least not in the sense of a stated objective, however broadly defined. The business of decolonization is essentially intransitive and open-ended; the verb may take an object, as in "decolonize *October!*," but the act is interminable, for who could say when it is complete? Perhaps the governing spirit is best described as one of "permanent revolution," though not quite in the technical sense in which Trotsky employed it.<sup>2</sup>

Among activists, the Decolonize slogan is sometimes seen as a corrective to the governing spirit of Occupy Wall Street, even while acknowledging the gift (which continues to give) of that great insurgency. In the heyday of Occupy Wall Street, there was no institution, agency, or dogma that was immune to the call to occupy. And yet the term could never shake off its more than awkward association with settler history, and many Occupy groups failed to survive the "race moment" that American social-movement groups inevitably seem to confront. Having learned the lessons of Black Lives Matter, Idle No More, Standing Rock, and Red Nation, the "Decolonize" initiative (it is not a movement in the classic sense), by contrast, directly addresses the legacies of stolen land, liberty, wages, children, languages, and history, and puts race in the forefront.

The call to Decolonize is almost as portable as Occupy—it can be applied to everything and almost anything—but in any instance it will have a legible, local meaning, not easily transferable. For example, the origin of Decolonize This Place (DTP), of which I am a founding member, traces to a 2016 Brooklyn Museum exhibition named *This Place*, featuring the work of acclaimed photographers commissioned to shoot in Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territories. The show was promoted as "an intricate and fragmented portrait alive to all the rifts and paradoxes of this important and much contested place."<sup>3</sup> For members of the Decolonial Cultural Front, who staged an action inside the museum, the exhibition whitewashed the violence of the Occupation; labeling these lands as "contested" is precisely the rhetoric that has allowed land theft and subjugation of Palestinians to continue for more than seventy years. Aside from shining a spotlight on the museum's own role in Brooklyn gentrification, the point was

1. Angela Davis, *Are Prisons Obsolete?* (New York: Seven Stories Press, 2003).
2. Leon Trotsky, Luma Nichol (introduction), *The Permanent Revolution and Results and Prospects* (Seattle: Red Letter Press, 2010).
3. *This Place* (Brooklyn Museum, February 12–June 5, 2016).

not to imagine how *This Place* could ever be repackaged in a more acceptable version; it was to communicate that no curator should ever try again to mount a similar effort.

Subsequently, I was part of the initial DTP group, along with Amin Husain, Nitasha Dhillon, and Yates McKee, who took up a three-month residency at Artists Space in the fall of 2016. We four had been collaborating, since Occupy, in Strike Debt, and then in G.U.L.F. (Global Ultra-Luxury Faction), the direct-action wing of the Gulf Labor Coalition. “This Place” now applied to the gallery itself, which we ran as a “movement space,” launching actions and incubating alliances with other grassroots arts activist groups (including Chinatown Arts Brigade, Take Back the Bronx, NYC Stands With Standing Rock, and South Asia Solidarity Initiative). The most notable action was to engage with the American Museum of Natural History, which hosted, albeit involuntarily, three of our annual Anti-Columbus Day Tours. These events helped initiate a dialogue that resulted in the museum taking its first steps, finally, toward joining the decolonization movement that is working its way through the arts-and-education sector.

Where will the movement take us? In the arts, we are seeing the focus on fuller inclusion of underrepresented artists and materials expand into the areas of funding, patronage, and institutional ethics. In the wake of DTP’s successful 2019 campaign to oust Warren Kanders from the board of the Whitney Museum (and similar efforts by PAIN—Prescription Addiction Intervention Now—targeting the Sackler family), it is increasingly a liability to have board members who build their fortunes from crimes against humanity, and it will be more and more difficult for administrators and curators to quarantine the aesthetics from the blood money. The museum-building boom of the 1990s and 2000s (spurred by urban “revitalization”) has lost steam, but many of these glitzy initiatives were still trying to establish themselves at a time when the ground was shifting rapidly underfoot. As decolonization gathers momentum, institutions will be obliged to build a firewall against art-washers and market speculators while also forging entirely new relationships with the communities on their doorsteps. The onset of the COVID-19 recession has seen museums struggling to survive, and so the opportunity to reinvent has become a necessity. As the pandemic takes its fiscal toll, museums are likely to emerge looking a lot different. They should seize the occasion to adopt a decolonial ethics and practice.

In education, the scope is even greater. When Cape Town students launched Rhodes Must Fall in 2015, they set in motion an international program of action that goes far beyond the removal of statues, renaming of buildings, and curricular reforms. With tuition-free college and debt jubilee now in the mainstream of US discourse, how can the push for College for All take onboard more fully the demand for reparations? Is a debt jubilee complete if it fails to include the unsettled claims from land dispossession, or the ongoing legacy of slavery, Jim Crow, and mass incarceration? Can higher education be defined as a reparative public good? Some colleges have begun to open the door, by acknowledging the claims

related to their own past reliance on slavery, but there are few efforts underway to compensate those excluded from the postwar GI Bill for the opportunities lost from missing out on higher education's Cold War boom decades. The topic of stolen Indigenous land is even more explosive, especially for the nation's seventy-six public-land-grant universities. As land acknowledgments have become more common, Indigenous community advocates are asking for more substantive action beyond the rhetoric.

At the same time, as institutional leaders struggle to repair past colonial harms, they are being pressured to sever ties with, and investments in, mass incarceration, borderland detention, climate injustice, and militarist occupation. Many are asking how far will the demands go, or how much is enough? The administrative class should be asking a different question: How can we be in the forefront of the Decolonization, Sanctuary, and Anti-Racism movements? They could start by "socializing" their assets or infrastructure and making space available to communities (beginning with Indigenous groups) that need somewhere to meet for organizing and educating or as a refuge. More substantial commitments will follow from forging these new relationships.

Of course, they should also be opening their books and purging their boards. They should be slicing executive salaries and prioritizing the economic security of payroll employees. They should be liberating the culture and education sector from its current financialized plight as a field of transactional relations. They should be taking advantage of the pandemic crisis to rethink their civic purpose and their obligations to community care. It's high time; history is calling.

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PAUL CHAAT SMITH

When I hear the word *decolonize*, I feel the following things in the following order: annoyed, dismissive, and a hundred years old.

I don't want that! I know (somewhere) there's sincere and smart thinking at work here. Plus, I want to feel something other than annoyed and ancient. In fact, I want to be generous. So I remember all the stupid things I held dear when I was coming of age in the 1970s: joining a Marxist study group; reading Stalin in a Marxist study group; supporting that creep Mugabe and ZANU; insisting that the American Indian movement would eventually get its act together; predicting a socialist and independent Puerto Rico by 1980; and, more than once, even declaring the Eagles one of the greatest rock bands ever. Being human, no doubt I've suppressed the worst examples. And yet, at the same time, also because I am human, I still secretly believe I never was all that wrong. At least, not as wrong as Kids Today.

I find the current discourse morally self-serving and intellectually vapid, leading to a depressing lack of critical rigor and all-around marshmallow-headedness. It encourages a flattering belief that those on the right side of history today would never have been on the wrong side of history back then. It centers these issues as primarily ones of right and wrong, personal integrity and goodness, with bright lines delineating the binary territories of self-evident rightness and wrongness.

When I listen to present-day decolonizers, what they describe sounds like a virus, a disease that has infected us all, a disease that can be cured. I don't think colonialism can be cured, because colonialism is not a disease. I'm not even sure about the value of naming a thing so vast and complex. There is no history of the world of the past half-millennium apart from colonialism. Naming such an unfathomably massive and intricate process suggests it can be fully understood, tamed, and perhaps even, as happens in science-fiction movies these days, reversed, unwound, and the damage undone.

What we talk about when we talk about decolonization is, well, a bunch of things. It is about the spectacular rise of the West over the last five centuries, that project's extraordinary transfer of wealth, its unspeakable cruelty, and the wildly unequal outcomes and stunning inequality that inform the lives of everyone in the twenty-first century. It is also, let's be honest, about guilt. How do we make sense of the reality that some of us can write for *October* in comfortable Smithsonian offices and elite universities, knowing that the accidental privilege of where and when we were born has more to do with how we've ended up than our own talents and work?

We can agree that the ongoing process we are now calling colonialism radically distributed power and wealth at the expense of those outside the West, and that in fact much of this process was theft. At the same time, there were, in fact, winners and losers at every moment of these five centuries. To ignore that is to deny agency to the colonized, who become victims, and victims only.



Back in 1519, dozens of Indigenous nations in what is now Mexico allied themselves with Cortez and defeated the Aztec Empire. Those dozens of nations fielded an army of tens of thousands. Cortez had six hundred men. People hate to talk about this, because they live in 2020 and they know Spaniards Bad, Indians Good, so how could Indians, presumably Good, support Cortez (Bad)? The only explanation would seem to be they were dullards, or thought Cortez was a god, or were too scared of his horses and weapons. The most obvious explanation, that those dozens of Indian nations fucking hated the Aztecs, for excellent reasons, is ignored. The red nations made a play, and from the vantage point of five centuries we can say it didn't work out. But they didn't live in a vantage point five centuries in the future. They rolled the dice, and let's remember they did crush the mighty Aztec Empire. Which they really, really hated.

This is part of the social rule book in the discourse: It is very bad form to suggest that the Aztecs might have been mostly terrible. So our children learn about their wonderful construction projects and never get a glimpse that it wasn't all peace, love, and understanding. And this is when the colonized become lovable furry creatures.

Discourses can become runaway trains. Wishing it wasn't so is like wishing I had a more nuanced perspective on Zimbabwe and the Eagles forty years ago.

I see this Thing Too Big to Name as a collective inheritance. The question is what we make of our present circumstances. I'd rather museums be confronted with the elitist nature of their trustees than not. I'd also wish contemporary artists spend more effort creating work that is not incomprehensible to most people of Earth. Better that statues of Confederates and colonizers be the target of protests than not. Though what I really wish is proposals on what to do with them other than incarceration in a museum basement, erasure, and earnest interpretive labels. (The sparkling exception is Mack Williams's genius proposal to carve the Atlanta hip-hop band OutKast next to the Confederate generals on Stone Mountain in Georgia.)

If only people were nicer! Behind all the slogans, that's what I often hear. I don't think people were ever particularly nice. I don't think we're all that nice today. I remember Eduardo Galeano at a book reading in Dupont Circle years ago telling us that he believes all humans are half-marble, half-garbage. Dude was right. Life is hard. Revolutions eat their young. History is ten thousand miles of bad road. Nothing is simple. Nothing is easy.

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## NANCY SPECTOR

Having worked as a white, cisgender female museum curator for over three decades, I consider the recent call to decolonize our cultural institutions a critical and moral imperative. To do so will represent a total epistemic shift in the mission and, hence, function of museums today. The term *decolonize*—in its historical and current usage—has both specific and metaphoric meanings, ranging from the literal repatriation of Indigenous land and objects to broader social-justice initiatives designed to secure inclusion and equity on all levels.<sup>1</sup> For the Guggenheim, a museum of late-nineteenth-, twentieth-, and twenty-first-century modern and contemporary visual art, the concept of decolonizing offers (demands?) many significant avenues for self-critique and course correction.

While the terminology is rooted in the historical phenomenon (and ultimate failure) of post-World War II geopolitical decolonization, curators at the museum are understanding it today as a critical, paradigm-shifting complication of the institutional critique we first undertook curatorially during the late 1980s and 1990s. Fueled by the postmodernist, poststructuralist dismantlement of master narratives as explicated in these very pages, we embraced revisionist art history and cultural theory to reread our own institutional history and the vagaries of visual representation as presented in the permanent collection, publications, and exhibitions. We attempted to serve as a platform for the identity politics so prominent during the decade. The 1995 retrospective of Félix González-Torres, for instance, very deliberately articulated issues around queer representation and AIDS activism but paid less attention to the artist's Latinx identity, in accordance with his own wishes at the time. His postmodernist strategy at the height of the culture wars was to "infiltrate" the mainstream museum using mimicry and seduction in order to introduce otherwise incendiary narratives, not to topple the institution itself.

The discourse of multiculturalism so prevalent during the 1990s morphed at the Guggenheim into a rhetoric of "globalism." The Guggenheim Museum Bilbao opened in 1997 to much fanfare, expanding the institution's foothold in New York and Venice to include Spain, thus creating a "constellation" of affiliated cultural sites. Our own history of "internationalism"—rooted in biannual surveys of artistic developments around the globe starting in 1956 and ending with the fateful 1971 Guggenheim International Exhibition, which culminated in the cancellation of Daniel Buren's famed striped banner—evolved accordingly. The first decades of this century saw the establishment of our Asian Art Initiative; the multiyear, multi-continent UBS-sponsored acquisition program "MAP: Global Arts Initiative"; and the BMW Guggenheim Lab, an itinerant investigation into

1. See Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang, "Decolonization Is Not a Metaphor," *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education & Society* 1, no. 1 (2012), pp. 1–40. In writing this text in February 2020, I benefited from the input of Guggenheim curators Ashley James, Kyung An, Levi Prombaum, and X Zhu-Nowell. In August, the Guggenheim adopted and published a Diversity, Equity, Access and Inclusion action plan.

urban issues that traveled from New York to Berlin and Mumbai, further evidence of the museum's efforts to engage in cultural exchange and promote an understanding of art within a global context by decentering dominant art-historical discourse.

But without the deep, institutional reckoning necessitated by decolonialist or "de-imperialist" theory, the centering of whiteness integral to the precepts upon which our museums were founded will go unremarked and uninterrogated. The evolution of modernist thinking from the Enlightenment through centuries of European history was inextricably intertwined with imperialist expansion, with what Walter D. Mignolo has termed the "colonial matrix of power."<sup>2</sup> It is within this all-encompassing, oppressive web that museums perpetuate the myth that whiteness is a given, uncoded, and central to all internal and external narratives. The hierarchies of thought that position the white (male) as enunciator and all else the enunciated in this "matrix of power" have manifested in both the entrenched structures of cultural institutions and their exhibitions, which center specific stories to the exclusion of many others.

In some cases, museums have begun to rectify this epistemological state through expanded exhibition and acquisition programs. This past year at the Guggenheim, for instance, six artists were invited to curate from the collection with an eye toward its historical gaps and blind spots. *Artistic License: Six Takes on the Guggenheim Collection*, curated by Cai Guo Qiang, Paul Chan, Jenny Holzer, Julie Mehretu, Richard Prince, and Carrie Mae Weems, was designed to ask questions about the museum's past aesthetic choices in relation to an ideology of exclusion. Simultaneously, in the Tower galleries there were exhibitions of new work by Simone Leigh (with an accompanying conference devoted to the intellectual lives of black women); a response to our significant Robert Mapplethorpe holdings by Rotimi Fani-Kayode, Lyle Ashton Harris, Glenn Ligon, Zanele Muholi, Catherine Opie, and Paul Mpagi Sepuya; and *Basquiat's Defacement: The Untold Story*, guest-curated by Chaédria LaBouvier, which examined the artist's response to police brutality in the murder of a young black man named Michael Stewart.

But diverse programming and building a more representative collection alone are not sufficient. We at the Guggenheim are acutely aware of the need to diversify our very structure, from top to bottom, in order for the museum to model what equity in the cultural sphere should be. In this age of rising and rampant racism, homophobia, and populism, the efforts to do so authentically and quickly are ever urgent. Efforts are certainly underway, with a new paid-internship program and free admission for students at a number of CUNY colleges, but a true transformation of board and staff will take more time. While this happens, the museum continues to interrogate inherent biases in all its

2. Walter D. Mignolo, *The Darker Side of Western Modernity: Global Futures, Decolonial Options* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011).

functions, while also trying to come to terms with what an art museum should be in the twenty-first century. The traditional call for a nonprofit cultural institution to remain “neutral” is a perpetuation of the status quo, a set of values steeped in the “colonial matrix of power.”<sup>3</sup> To not question this fact, to not ask what a museum of modern and contemporary art should do (as well as represent), is perilous during this era of great upheaval and uncertainty. In the meantime, González-Torres’s tactical methodology—working from within the institutional frame to effect change with a determination to question accepted ideologies while allowing for, even inviting, multiple, sometimes contradictory meanings—presents for us a possible path forward in decolonizing the museum.

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3. See forthcoming book on this subject by Laura Raichovich, published by Verso Books.

## FRANCOISE VERGÈS

*Decolonization:* If I may start with personal remarks, I will say that decolonization, as a historical and cultural process, was the world in which I grew up in the '60s and '70s on Réunion Island. My parents were anti-colonial and feminist activists, members of the local communist party, and at home we discussed the struggles of national-liberation movements and of successive attempts to delink the South from the North's stranglehold. I knew the names of heroines and heroes of anti-colonial struggles past and present, the War in the Rif, the insurrection in Madagascar, the Battle of Algiers, the Tet Offensive. Decolonization also meant speaking Creole, despite its low status among the French, and listening to maloya, the song and dance created by the enslaved, the public performance of which was forbidden by the French postcolonial power until the 1980s, and it was knowing the dates and events of colonial history in order to challenge teachers in schools. In other words, it meant getting educated in non-hegemonic histories and cultures.

Decolonization was a geography, a library of memories, narratives, photos, and moving images, a political horizon which meant the end of imperialism and of exploitation of the peoples and riches of what was still called the Third World. When I lived in Algeria, between my time in Réunion and France, I continued my education in decolonization. I idealized Algeria because it had victoriously kicked out French colonialism. As a young woman, decolonization took on a more personal dimension through psychoanalysis and feminism, learning that the decolonization of the self was a long and difficult process that never ended but was essential.

*Decolonize* has now been adopted in the neoliberal West, where the notion has rapidly been institutionalized—universities, museums, and art galleries have been organizing debates and exhibitions. When I was I was reflecting on the speed with which the word *decolonize* has been appropriated in the art world, and on the role it had started to play in helping one's career and recognition, I was reminded of Barbara Christian's text "The Race for Theory" (1987).<sup>1</sup> Playing on the two meanings of *race* in English, Christian observed that "the language it [the race for theory] creates is one that mystifies rather than clarifies our condition, making it possible for a few people who know that particular language to control the critical scene." She added, "My fear is that when Theory is not rooted in practice, it becomes prescriptive, exclusive, élitish."

This process of pacification, of de-radicalization, is threatening *decolonize*. But this process is inevitable, and in fact there is nothing to fear. Neoliberalism needs to put new commodities on the market, to expand its colonization of every corner of the world, of bodies and psyches, while it also establishes borders and walls. It is able to appropriate even the critique directed at its ideology and practices, much faster than ever before. There is no reason that *decolonize* will be protected from

1. Barbara Christian, "The Race for Theory," *Cultural Critique* 6 (Spring 1987), p. 55.

neoliberal avidity and interest into commodification via pacification. When I co-created the association Decolonize the Arts in France (2015), the question of recognition by art institutions emerged as a site of conflict among us. Despite strong racism and sexism in the French art world, black actresses and actors' protests against racism were published and debated, colonial history, migrants' narratives, and postcolonial malaise were entering the stage, even if things went on as usual. Some of us thought that the battle for recognition was not worth the investment it required, that it was better to put all our energy into confronting the difficulty of dismantling the master's house, of working without the master's tools, into inventing decolonial practices, into questioning our own coloniality. In doing so, we are harking back to the long political history of decolonization and its unfinished project: slave revolts and insurrections, anti-colonial resistance and struggles, paying attention to the stories of unsung heroines and heroes, digging through the dust and embers of lives that had not been recorded, playing with silence and erasure, not trying to fill the gaps. . . . When I was working on a project for a museum on Réunion (2004–2010), I suggested a "museum without objects," since practically no objects that would testify for the lives of the enslaved, the indentured, the poor, survived; they had been discarded, perceived as having no meaning. Rather than seeking to fill this absence, we would start from the absence and give it meaning, and we would avoid the central role of the object in creating a narrative and thus establish the equation no object = no story. We would anchor the project on the island, in its millenary world of Indian Ocean exchanges, the world of winds, hurricanes, volcano, trees, spirits, dreams, the unforeseen, the unexpected. The lives of the oppressed are told in poems, songs, rituals, languages rather than translated into stones. The project was killed by the French state and local conservatives, but we learned that imagining a decolonial project meant going out of the hegemonic frame, exploring other forms, and even if we ended up being wrong, it was worth trying.

I read that, in the context of the current pandemic, the lockdowns, the connection made between diffusion of infectious diseases and environmental destruction by capitalism, the art world is questioning the relevance of biennials and festivals and the constant travel they imply, the amount of waste they generate, and thus contemplating going green. Will that contribute to decolonize art history and the art market or simply accomplish some marginal reforms? How are the rules of the "free" market decolonized? What constitutes a "decolonized market"? We read a lot about how the pandemic has transformed "our" thinking and how what's happening supports the idea for a new way of living on Earth. This is fine, but I have never seen people in power relinquish it for the common good.

The lockdown adopted by so many states in answer to the pandemic has shown more clearly than ever that deaths from infectious diseases occur in greater number among people of color because they are among the poorest and do not have access to the best health care or have protection in their jobs, as they are seen

as “disposable,” and they usually are not in the best health because of their living conditions, access to good food and adequate housing. . . . This is a legacy of slavery, colonialism, and racism. The West has never sought to reflect on what Aimé Césaire called the “shock in return” in *Discourse on Colonialism* (1950), the way in which racial thinking penetrates the societies that had been enslaved and colonized. It wants to remain innocent of its crimes. I do not think the burden of decolonizing the West rests on people of color, or the decolonization of the art world on artists of color—why should it be so? But I think that decolonization goes further than de-Westernization. Neoliberalism is global; xenophobic nationalism is not just in the West, nor anti-migrant policies, nor murderous patriarchy.

But if to *decolonize* is already a commodity, should we see decolonization as another trick of the West? And thus, should we embrace *de-imperialization*? Why not? What interests me are the *practices*, the daily gestures, of fighting against the deadly economy of extraction and exhaustion, from racism and exploitation, the song of the Chilean feminist group Las Tesis against feminicide, Palestinian street art against Israeli occupation, what we already see as artistic contestation in lockdown—slogans projected onto walls, the appropriation of balconies, the free access to films, operas, texts, collections, all these attempts to overcome social separation, division. There is not *one* doctrine, only the will and desire to be free from a murderous economy.

FRANCOISE VERGÈS, raised on Réunion Island, is a political theorist, decolonial, anti-racist feminist, and a co-founder of Decolonize the Arts (Paris).

MARIE WATT

*Blankets*

Blankets are my primary material. In my tribe, we give blankets to honor people for being witness to important life events. This practice is held in common with many Indigenous communities. Blankets are loaded with history and intimacy. They code-switch, depending on the audience. Markers for memory and story, blankets accompany births, deaths, and the living of life between. Blankets transcend cultures. Blankets are migratory.

This particular blanket is a sign of colonial contact and exchange, a carrier of disease, and a transformational object. It is a double-length uncut Witney point trade blanket. I like to say it's an example of an early tax loophole. This blanket

was imported from England, and because it looks like a single blanket, it was only taxed as one blanket. It was accompanied, however, by detailed directions explaining how and where to cut it to create two blankets. The finger-



like black bars are called points and refer to the size and quality of the blanket. The points allude to the blanket's value and, by extension, the goods and services that could be traded for it. While loom-woven blankets have always been a part of some tribal customs, these woolen trade blankets were so radically redefined and reclaimed by Native communities that they are often considered Indigenous objects now.

*The Transportation Object*

Potlatches are a part of the Coast Salish economy and a means for displaying wealth and social relationships through ecstatic giving. Potlatches went against Western ideas about the accumulation of wealth, and they were banned by the Canadian and US governments from 1885 to the 1950s to prevent tribal communities from gathering. This source photo is dated 1913, meaning this gathering is an act of civil disobedience, an expression of cultural unity, a rejection of colonial policy.

In the photo, the potlatch host is casting gifts from the rooftop to the guests below. A blanket sails like a magic carpet above the crowd. The blanket—an object loaded with the violence of colonization—has become a gift. I've come to see this flying blanket, and all blankets, as "transportation objects," both physical and meta-physical. I have also come to think of art as a transportation object, and to think of my work that way, too. With imagination, through acts of making, I transport objects



from one meaning to another. An object once used to harm can be transformed into an object used to remember, to connect, to liberate, to reveal, to repair.

Edward Curtis took this photo of a village without its inhabitants. It is hard to separate Curtis's name and archive of images from the complex conversation around decolonization. Curtis's narrative has etched into the Western psyche a misleading, sepia-hued understanding of what American indigeneity looks like. The broader colonial gaze renders Indigenous people inanimate and holds them hostage to Western traditions of representation. But if photographs can be tools of misunderstanding, they can also be tools to remedy that view and offer an alternative, a means for challenging and changing the historical record. For example, in *1880 Crow Peace Delegation: Peelatchi-waaxpáash/Medicine Crow (Raven)*, artist Wendy Red Star uses a red correction pen to animate Medicine Crow's portrait by annotating intimate and worldly details that affirm his position within the Crow community. In a similar spirit, I recreated the photograph of the potlatch and turned it into a blanket, which is a transportation object.





### *Crowd Scene*

Acknowledging this potlatch gathering as an act of civil disobedience, I transformed the hands that reach to catch the blanket into fists raised in solidarity. This piece was made in 2015, in the midst of the Black Lives Matter movement and the Flint water crisis, just before the Standing Rock protests and the Water Protectors' generative work. Social justice, racism, access, representation, equity, and community mobilization—all of these issues are as pertinent today as they were in 1913.

The Seneca tribe is matrilineal. Tribal enrollment and clan identity are passed on through our mothers. The ownership of land and voting rights—these, too, are the historical domain of Iroquois women. The suffragists in Seneca Falls, New York, observed and drew from the liberties of Iroquois women. I come from proto-feminist stock. In my version of the potlatch photograph, I inserted my daughters and myself as guests and witnesses. When I see us in this image, I see fragments of our story and lineage. The blanket is billboard-like and cinematic in scope. Bodies can choose to be observers, to engage the narrative, to be witness to this uncut blanket and uncut tradition.



### *Sewing Circles*

I've been hosting sewing circles in my studio, in community spaces, in schools, and in institutions for fifteen years. These events accommodate any number of participants, no experience necessary. The largest to date was held over the course of three hours at the National Gallery of Canada, 225 people strong. These gatherings are an essential part of my work, not a means to an end. The elements being stitched often arise from an Indigenous perspective in relation to sites, histories, and Iroquois teachings; these themes then become touchstones for conversation, connection, and cross-cultural knowledge to be generously exchanged by participants. These events create connection through handwork and stories, but they also subvert the historic attempt of missionaries to colonize Indigenous women and girls through quilting bees.

My work is often categorized as “traditional” and “craft.” I find these labels perplexing, symbolic of colonialism’s fear of Indigenous self-representation. I see my art as contemporary art. It has as much to do with the feminist textile practices of Harmony Hammond and Faith Ringgold as it does with Seneca and Iroquois matrilineal customs. I see my work as an extension of painting, drawing, sculpture, and social practice.

When will Indigenous artists and people of color be released from the responsibility of being educators, diplomats, police, and activists, so that we might instead turn our energy toward building a thriving cultural ecosystem for all of our relations? My transportation objects are testaments to my own personal effort.

MARIE WATT is an artist and citizen of the Seneca Nation with German-Scot ancestry. Her work explores the intersection of history, community, and storytelling.

## ROCÍO ZAMBRANA

Myisha Cherry and Eric Schwitzgebel begin their 2016 *Los Angeles Times* op-ed, “Like the Oscars, #PhilosophySoWhite,” by declaring that “academic philosophy in the United States has a diversity problem.”<sup>1</sup> Recent data on the demographics of the American Philosophical Association’s membership reveals a discipline steadfastly white and male despite efforts to “diversify.”<sup>2</sup> Only twenty-five percent of all philosophy faculty in the United States are women,<sup>3</sup> and eighty-six percent of philosophy PhDs are non-Hispanic white.<sup>4</sup> Around one to four percent of philosophy faculty are black. Indigenous scholars with PhDs in philosophy from anglophone universities who work at US institutions of higher education, Kyle Whyte reported in 2017, total “roughly less than 20 persons, including those who are retired and those close to finishing their degrees.”<sup>5</sup> In 2015, a cohort of five black women earned PhDs in philosophy in one institution, making national news.<sup>6</sup> Faculty interviewed for “Diversifying a Discipline,” the *Chronicle of Higher Education*’s article on the women, characterized their efforts as “decolonizing” philosophy and the philosophical canon.

Philosophy does not have a diversity problem. Rather, it is a site of the coloniality of knowledge and sense. Philosophy’s poor track record in terms of diversity follows from this. Aníbal Quijano used the term “coloniality of power” to describe the organization of existence initiated by the conquest and colonization of the Américas.<sup>7</sup> Race functions as the central technology in the installation of the modern capitalist world, organizing “work” (*trabajo*), “sex” (*sexo*), subjectivity, and authority, Quijano argues. The coloniality of power describes the ongoing productivity of a hierarchical system of racial classification that articulates heterogeneous, simultaneous forms of labor, gender, subjectivity, and authority. Race

1. Myisha Cherry and Eric Schwitzgebel, “Like the Oscars, #PhilosophySoWhite,” *Los Angeles Times*, March 4, 2016, <https://www.latimes.com/opinion/op-ed/la-oe-0306-schwitzgebel-cherry-philosophy-so-white-20160306-story.html>.

2. See the American Philosophical Association’s report Demographic Statistics on the APA Membership, FY2016 to FY2018: [https://cdn.ymaws.com/www.apaonline.org/resource/resmgr/data\\_on\\_profession/fy2018-demographic\\_statistic.pdf](https://cdn.ymaws.com/www.apaonline.org/resource/resmgr/data_on_profession/fy2018-demographic_statistic.pdf). See also the APA’s resources on diversity: <https://www.apaonline.org/page/resources>.

3. See Sherri Conklin, Eric Schwitzgebel, and Nicole Hassoun, “Tell Us How to Fix the Lack of Diversity in Philosophy Departments,” blog of the APA, April 9, 2019: <https://blog.apaonline.org/2019/04/09/tell-us-how-to-fix-the-lack-of-diversity-in-philosophy-department/>.

4. Cherry and Schwitzgebel, “Like the Oscars, #PhilosophySoWhite.”

5. See <https://politicalphilosopher.net/2017/02/03/featured-philosopher-kyle-whyte/>.

6. See Vimal Patel, “Diversifying a Discipline,” *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, March 27, 2016, <https://www.chronicle.com/article/diversifying-a-discipline/>.

7. See Aníbal Quijano, “Colonialidad del poder y clasificación social,” *Festschrift for Immanuel Wallerstein, Journal of World Systems Research* 2 (2000).

and labor are tightly bound. Racial identities are not only produced, they function to distribute who is exploitable versus who is disposable henceforth. Race produces, then, modalities of violence necessary for a functioning capitalist system. The latter is not seen as monolithic or totalizing but as requiring heterogeneity and simultaneity. Maria Lugones modifies Quijano's account, noting the significance of gender. Moreover, she provides an account of the "modern/colonial gender system," which tracks how race also produces gender.<sup>8</sup> A gender hierarchy installs the category of "woman" at a proximity to whiteness in the exclusion of women from waged or unwaged labor beyond the home, for example, or in images of gender equality tied to access to waged labor. The point is this: Coloniality names the ongoing productivity of race/gender, replicating modalities of violence initiated by the installation of the capitalist modern project in altered material and historical conditions. It tracks the afterlives of the colony.<sup>9</sup>

The coloniality of power organizes subjectivity and knowledge as well, including the imagination, desire, and sense. It thereby produces modes of knowing, of producing knowledge, perspectives, images, and forms of signification.<sup>10</sup> Knowing as well as sensing articulate meaning in relation to the material and symbolic content of labor, gender, subjectivity, and authority. Quijano calls this the "colonization of the imagination." Modernity/rationality not only produces beliefs, images, desires, and patterns of expression central to the cultural formation distinctive of the colonizer. It is a mechanism of control involved in the ongoing reinstallation, in changing material and historical conditions, of the race/gender hierarchy at its core. Eurocentrism shapes views of history (linearity, maturity), temporality (futura), and universality inscribed in institutions such as the state or the university. It shapes sensibility itself, however, deploying categories of intelligibility that capture the imagination, the body, memory, sensation. The point is this: A race/gender system of classification not only posits and actualizes a hierarchy. It turns unintelligible or co-opts by rendering intelligible forms of knowing, sensing, experiencing, relating, and memory that exceed modernity/rationality.

Fanon's discussion of language serves as a starting point for understanding the coloniality not only of knowledge but of sense. "The study of language is essential for providing us with one element in understanding the black man's dimension of being-for-others, it being understood that to speak is to exist absolutely for the other," Fanon writes.<sup>11</sup> "The more the black Antillean assimilates the French language," he continues, "the whiter he gets—i.e., the closer he comes to becom-

8. See Maria Lugones, "Heterosexualism and the Colonial/Modern Gender System," *Hypatia* 22, no. 1 (Winter 2007), pp. 186–209.

9. For the language of "afterlife," see Saidiya Hartman, *Lose Your Mother: A Journey Along the Atlantic Slave Route* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2017), and Christina Sharpe, *In the Wake: On Blackness and Being* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2016).

10. See Quijano, "Colonialidad del poder y clasificación social." See also Eduardo Lander, ed., *Colonialidad del saber: Eurocentrismo y ciencias sociales* (Buenos Aires: CLACSO, 2000).

11. See Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, trans. Richard Philcox (New York: Grove Press, 1967), pp. 1, 2.

ing a true human being.” Language actualizes, updates, how race/gender operates in different material and historical conditions. Language is not a site of Eurocentrism in merely establishing a cultural/racial hierarchy. In allowing for proximity to humanity itself, the language of the colonizer imposes an ontological break whereby intelligibility, imagination, sensibility are captured. Modernity/rationality organizes existence by banishing or by co-opting meaning and sense beyond it. Intelligibility, indeed legibility, in light of ideas and images of rationality/modernity—whiteness—is key for its reproduction. This is how modernity/rationality shores itself up. For this reason coloniality produces modalities of violence that undermine “not only life but the conditions of the production of sense and legibility of the lives that it designates as dispensable.”<sup>12</sup> It undermines the “grammars of sense,” to quote María del Rosario Acosta's term, proper to the coordinates of their own organization of existence.

Philosophy's problem is one of coloniality rather than diversity, as I stated above. Philosophy has historically been seen as a critical discourse, pursuing the denaturalization of meaning.<sup>13</sup> Yet its disciplinary practices often actualize the coloniality not only of knowledge but of sense.<sup>14</sup> The former police disciplinary boundaries through canon- and curriculum-building, writing and citation practices, pedagogical and mentoring values. These last produce categories and argumentative structures—grammars, one might say—that articulate meaning and legibility to the measure of modernity/rationality. Philosophy's problem is not merely a problem of exclusion, then. It is a problem of occlusion, of the production of alterity that serves to undermine ontological as well as epistemic/aesthetic plurality. That philosophy remains steadfastly white and male despite efforts to “diversify” signals that it remains a site of the coloniality of knowledge and sense, that its own attempts to “diversify” shore it up. The aim to decolonize philosophy often suffers the same fate as the criticized language of diversity and inclusion.<sup>15</sup> Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui puts the point best.<sup>16</sup> The proliferation of neologisms, the creation of a new academic canon, the generation of academic gurus, she argues in discussing discourses of decolonization, are symptoms of a production of knowledge embedded in the political economy of the neoliberal university. Intellectual and academic extractivism is not merely a matter of the geopolitics of knowledge. For Rivera

12. María del Rosario Acosta, “Gramáticas de la escucha: historia, memoria y decolonialidad,” forthcoming in *Eidos*: “como una violencia que socava no solo la vida sino las condiciones de producción de sentido y legibilidad de estas vidas que designa como dispensables.”

13. On critique and decoloniality, see Nelson Maldonado-Torres, “What Is Decolonial Critique?,” forthcoming in *Philosophy and Coloniality*, special issue of *Graduate Faculty Philosophy Journal* (2020).

14. Much has been written about this. See, for example, Kristie Dotson, “How Is This Paper Philosophy?,” *Comparative Philosophy* 3, no. 1 (2012), pp. 3–29.

15. On critiques of inclusion and diversity, see Sara Ahmed, *On Being Included: Racism and Diversity in Institutional Life* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2012).

16. Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui, “*Ch'ixinakax utxiwa*: A Reflection on the Practices and Discourses of Decolonization,” *South Atlantic Quarterly* 111, no. 1 (2012), pp. 95–119.

Cusicanqui, it is part of the modern capitalist project's changing needs. This political economy of knowledge production captures meaning and sense, installing goals, metrics, programs, citations, and pedagogical practices that do not emerge from or aim to service a place or community.

Situated in academe, I try to interrogate the imperative to decolonize as increasingly captured by the neoliberal university. The dispute over the very language of decolonization is fruitful. It forces me and others committed to that language to disentangle it from its co-option in neoliberalism's ongoing attempts to shore itself up. My writing on Puerto Rico presses me to think through rather than abandon the category of decolonization beyond but also within the confines of the field of philosophy and the academe. Decolonization must also imagine decoloniality—practices that interrupt the production of a world to the image of capitalist modernity and its racial order. This requires the displacement of the production of knowledge and sense to the image of modernity/rationality. Writing must respond to this need, be meaningful to and indeed be measured by those most impacted by what the account seeks to understand. Work within the academy must respond to this need, understanding the university as a site of the production of reality, seek to decenter it, place it in service of places, histories, communities rather than individuals. Decolonization/decoloniality is distorted by a politics of representation, of recognition, accordingly, in its own attempts to decenter the European canon and long-standing practices associated with it. Decolonization/decoloniality is incomplete when it merely addresses the coloniality of sense, putting into question categories of meaning that capture the imagination and perception without addressing their work in meeting the changing needs of capital. Decolonization/decoloniality requires addressing a political economy that actualizes race/gender—from academic extractivism to labor, resources, and institutional financial ties and investments that shore up the racial order it purportedly seeks to question.<sup>17</sup> Interventions along these lines are key to shifting sense itself.

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17. See here Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang's now classic "Decolonization Is Not a Metaphor," *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education and Society* 1, no. 1 (2012), pp. 1–40.

## JOSEPH ZORDAN

*That there is something means that the world comes into being. The “origin” of the world takes place always and everywhere, time and time again, in every singular act of no matter which being, always momentous and local. World is thus always a multitude of worlds, an endless passage of phenomena . . .*

—Ignaas Devisch<sup>1</sup>

*And the disease is not racism. It is greed and the struggle for power. And I urge you to be careful. For there is a deadly prison. The prison that is erected when one spends one’s life fighting phantoms, concentrating on myths, and explaining over and over to the conqueror your language, your lifestyle, your history, your habits. And you don’t have to do it anymore, you can go ahead and talk straight to me.*

—Toni Morrison<sup>2</sup>

Dancing in the gallery lights, the white and dark blue beads of the Lakota cradle, poised at the end of the central platform of the gallery, never fail to strike me with awe. Out of any object in *Place, Nations, Generations, Beings: 200 Years of Indigenous North American Art* (PNGB), curated by Katherine McCleary (Little Shell Chippewa-Cree), Leah Shrestinian, and myself, this work has haunted me far beyond the confines of the gallery walls. In looking at the cradle, I always find myself in closest proximity not to its physical presence but to the immaterial absence of the child it was meant to hold. It finds new space in the material world, looking out to me from within the folds of hides, beads, furs, and cloth. A collision of grief and hope washes over me each time I pass it.

Made circa 1890, this work was created by a Lakota artist under the apocalyptic conditions created and instituted by the United States government and military for Indigenous peoples on this continent. To be Lakota and alive in the late-nineteenth century was to exist in a state of mortal precarity—a status that could be extended to most, if not all, Indigenous nations and their citizens within the boundaries of the United States at the time. After the resounding loss of the United States at the Battle of Greasy Grass in 1876, the need to alleviate American anxieties regarding “the Indian problem” became a paramount concern for the young nation, triggering a variety of responses. The Wounded Knee Massacre was either on the near horizon or in the very recent past of the cradle’s maker. The era saw the perfecting of what would become the boarding-school system to “kill

1. Ignaas Devisch, “A Trembling Voice in the Desert: Jean-Luc Nancy’s Rethinking of the Space of the Political,” *Cultural Values* 4 (2000), pp. 239–255.

2. Toni Morrison, “Black Studies Center Public Dialogue. Pt. 2,” 1975.





*Artist Once Known. Cradle. Circa 1880–1900.*

the Indian and save the man,” through General Henry Richard Pratt’s work with the Fort Marion prisoners. The Dawes Act of 1887 would seek to assimilate Indigenous people through the individualization of land ownership, an attempt at forcing Indigenous peoples into European conceptions of private property. Assimilation or death rang through the land.

Yet, even with these threats and pressures, this cradle was still made. While knowing the danger she was in—and while knowing the uncertainty of the future not only for her but everyone she knew and loved—a mother still gave her child the earliest dignity of *being* Lakota. Taking strings of beads to hide, she designed a cradle conforming to the small body it would hold—just as her mother had done before her, and her mother’s mother. Sitting with this work, made while its creator was staring down destruction, brings into sharp relief the remarkable nature of every single work within the gallery and collections I have encountered. Despite, or perhaps in spite of, the very same structures and institutions which still seek to end our lives, we continue to maintain a remarkable ability to create: to keep us in touch with our joy, our grief, our histories, our traditions, and our futures. In making this cradle, this woman was reaching back to a place where the dignity that had been extended to her from her ancestors extended again to a place beyond fear. This cradle was more than a cradle; it was a promise.

And now it’s at Yale.

Over one thousand miles away from Lakota homeland, put on display for thousands of gallery visitors (the majority of which are non-Indigenous), the cradle, and the promise it represents, have stood the test of time over one hundred years later, as many Indigenous nations have begun to rebound in population and interest in cultural connection. Yet, in its current residence—prison, home, or collection (depending on whom you ask)—this original promise has become supplemented by others to the Indigenous and non-Indigenous people alike. I find myself asking the same questions again and again when I spend time with it: What do you do with an object whose very creation upheld a promise for generations—but not a promise for almost anyone here? What do you do when born under the weight of a violent history, now experienced as a fragile present? When do we get to go home? Will it still be home when we get back? Was it ever our home to begin with?

The cradle—ordered by a logic sustained for generations and crafted by a gentle hand extending to a future beyond itself—sits with an uncertain future. A future that may never come. And yet, to create—over and over again—something which brings dignity not only to the recipient but to everyone who has come before and everyone who will come after: This, I believe, is what building decolonization looks like. Decolonization will not come down like lightning, nor will its harbinger arrive from any place like the Ivy league. Instead, it is a process which moves like a stream, gentle and persistent, adaptable and flowing, to the sea beyond itself.

But just as this cradle has transformed in its migration and taken on new promises, so too must I. We cannot all stay in our homelands, and there is much

work to be done in building this structure we call decolonization. What can we do where we are? For some time, I felt as though projects like PNGB were the ones to commit myself to in order to bring about the changes I wanted to see. But in its reception, and in that of other projects like it that have arisen in the art world, I now see how such projects can be misread and misunderstood. Perhaps most importantly, I have seen how we, as Indigenous people, are afforded no privacy even in the afterlife—as our lives and relationships are seen as an aside to the grand narrative of histories which sought to eradicate us in the past and include us in the present as tour guides or decoration.

I will no longer waste time explaining myself to those who willfully misunderstand us. I am not interested anymore in how we have survived through apocalypse after apocalypse, because I know how. Instead, I look now to the wisdom of Toni Morrison and agree that it is “way past time for the studied to examine the student.”<sup>3</sup> And so now I look not to the cradle but to the person who would think to remove this from a family. I look to the first European settlers of this land, who made this place not a home but a graveyard. I look at cruelty, not suffered but inflicted, and ask: What do you do when born under the weight of a violent history, now experienced as a delicate present? When do we get to go home? Will it still be home when we get back? Was it ever home to you?

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3. Morrison, *ibid.*